

Academy of Medical Sciences' policy on declaring and managing interests

1) *Our commitment to declaring and managing interests*

- The Academy of Medical Sciences records and manages the interests of the members of its key decision-making and advisory bodies¹, including: Council members (including Honorary Officers); grants panels; sectional committees; and working groups that make policy recommendations.
- The members of our key committees bring a range of experiences and perspectives to the Academy's work. It is likely they will have a variety of interests, arising from different contexts, activities, and relationships in a professional or personal capacity. This can include employment and other sources of income, speaking engagements, shareholdings, publications and research, and membership of professional or voluntary organisations.
- Having members of key committees with varied interests and specialist knowledge is a positive attribute, but it is vital that interests are openly declared so they can be appropriately managed. Declaring an interest does not mean there is a conflict of interest.
- Our report '*Enhancing the use of scientific evidence to judge the potential risks and benefits of medicines*' considers the declaration and management of interests.² It highlights the principles of identification, mitigation, and openness. Although this report focused on those involved in the conduct and reporting of research about medicines, it prompted us to review the way that we considered the interests of those involved in the Academy's work.
- As a result of this review, we will: increase the amount of information about interests that we collect from Council members, Honorary Officers and members of our Policy working groups and our Finance Committee. We will publish the interests of our Council members on our website.³
- We will ensure that the information collected from our selection panels (for Fellows and awards) is limited to that which is relevant. We will ensure that our guidance on how interests will be handled is clear.
- We will keep this policy, and its impact, under review.

2) *Purpose of this policy and to whom it applies.*

- The purpose of this document is to minimise the potential for conflicts of interest to arise and to protect the Academy and those who work for it from any perception, real or otherwise, that the external interests and affiliations of the members of its key committees might interfere with their ability to support the

¹ Referred to collectively as 'key committees'.

² Academy of Medical Sciences (2017) *Enhancing the use of scientific evidence to judge the potential benefits and harms of medicines* <http://acmedsci.ac.uk/policy/how-can-we-all-best-use-evidence>

³ See <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/about/governance/interests>.

Academy's objectives.

- This policy applies to:
 - Council members (including the Honorary Officers)
 - Finance Committee members
 - Peer reviewers, funding panels and sectional committees of the Academy engaged in awarding grants or the Fellowship election
 - Members of the Academy's policy working groups

3) Defining interests

Interests can be:

- **Direct** - A direct interest is when there is, or could be perceived to be, an opportunity for a person involved with the Academy's work to benefit.
 - *Financial interests* - when a person gets direct financial benefit. This means anything of monetary value, including: payments for services; equity interests, including stocks, stock options or other ownership interests; and intellectual property rights, including patents and copyrights and royalties arising from such interests.
 - *Non-financial professional and personal interests* - such as increasing or maintaining their professional reputation. This can include situations where the person: is an advocate for a particular group or is a member of a lobbying or pressure group; holds office or a position of authority in a professional organisation such as a royal college, a university, charity, or advocacy group; or has published a clear opinion about the matter under consideration.
- **Indirect** - An indirect interest is when there is, or could be perceived to be, an opportunity for a third party closely associated with the person in question to benefit. This could be through a close association with another person or organisation that has a financial or non-financial interest (as defined above), and could benefit from a decision the person is involved in making through their work on an advisory committee. We ask for known interests of close family.

Conflicts of interests can be actual (there is a material conflict between one or more interests) or potential (there is the possibility of a material conflict between one or more interests in the future).

The following examples of relevant interests that might apply to key Committees and individuals are not exhaustive.

- **Grants panels and sectional committees:** conflicting interests are primarily linked to a close relationship (e.g. is at the same institution, is a collaborator or has a strong personal connection) between the committee member or peer reviewer and the candidate. For the election of Fellows (Sectional Committees), Principal Nominators and support nominators would be conflicted. Specific guidance for these committees is available on our website⁴.

