

Conflicts of interest policy

Introduction

This conflict of interest policy explains to members of Council and Boards, Committee members, including Forum Steering Committee members, external advisers and senior staff what a conflict of interest is and the process to follow should such a conflict come into existence.

This conflict of interest policy is part of the RCN's governance documents.

Other relevant resources are:

- *RCN Code of Conduct 2019*
- *Regulation – RCN Council, board and committee members – fit and proper persons criteria*
- *Board confidentiality - RCN country and regional boards - policy for open and confidential sessions*
- *RCN Member Resolution Policy*
- *RCN Staff Disciplinary Policy & Procedure*

1. Purpose

- 1.1 When competing interests impair our ability to make objective, unbiased organisational decisions we have a conflict of interest. You may face a conflict of interest when your fiduciary duties as a Member of Council/Boards, Committee Members, including Forum Steering Committee members, an external adviser or senior staff member and your personal interests diverge.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This procedure applies to Members of Council/Boards, Committee Members, external advisors and senior staff.

3. Objective

- 3.1 To communicate the RCN's requirements in respect of conflicts of interest.

- 3.2 To advise all Members of Council/Boards, Committee Members, including Forum Steering Committee members, external advisors and senior staff of their obligation to disclose conflicts of interest and maintain high ethical standards.
- 3.3 To ensure that all organisational decisions are made in the best interests of the RCN.

4. Associated documents

4.1 This policy is part of a suite of documents aimed at ensuring best practice and governance.

- *Whistleblowing policy*
- *Gifts & Hospitality policy*
- *Anti-Corruption & Bribery policy*

5. Principles

Expectations

- 5.1 As Members of Council/Boards, Committee Members, including Forum Steering Committee members, external advisors and senior staff you are expected to:
- Maintain the highest possible standard of integrity in all your relationships, both inside and outside the organisation.
 - Reject any business practice which might reasonably be deemed improper.
 - Never use your authority or position for personal gain.
 - At all times, act with impartiality, independence and integrity.
 - Avoid being, or giving the appearance of being, in a position which may result in an actual or perceived detriment to the RCN's reputation and/or interests.

Disclosure

- 5.2 You must disclose or seek direction on any issues which may potentially conflict with your responsibilities to the RCN.

Restrictions

- 5.3 The following interests should be declared:
- posts held in the course of employment or practice

- consultancies, directorships or advisory positions in the field of health or social care or in a business with which the RCN might do business
- a position of authority in a charity or voluntary organisation in the field of health and social care
- any public appointments
- membership/Fellowship of other professional bodies and/or specialist societies
- membership of or affiliation to a political party
- any association with other organisations (including other Trade Unions) or individuals which may have an interest or influence in the College's work.

However, and in all cases, individuals have a responsibility to assess any potential conflicts and actual or perceived conflicts of interest (including those that are not referred to above) **must** be disclosed.

6. Procedure

When do I make a disclosure?

- 6.1 It is not possible to define all situations or relationships which may create a conflict of interest, so each situation must be evaluated individually. However, some of the more obvious conflicts include:

(a) Having any interest, dealings or managerial responsibility in any business which either is a competitor of the RCN or is seeking to become one.

(b) Having a close involvement with an organisation which is a competitor of the RCN or is seeking to become one.

Questions to ask yourself in order to assess whether a conflict of interest exists: -

- Will this interest substantially affect my ability to carry out my role?
- Will this interest put me under unreasonable pressure?
- Will this interest interfere in my ability to act in the best interests of the RCN?
- Would this look like a conflict to a member outside the situation?

Where do I record my disclosure?

- 6.2 Disclosure should be made on the register of Interests. Members of Council/Boards, Committee Members, including Forum Steering

Committee members, external advisors and senior staff making positive disclosures will be asked at each of their meetings to review conflicts of interest.

Responsibilities

- 6.3 Actual conflicts of interest must be avoided and potential conflicts of interests carefully managed. The Chair of Council/Chair of Boards/Chief Executive/Committee Chairs/Governance staff (as appropriate) must review the disclosed interest, discuss it openly and manage it so that Members of Council/Boards, Committees, Forum Steering Committees, external advisors and senior staff do not become involved in or influence situations where actual conflicts of interest occur.

Where an item is being discussed at a meeting, members, advisers and staff are required to disclose the existence and nature of any personal or prejudicial interest that they may have at the beginning of the item, or when a conflict of interest becomes apparent during the course of a discussion. Such a declaration will be recorded in the minutes. Where there is a substantial interest, the member, adviser or staff member may be asked to withdraw from the meeting and take no part in either the discussion or the decision, and the withdrawal will be recorded in the minutes.

Further advice

- 6.4 If you are in any doubt as to whether a conflict of interest exists discuss the situation with the Governance Support Directorate at (governance.support@rcn.org.uk).

7. Consequences

- 7.1 Failure to comply with the above procedures may result in disciplinary action in line with the RCN Member Resolution policy or the staff Disciplinary Policy & Procedure.

Approved by RCN Council 26 November 2020

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