

BMA conflicts of interest policy



What is a conflict of interest?

A conflict of interest can be defined as a 'set of circumstances that creates a risk that an individual's ability to apply objective judgement or act in one role is, or could be, impaired or influenced by a secondary interest.' (National Audit Office "Conflicts of interest", 27 January 2015).

Conflicts of interests occur where a person acting in a representative capacity (in this case, elected and appointed members, BMA directors and representatives¹ (**hereafter referred to in the collective 'member/s'**)), could be unfairly influenced by financial or other commitments into failing to represent his or her constituency adequately, or adequately discharge their responsibilities in their appointed position.

It is appropriate, therefore, that there is openness and transparency about other commitments that Members may hold. By ensuring that any potential conflicts of interest are disclosed and known to others, they are less likely to influence debates/votes in meetings etc.

The information provided by Members will be processed in accordance with data protection principles as set out in the Data Protection Act 1998. Data will be processed only for the purposes set out in this policy and not for any other purpose.

Do I have to declare?

Where there is a potential for such relationships or external appointments to be material and relevant to BMA business, all such interests should be disclosed and any changes should be declared and recorded as and when they occur, and no later than fourteen (14) days of the change occurring. Any potential conflict of interest should then be declared before or at the commencement of any discussion or debate as well as on appointment to any BMA position.

The intention is not to forbid participation in other activities outside of the normal responsibilities of a Member, indeed these additional activities can be a source of strength to the BMA. However, members are obligated and have a duty to declare any personal, pecuniary interest in proposed transactions/arrangements, political affiliations or donations made, or any other interest that they think may relate to any decision being taken. Members must also be alert to conflicts of interest arising through business associations, spouses, partners and other close relatives. Where their conflict of interests makes it appropriate to do so, members must limit their participation in debate and/or decision-making.

Members must ensure that they declare any potential conflicts of interests in advance if they wish to speak in debate where the subject of the debate could potentially lead to a conflict.

The responsibility for avoiding any conflict of interest lies with the individual. Care should be taken by Members so as not to place themselves under any obligation, or perceived obligation, to any individual or organisation that might influence them in the performance of any BMA duties. However, if this does happen, steps should be taken swiftly to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the BMA's interests.

Members should take responsibility for ensuring that they notify the committee secretary of any change in circumstance (using the 'Declaration of Interests' form) and if a member has a conflict of interest, they should not be a party to any decision-making, unless authority to do so is given by the chair of the meeting. This could range from absenting themselves from a meeting during the discussion of an issue or abstaining from voting, depending upon the nature of the conflict. It will be a matter for the chair to decide whether the person's interest can be regarded as likely to give rise to a conflict of interest, as well as the appropriate course of action.

¹ Representatives include: non-members who are elected, observers, visitors and lay members.

What type of information should I declare?

All Members must complete and return to the committee secretary a 'Declaration of Interest' form as soon as possible. Members will be responsible for notifying any changes in their registrable interests within fourteen (14) days of the change occurring to ensure that the register is kept updated.

Some guidance on the type of information which Members should consider declaring as potential conflicts of interest is set out below. It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive and it is impossible to list every potential situation or circumstance that could give rise to a conflict of interests. Members should therefore use their judgment to decide whether any of their interests should be disclosed.

- **Directorships and committee appointments:** Both paid and unpaid directorships (including non-executive directors or senior employees) of any public or private company or other body, together with any roles or positions with other committees.
- **Alternative trade union membership external to the BMA:** any membership of another trade union must be disclosed.
- **Other remunerated work:** Any paid employment or other sources of income outside their normal medical work. Examples might be paid consultancy or advisory positions with government departments, pharmaceutical companies or the medical press, articles sold to the paramedical press, or remunerated speaking engagements. Also included should be work for companies active in other healthcare fields, NHS Trusts, health authorities, any NHS commissioning body or health boards and endorsements or appointments which could be used by other organisations for marketing purposes.
- **Gifts, benefits and hospitality:** This includes any substantial gift or material advantage received by a member which in any way relates to his/her membership of BMA committees. This would include trips or visits arising out of membership, where the cost has not been wholly borne by the member or the BMA. Gifts of less than £500 in value and other benefits of less than £500 in value would be exempt, as would events to which all members are invited.
- **Shareholdings or other positions:** Declaration of the name of any public or private company (including any not-for-profit), business, partnership or consultancy active in the field of healthcare or certain other sectors where a conflict of interest might arise (eg retail financial services, STM (scientific, technical and medical) publishing) in which the member holds significant shareholdings, interests or control. Significant in the context of shareholdings is defined as either (a) greater than 1 per cent of the issued share capital of the company or body, or (b) less than 1 per cent of the issued share capital but more than £25,000.
- **Indirect social/business relationships and family interests:** These would include any close association with an individual who has a financial interest, a non-financial professional interest or a non-financial personal interest (and any other interests) of close family members/friends/business partners that might be considered relevant to an individual's position as a member of any BMA committee.
- **Appointments which could lead to a commercial conflict of interests.**
- **Potential conflicts arising from the possession of confidential information.**
- **Miscellaneous and unremunerated interests:** This includes other interests which do not fall clearly within any of the above categories, for example, an active role within a political party, membership of societies such as the Freemasons or of other organisations. Membership of, or work for, other bodies such as charities or trusts which could possibly

