Managing Conflicts of Interest and disputes
Guidance for Ethics Committees

Ethics committees manage conflicts of interest and disputes as part of their day-to-day activities. Effective handling of conflicts of interest is crucial to give confidence to academic staff and students that decisions are robust, fair, and transparent. Failure to manage conflicts of interest severely undermines trust and could lead to ethical challenges.

The purpose of these guidelines are in accordance with the University's Terms of Reference below:

2.7   Safeguard the good name and values of the University.

2.11   Ensure effective arrangements are in place for the management of information which meet ethical standards. Freedom of information requirements and other legislation on the use and protection of data.

2.12 Ensure the board delegates authority appropriately.

2.17 Ensure there are systems of control and accountability for risk management policies' and strategies.

2.42 Ensure there is a framework in place relating to the conduct of staff.

2.49 Ensure there is an effective decision-making process in place to enable risk-based decision making, to mitigate against adverse reputational impact and ensure the university's sustainability.

2.63 Maintain and protect the principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech

Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest is a situation where a 'reasonable person' would consider that any decisions taken by individuals have been or could be influenced or impaired by an interest they hold. In respect of a research application this could involve being the chief investigator of a research project itself or with the project sponsor; or direct involvement in the research undertaken.

Declaring interests

The ethics chair must make arrangements to ensure individuals declare any conflict or potential conflict in relation to a decision to be made by the committee as soon as they become aware of it.

The approach to the handling of a conflict of interest

Timing	Checklist for Chairs	Responsibility
In advance of the meeting	1. The agenda to include a standing item on declaration of interests to enable individuals to raise any issues and/or make a declaration at the meeting. 2.If the chair and/or deputy chair is declaring the interest provision should be made for an alternative chair to attend the meeting and be prepared to chair it when a research proposal is being discussed. 3. A definition of conflicts of interest should also be accompanied with each agenda to provide clarity for all recipients. 4. Agenda to be circulated to enable attendees (including visitors) to identify any interests relating specifically to the agenda item/ research proposal being considered	Chair and secretariat
During the meeting	5. Chair requests members to declare any interests in agenda items/research application including the nature of the conflict. 6. The member must leave the room/online platform in the instance of an application being discussed for its duration. 7. If required the deputy chair steps in at the appropriate time.	Chair
Following the Meeting	8. The chair/deputy chair and secretariat discusses the letter and coordinates this alongside any response regarding any ethical decision. A note will be made to the letter sent to the applicant to indicate the person with the conflict of interest had played no part in the review of the application and had not been present for the discussion/decision making.	Chair/deputy chair and secretariat

Resolving Disputes

At times, despite all our best efforts to resolve disputes and arrive at a committee decision, it may not be possible to reach consensus or even an overall majority. In the case that a decision cannot be made by the committee, the decision will then in turn be referred to a higher level committee (in the case of a Ethics Subject Panel, it would be referred to the Faculty Ethics Committee). The following flow chart outlines the accountability and reporting.

Flow through of process to deal with conflicts of interest and disputes