⁴ See <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/about/governance/interests>

- **Council (including the Honorary Officers):** conflicting interests might include: a close relationship with candidates being approved for election; considered for a prize/award; or to Chair a committee/working group. See *Policy working groups* section below for potential conflicting interests when determining the Academy's policy position or approving working group reports. The declaration of interest form for this committee is available on our website⁵.
- **Policy working groups:** conflicting interests might include working for (or being closely associated to) an organisation that might be impacted by a particular recommendation; the potential to gain personal advantage or disadvantage from a recommendation or conclusion; having a strong prior position on a particular aspect of the terms of reference of the study. The declaration of interest form for this committee is available on our website⁶.
- **Finance Committee:** conflicting interests might include involvement in companies supplying services to the Academy (e.g. investment management, bankers, property management) or a close relationship to staff members (given the Committee's role in remuneration and employment conditions). The declaration of interest form for this committee is available on our website⁷.

4) *Declaring interests*

- After reading this policy, members should complete the declaration of interests form that is relevant to their committee and read the associated guidance notes.
- All interests should be declared if, in the view of a reasonable person, they are relevant, or could be perceived to be relevant, to the work of the Academy committee in question.
- Normally only current interests need to be raised, unless a past interest might influence, or reasonably be expected to influence, or bias judgement.
- In cases where an individual is uncertain as to whether a conflict of interest exists or not, they should discuss this with either the relevant Director, Executive Director or the Committee Chair.
- If an individual is concerned about a possible conflict of interest involving another member of the body, then he or she should raise the matter with either the member concerned, the relevant Director, Executive Director or the Committee Chair.
- Members of the Academy's key committees have a responsibility to update their declaration of interests when they change (and at least annually); to declare at the start of every meeting interests relevant to the agenda items/papers (this will normally be a standing item on the agenda) as well as any additional interests that become relevant during the meeting as a result of discussions.

⁵ See <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/file-download/47282196>

⁶ See <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/about/governance/interests>

⁷ See <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/about/governance/interests>

5) *Managing and mitigating interests*

Staff will review the declared interests and bring them to the attention of the Chair.

There are three potential responses to a declared interest:

- **No action other than the process of open declaration** – the person can engage in all aspects of the committee's work. This is usually because the declared interest is not considered to represent a perceived conflict of interest or because an open declaration is considered sufficient to mitigate any risk of conflict.
- **Partial exclusion** – the person can engage in committee discussion or provide advice to the meeting in the form of a presentation or written input (for example, because of their expert knowledge), but is excluded from developing recommendations and decision-making on the matter relating to the interest and would normally be excluded from the room.
- **Complete exclusion** – the person can have no input to a specific topic or discussion of a grant application/Fellowship nomination, either from the start (non-appointment) or for part of the committee's work relating to that topic or application. When an interest leads to exclusion for a specific topic or application, it may be appropriate to withhold any confidential meeting papers for that item especially when the person could benefit from the information. The person would be excluded from the room while discussion of the topic or application takes place.

The Chair of the committee will normally decide how to manage the interest, with advice from staff. In the case of a major potential conflict of interest; an interest relating to the Chair; or a difference of opinion on how the potential conflict should be handled, the Academy's Honorary Officers (or, if required, its Council) will decide how to manage the interest. The declaration and the action that has been taken to manage a declared interest will be recorded in the minutes. The majority of conflicts or potential conflicts will relate to a particular issue and as such will not present any long-term restrictions on an individual's ability to sit on the Academy's committees or act as a peer reviewer. However for example where the focus of a working group may change or a person's interests may change to the extent where their continued participation may impact on the credibility of the key committee or their interests cannot be managed then they may be asked to step down from the Committee or their status changed to an observer (i.e. have no decision-making role).

Council Members are also charity trustees of the Academy and any conflicts of interest will therefore be managed by the Chair in accordance with the law, the Academy's governing documents and the guidance of the Charity Commission. In the event that there is any question as to how such conflicts should be managed, legal advice should be sought.

6) Confidentiality of discussions and documentation

Except with written agreement of the Chair, members must not share meeting papers or related correspondence, nor relay discussions that took place at the meeting with non-Committee members or with Committee members who have been excluded from all or part of the meeting due to their conflict of interest.

7) Breaches of this policy

Accidental failure to declare a relevant interest should be reported to the Committee Chair and secretariat as soon as possible. They will consider whether this has had a material impact on the decisions taken by that Committee. The Academy's Disciplinary Regulations may be used to investigate a potential wilful breach of this policy by a Fellow. The Academy reserves the right to investigate any potential wilful breach of this policy by a non-Fellow, and to exclude an individual from participation in any Academy activity as necessary.

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