Guidance on the register of interests and managing conflicts

1 Members of Council and Boards, external advisers and senior staff have a duty to act impartially and objectively, and to take steps to avoid any conflict of interest arising as a result of their membership of, or association with, other organisations or individuals.

2 To make this fully transparent, a register of members’ advisers’ and senior staff interests has been established.

3 The aim of the register is to support transparency and probity, and to maintain confidence in our governance process.

4 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 or individuals which may have an interest or influence in the College’s work.

5 The Chief Executive & General Secretary is responsible for keeping the register of members, advisers and senior staff interests. The register will be published on our website. Members, advisers and senior staff have a duty to provide relevant information and advise the Governance Support Directorate (governance.support@rcn.org.uk) of any amendments to their entries in the register as soon as possible following any changes in their circumstances. Members and senior staff will be invited to update their entries on a quarterly basis.

6 Where an item is being discussed at a meeting, members, advisers and staff have a responsibility 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 material interest, the member, adviser or staff member will 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.
7 When considering whether a conflict of interest or loyalty exists, members, advisers and staff should always consider how the issue might be perceived by members or people outside of the organisation.

8 Conflicts of interest are the norm and are not usually a problem if declared. The point about a conflict of interest is that everyone needs to know that it exists and where there is a material interest the member, adviser or staff member absents themselves from any decisions in relation to the issue.

9 Very occasionally people in positions of judgement may have to take extra steps to avoid accusations of bias and lead to doubts about the individual's integrity or compromise their position in the College and the organisation’s probity.

10 Members, advisers and senior staff are free to engage in political activities or to maintain links with political organisations, provided that such activity does not conflict with the role of the College or compromise their position within the College. Political activity should be included among the interests declared by members, advisers and senior staff.

11 It is normally undeclared conflicts that cause problems and result in the probity of the organisation and the individual involved being questioned. This is because a conflict if unmanaged can inhibit free discussion; result in decisions or actions that are not in the best interests of the organisation and risk the impression that the organisation has acted improperly.

Examples
A conflict of interest could arise if a County Council awarded a lucrative contract to a company owned by the brother of a Councillor. It would be entirely proper for the Council to award the contract to the company if it submitted the best tender provided that the Councillor himself was not be part of the decision making process.

The Chair of the Charity Commission absented herself from all decisions regarding the charitable status of public schools as she has a daughter at private school and she felt her involvement constituted a conflict of interest.

Conflict of interest statements often accompany published reports. These statements by contributors to a report are about other interests they have which could be seen to have influenced the findings or their interpretation.

For further information please contact governance.support@rcn.org.uk

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