

# Conflicts of Interest Policy

## **Document Summary**

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## The City College: Conflicts of Interest Policy

### 1. Introduction

Conflicts of interest may arise where an individual's personal or family interests and/or loyalties conflict with those of the College. These interests may be academic, financial or emotional. Such conflicts may create problems, as they can:

- inhibit free discussion
- result in decisions, or actions, that are not in the genuine best interests of the College
- risk creating the impression that the College has acted improperly.

The aim of this policy is to protect the College and the individuals concerned from any appearance of impropriety.

### 2. Principles

The College is committed to maintaining the highest standards and conducting its business in accordance with best practice in higher education corporate governance and with the seven principles identified by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership). Everyone associated with the College should conduct themselves with integrity, impartiality and honesty at all times and should maintain high standards of propriety and professionalism. They should avoid situations where they, or the College, could be open to suspicion of dishonesty, and not put themselves in a position of conflict between their various activities.

### 3. Disclosure

If a staff member has a conflict of interest (actual, perceived or potential), they have a duty to disclose it and to take such actions as may be appropriate, as set out under the procedure below. This duty of disclosure applies to the perception of the situation as well as the actual existence of a conflict of interest – suspicion may arise even when a staff member acts with complete neutrality and professional integrity. The existence of this Policy is not in any way intended to question the integrity of staff, but is necessary to protect them and the College from reputational damage or other liabilities.

Disclosure must be made in writing to the Principal, Managing Director or Director of Student Records before or as soon as the conflict of interest arises. If the conflict arises at a meeting the staff member must:

- declare an interest at or before discussion begins on the matter
- withdraw from the meeting for that item unless expressly invited to remain in order to provide information
- withdraw during the vote or any other decision-making part of the process
- inform the Managing Director or Director of Student Records immediately in writing.
- It is the individual's responsibility to raise concerns relating to conflicts of interest. If not sure what to declare, those affected should err on the side of caution and consult at the earliest possible occasion.

The following information provides guidance on the identification and subsequent management of actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest that may be encountered

and must be disclosed. It is not intended to be exhaustive, and there may be other occasions which may pose a real or perceived conflict of interest. Staff have a responsibility to use their judgment and follow the disclosure instructions provided in this policy.

#### **4. Academic Relationships**

Academic staff members have an obligation to make a disclosure in all cases where they find themselves involved in the recruitment, assessment and progression of students with whom they have a personal relationship, or who is known to them privately through their commercial interest, or whose known religious/ethical views or strong personal values may be perceived to be in conflict with their own.

#### **5. Recruitment of new staff**

Staff involved in the recruitment and selection process must immediately disclose any conflict or potential conflict of interest, at which point in the interests of fairness to all candidates they will not be permitted to continue to participate. For example, it would not normally be appropriate for a member of staff to be a member of a recruitment panel where an applicant is a member of their spouse's family.

#### **6. Relationships involving a senior colleague**

It would normally not be appropriate for members of staff in a direct or indirect management or supervisory role to be involved in management activities relating to the member of staff with whom they have a relationship, for example:

- Authorisation of financial payments or expenses
- Salary payments
- Recruitment, selection or appointment, including the provision of references
- Progression and promotion
- Probation.

#### **7. Private work**

Members of staff may undertake private work in their own time, but this must not impair the performance of the member of staff's duties nor conflict with the interests of the College. Before accepting any work or extending any existing private work, members of staff are encouraged to consult with the Principal, Managing Director or Director of Student Records. Under no circumstances may College stationery (printed or otherwise) bearing the College's name, address, letter heading or crest be used in connection with private work.

#### **8. Relationships between members of staff and suppliers**

Where members of staff have personal relationships with consultants, contractors or suppliers who provide goods or services to the College, and they are in a position to influence contracts or the tendering process, such personal relationships must be disclosed in good time.

A determination may then be made as to whether the member of staff should take any part in determining the price or conditions associated with the contract. This duty of disclosure applies equally to any renewal or extension of contracts.

## **9. Hospitality and Gifts**

Hospitality of a value over £50 received by any member of staff from any source (including suppliers, students, or other stakeholders) must be disclosed.

## **10. Gifts, vouchers, points or payments from suppliers**

Gifts, vouchers, points or payments received personally by any member of staff from suppliers or their agents as a result of a College purchase belong to the College rather than to the person placing the order, and must be disclosed immediately.

For the avoidance of doubt, low value items (below £10) such as calendars, diaries, pens and mugs may be retained without disclosure. In addition, members of staff should disclose any preferential prices or discounts offered by suppliers when purchasing goods or services on behalf of the College, as these should be announced to other staff responsible for procurement.

## **11. Gifts from Students**

Any gifts from a student to a member of staff, other than a token gift of nominal value (typically less than £20), should be politely declined. If declining the gift would cause offence, the gift must be declared to the Principal, Managing Director or Director of Student Records and may be accepted on behalf of the College. The acceptance of any gift from a student in a position of academic oversight (e.g. while they are being assessed) is strictly prohibited. Gifts of significant monetary value, such as cash or a substantial gift card, are inappropriate and should never be accepted for personal use.

## **12. Relationships between staff and students**

The College values good professional relationships between staff and students. These relationships are heavily reliant upon mutual trust and confidence.

A personal relationship of a sexual or other intimate nature between a member of staff and a student, with whom that member of staff also has a professional connection, gives rise to an actual or apparent conflict of interest. In particular, such a relationship creates, or may reasonably be perceived to create, a risk of favouritism or abuse of authority. It also undermines the relationship of trust and confidence that is intrinsic to staff and student interaction.

Abuse of authority can include the misuse of power and, as such, The City College is clear that it disapproves of and discourages intimate personal relationships between staff and students, in order to protect students from possible abuse of power, sexual misconduct, harassment or bullying. Should any staff member be found to be involved in an intimate personal relationship with a student or student(s) they will be subject to the disciplinary process of the College which could involve in dismissal. This does not include excluded relationships, involving ongoing intimate personal relationships that existed before the date this condition came into force, or which existed before a staff member became a member of staff in relation to the student with whom they are having an ongoing intimate relationship.

In order to avoid abuse of power relationships between staff and students, it is advised that gifts from students should only be tokens of appreciation (cards or

chocolates) and not expensive gifts (gift tokens of monetary value, etc.). Any such gift should be politely declined to avoid unfair treatment of students and attempts to influence academic judgement. Any such relationships or gifts must be disclosed to the college.

### **13. Failure to disclose**

Failure to seek approval for and/or disclose complete and accurate information regarding a conflict of interest may constitute misconduct or gross misconduct and result in disciplinary action being taken.

### **14. Further Information and Resources**

For additional details and best practice guidance on conflicts of interest and good governance, please refer to the following sources:

- The Seven Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles): A foundational document on ethical standards in public service.
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>
- Office for Students (OfS) Regulatory Framework: The OfS sets out conditions of registration for higher education providers, including expectations on governance.
- <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/>
- Advance HE: Provides guidance and resources on governance, leadership, equality, diversity, and inclusion in the higher education sector.
- <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/governance>