



UNIVERSITY OF  
OXFORD

# CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

*An introduction to recognising, declaring  
and managing conflicts of interest.*

# What is a conflict of interest?

Everybody has a number of different interests. For academics these interests may relate to conducting research, publishing and undertaking commercial activities, and to recruiting, teaching and supervising students. Interests might also include external activities and additional roles or responsibilities within the collegiate University.

Each of these different interests will generate different responsibilities. You should be aware of these, and be able to distinguish between the responsibilities that come with each of your activities. Different interests can come into conflict, and the resulting 'conflicts of interest' need to be identified, declared and, where necessary, managed.

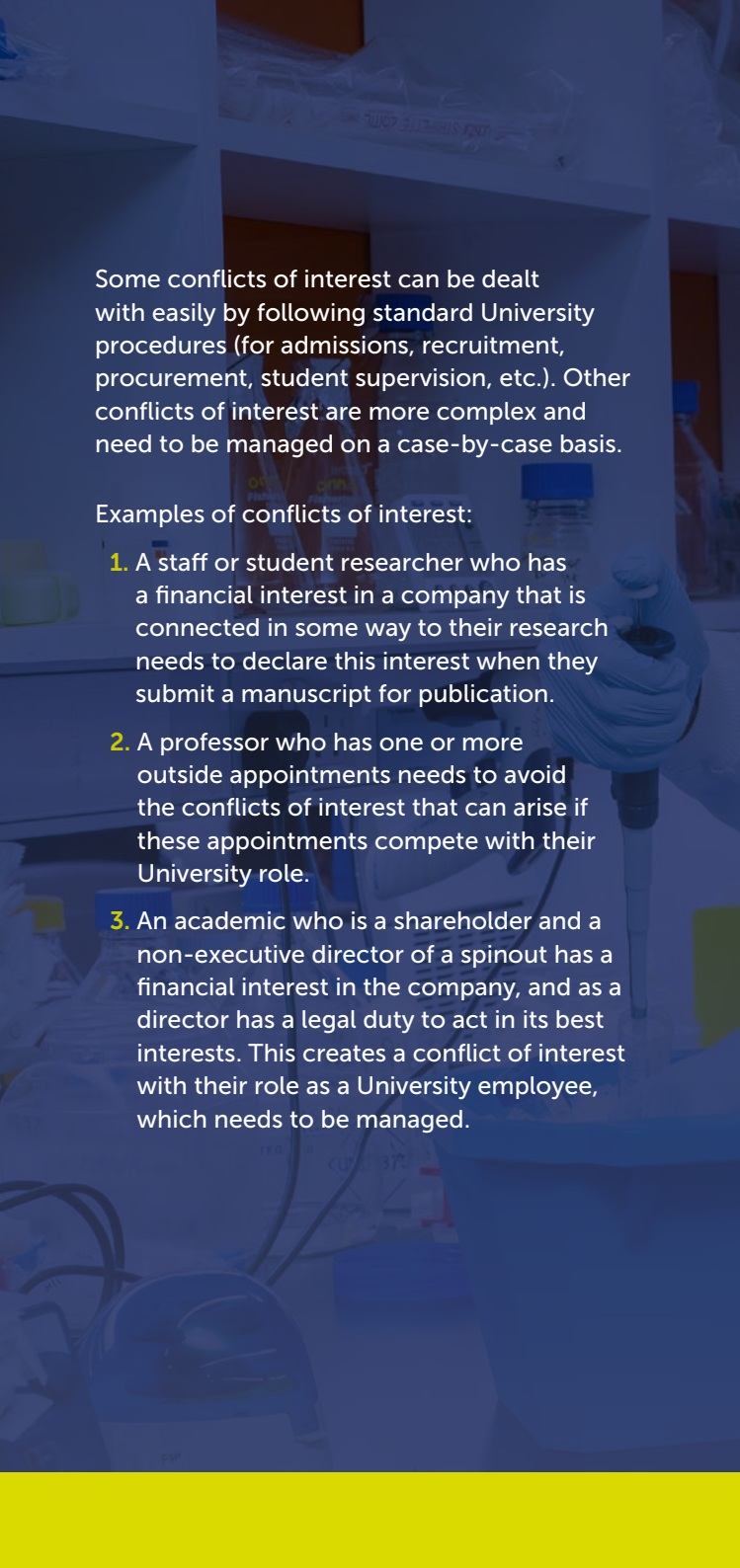
This is important because undisclosed and unmanaged conflicts of interest can result in biased decision-making and can call into question the objectivity of research findings. Conflicts of interest may also seriously damage the reputation of individuals and jeopardise the University's public standing.

**The University has a Conflict of Interest Policy. Whether you are a member of staff, a student or working at the University in another capacity (for example as a grant holder or emeritus researcher) you are required to:**

- 1.** Consider your own interests and if any of these might conflict (or appear to conflict) with each other or with your responsibilities to the University.
- 2.** Declare any potential conflicts of interest to your head of department. (Heads of departments should declare interests to their head of division, UG students to their tutor or senior tutor, and PG students to their supervisor.)
- 3.** Decide how best to deal with competing or conflicting interests, and agree a written management plan with the person to whom you have declared the interest.