influence a member's position with regard to his/her BMA associated activities should also be included, as well as membership of UK Governments or Department of Health committees/working groups (or their equivalents in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland) on which the member is not a designated BMA representative.

How are we recording conflicts?

It is essential that declarations of interest and actions arising from any declarations are recorded formally and consistently across all BMA committees and meetings. The checklist below will provide support and guidance in conflicts of interest management to the chair of the meeting prior to, during and following the meeting.

Timing	Checklist for chairs	Responsibility
In advance of the meeting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The agenda should include a standing item on declaration of interests, including a definition of conflicts of interest, to enable individuals to raise any issues and/or make a declaration prior to or at the meeting. The agenda should be circulated to enable attendees (including visitors) to identify any interests relating specifically to the agenda items being considered. Members should contact the chair as soon as an actual or potential conflict is identified. Chair to review a summary report from preceding meetings i.e., sub-committee, working group, etc., detailing any conflicts of interest declared and how this was managed. A copy of the register of interests is checked to establish any actual or potential conflicts of interest that may occur during the meeting and the chair should consider how the potential conflict will be perceived externally. 	<p>Meeting chair and committee secretary</p> <p>Each individual member</p> <p>Meeting chair and committee secretary</p> <p>Meeting chair and committee secretary</p>
During the meeting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Check and declare the meeting is quorate and ensure that this is noted in the minutes of the meeting. Chair requests members to declare any interests in agenda items which have not previously been declared and authorised, including the nature of the conflict. The register of interests is made available for inspection and the meeting and any updates made at the meeting will need to be dealt with before the meeting can proceed. Chair makes a decision as to how to manage each potential conflict which has been declared, including whether/to what extent the individual Member should continue to participate in the meeting, on a case by case basis, and this decision is recorded. As a minimum requirement, the following should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Declaration of any interest or any reference to previous declarations and how these were dealt with; At what point the interest was declared; The nature of the interest; The chair's decision and resulting action taken; An explanation of reasons for any broader decisions taken. Visitors in attendance who participate in the meeting must also follow the meeting protocol and declare any interests in a timely manner. <p>While the 'Declaration of Interests' form should be completed in advance of any meetings, template forms for recording any interests during meetings should be made available by the committee secretary.</p>	<p>Meeting chair</p> <p>Meeting chair</p> <p>Meeting chair and committee secretary</p> <p>Committee secretary</p>
Following the meeting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> All interests should be promptly updated onto the declaration of interest form; All new completed declarations of interest should be transferred onto the 'Register of Interests' to be held by the chief executive officer/committee secretary. The register will be made available on request for inspection by any BMA member. 	<p>Individual(s) declaring interest(s)</p> <p>Designated person responsible for registers of interest</p>

What happens if I fail to disclose a conflict of interest?

Failure to disclose an actual or perceived conflict of interest, or to cease involvement in the situation until the conflict has been resolved, constitutes a breach of the BMA code of conduct and may be subject to the BMA support and sanctions process. In applying the support and sanctions policy, consideration will be given to the extent to which the member was aware of the actual or perceived conflict of interest and/or made a reasonable decision not to declare it and the time and manner in which the failure to disclose is remedied, if applicable.

What if I am aware of a breach of this policy by another member?

In the spirit of good collegiate working, it is recommended that the individual concerned is approached privately in the first instance so that the matter may be resolved informally. If concerns remain then it would be appropriate to give notice to the individual that the matter will be raised with the committee secretary. If the matter cannot be resolved at this stage, and bearing in mind that this policy is not going to be applied unreasonably or disproportionately, then the allegation may be considered in line with the BMA support and sanctions process.

Queries

If members have any questions with regard to those interests which should be declared, they should seek advice from the committee secretary or the director of legal services on 020 7383 6028.