

## Identifying conflicts of interest in recruitment

### Recruitment and selection fact sheet

**Purpose:** this fact sheet is guidance material to support the directive relating to recruitment and selection. It explains how to declare knowledge, relationships and conflicts of interest when you are involved in a recruitment and selection process and to support completion of the [Conflicts of interest in recruitment declarations form](#).

### Section A: Declare knowledge and relationships with no conflict of interest

Recruitment processes often involve people who know, or have some connection with, applicants. This is common and may arise from routine professional or community connections, for example:

- working in the same organisation
- being a work colleague, supervisor or referee
- living in the same neighbourhood
- attending the same community group.

Having prior knowledge of, or a relationship with, an applicant **does not automatically mean there is a conflict of interest**. A conflict arises where there is a factor in the relationship that could influence, or reasonably be perceived to influence, your role in the recruitment process.

Further information on how to determine if the knowledge or relationship amounts to a conflict, including the factors to consider, is provided below under '[When should I use Section A or B](#)'.

After applications close, review the list of applicant names. Use **Section A** of the Conflicts of interest in recruitment declarations form to declare any knowledge or relationships that **do not** amount to a conflict of interest.

If you have prior knowledge of an applicant:

- consider how that knowledge will be disclosed and used (or not used) in the assessment process
- clearly document this, for example in the selection report
- if the prior knowledge includes adverse information, ensure procedural fairness by providing the applicant with the details and an opportunity to respond.

These steps help ensure transparency, integrity and fairness in the recruitment process and assists the decision maker to determine if further action is required.

### Section B: Declare conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest arises when your personal interests **could improperly influence, or be perceived to influence**, your role in the recruitment and selection process. These conflicts can be actual, perceived or potential:

- **Actual:** Your personal interests directly conflict with your official duties in the recruitment process. Example: a family member applies for a role and you are involved in the recruitment activities.
- **Perceived:** It might reasonably appear to others that your personal interests could influence your official duties in the recruitment process, even if you believe this is not the case. Example: a colleague with whom you regularly have lunch with at work in a one-on-one capacity applies for the role and you are involved in the recruitment activities.
- **Potential:** Your personal interests could conflict with your official duties in the future. Example: As a hiring manager, you are involved in designing the role description and advertisement for a role that you are aware a friend is likely to apply for.

Sources of conflicts of interest are diverse and may include:

- personal or professional relationships (current or past)
- financial ties to an applicant or their organisation
- connections to an applicant you receive benefits or favours from
- affiliations with political, social or professional groups.

Conflicts of interest may also arise where there have been **prior negative interactions**, such as complaints or past performance processes involving an applicant.

Use **Section B** of the form to declare any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest.



If you're unsure whether knowledge or a relationship amounts to a conflict of interest, declare it in **Section A** of the form and seek advice from the decision maker and/or speak with your local human resources team.

## When should I use Section A or B?

Some conflicts of interest are straightforward, such as personal relationships involving a family member, partner or friend (actual conflict – complete **Section B**). Other situations are more complex and require careful consideration on a case-by-case basis.

When deciding whether to use Section A or Section B of the form, consider the factors and guiding questions to ask yourself below:

| Factors              | Guiding questions and examples  |
|----------------------|---|
| Nature and capacity  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the nature of the relationship with the applicant, and does it involve multiple intersecting roles?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Personal relationships (such as a family member, friend, partner or business associate) are more likely to create a conflict of interest</li> <li>– Professional relationships limited to workplace interactions are less likely to create a conflict of interest unless there is another contributing factor (see below), such as a negative interaction (e.g. where a grievance or dispute is involved)</li> <li>– Relationships involving intersecting roles, such as a colleague who is also a friend or business associate that you interact with in personal or social settings, are more likely to create a conflict of interest.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Intensity and extent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How close and significant is the relationship with the applicant, and what is the scope of the interactions?</li> </ul>  |

| Factors              | Guiding questions and examples  |
|----------------------|---|
|                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Frequent one-on-one interactions outside of work, such as weekend catchups, may indicate a closer relationship that could amount to a conflict of interest</li> <li>– Casual group interactions, such as Friday night drinks with a group of colleagues, are less likely to create a conflict of interest unless there is another contributing factor.</li> <li>• Consider social media connection: professional networking (e.g. LinkedIn) or personal networking (e.g. Facebook or Instagram)? What is the extent and frequency of the interactions, and could they reasonably be perceived as influencing your professional judgement?</li> </ul> |
| Duration and recency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How long has the relationship existed? How recent were your interactions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Long-standing relationships or relationships with regular interactions are more likely to create a conflict of interest</li> <li>– Occasional or brief interactions are unlikely to create a conflict, unless there is another contributing factor</li> <li>– A close personal or professional relationship that ended recently may still pose as a perceived conflict, whereas one that ended many years ago may not.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |
| Perception           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would the connection or relationship look to a reasonably informed observer? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– If it could be reasonably perceived as influencing your decisions in the recruitment process, it may be a perceived or actual conflict of interest.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |

### Reminder – are you a referee for an applicant?



Being a referee does not automatically create a conflict of interest. However, to support transparency in the process, declare this in the Conflicts of interest in recruitment declarations form, in either:

- Section A for knowledge or relationships that do not amount to a conflict of interest, or
- Section B if there is a factor in the relationship that amounts to a conflict of interest.

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## Case scenario: navigating workplace relationships

### Scenario 1

You and a colleague met through your current workplace and have developed a friendly working relationship. Over time, you've started spending more time together, regularly having coffee and lunch together in a one-on-one capacity.

Now, you are on the selection panel, and this colleague has applied for the role being recruited for.

#### What should you do?

**Option A** – You decide that this is not a conflict of interest because your relationship is purely professional and stems from your workplace connection. You declare the relationship in Section A of the form (knowledge and relationships with no conflict of interest).

**Option B** – You recognise that your relationship is not close enough to affect your impartiality, but others might perceive it differently. You declare it as a perceived conflict of interest in **Section B** of the form and propose resolution or mitigation strategies in **Section C** of the form.

#### The Answer – Option B

This is a perceived conflict of interest. While your relationship is primarily professional, the frequent one-on-one interactions (e.g. coffee and lunch) may create a perceived conflict of interest. A reasonably informed observer could perceive this as potentially influencing your impartiality, particularly in the context where there are other internal applicants for the role. You should declare this as a perceived conflict in **Section B** and propose resolution or mitigation strategies in **Section C** of the form.

### Scenario 2

Now, consider the same situation, but with the following additional elements:

- You attend the same gym twice a week before work and usually have breakfast together in the office building afterwards
- You frequently interact on social media together and you were recently a bridesmaid at their wedding.

#### What should you do now?

**Option C** – You believe this remains a perceived conflict of interest because you are work colleagues and can still act fairly and assess the applicant impartially.

**Option D** – This is now considered a friendship, which could compromise your ability to remain impartial. You declare this as an actual conflict of interest and remove yourself from the recruitment and selection process entirely.

#### The Answer – Option D

This is an actual conflict of interest as the relationship extends beyond the workplace into personal and social contexts, including the gym and breakfast together, frequent social media interactions and being a bridesmaid at their wedding. These factors indicate that the professional relationship has become a friendship, which creates an actual conflict of interest, and it is best practice to remove yourself from the selection panel.



Every relationship is unique, and the determination of whether a relationship amounts to a conflict of interest will depend on the specific circumstances. It is important to apply your own judgement, consider the guidance provided and seek advice from your local human resources team or the decision maker if you are unsure.