**Don't forget that:**

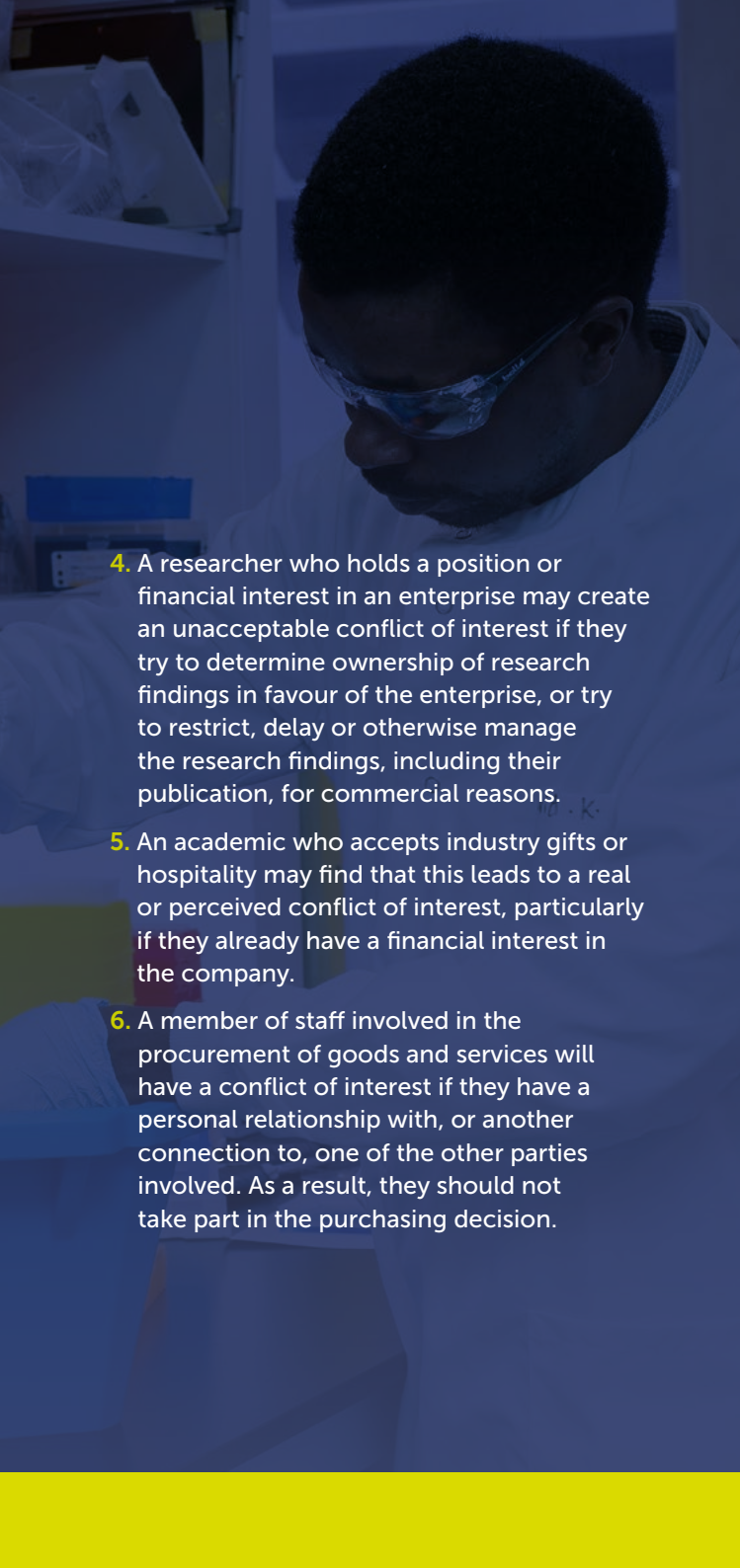
- ▶ You need to seek approval before taking on an outside appointment in addition to your University role.
- ▶ If you have an interest (be it financial or personal) in a spinout, startup or other external venture with a connection to your academic work, you are required to take certain steps to manage your conflicts of interests (see Appendix A of the Policy).
- ▶ All researchers are required to state (via X5) whether or not they have a conflict of interest in respect of each application for external funding.
- ▶ Researchers also need to ensure that they comply with the conflict of interest requirements of their research funders.



Some conflicts of interest can be dealt with easily by following standard University procedures (for admissions, recruitment, procurement, student supervision, etc.). Other conflicts of interest are more complex and need to be managed on a case-by-case basis.

Examples of conflicts of interest:

1. A staff or student researcher who has a financial interest in a company that is connected in some way to their research needs to declare this interest when they submit a manuscript for publication.
2. A professor who has one or more outside appointments needs to avoid the conflicts of interest that can arise if these appointments compete with their University role.
3. An academic who is a shareholder and a non-executive director of a spinout has a financial interest in the company, and as a director has a legal duty to act in its best interests. This creates a conflict of interest with their role as a University employee, which needs to be managed.

- 
- A person wearing safety glasses is working in a laboratory setting, looking down at a piece of equipment. The background shows laboratory shelves and equipment.
4. A researcher who holds a position or financial interest in an enterprise may create an unacceptable conflict of interest if they try to determine ownership of research findings in favour of the enterprise, or try to restrict, delay or otherwise manage the research findings, including their publication, for commercial reasons.
  5. An academic who accepts industry gifts or hospitality may find that this leads to a real or perceived conflict of interest, particularly if they already have a financial interest in the company.
  6. A member of staff involved in the procurement of goods and services will have a conflict of interest if they have a personal relationship with, or another connection to, one of the other parties involved. As a result, they should not take part in the purchasing decision.

**To find out more:**  
[researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/  
integrity/conflict](https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/integrity/conflict)



**Related policies are available online:**

**Academic integrity in research**

**Outside appointments**

**Gifts & Hospitality**

**Anti-bribery & anti-fraud**

**Information security**

**Data protection**