Policies and Procedures

Operations Department

Conflict of Interest Policy

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Conflict of Interest Policy

1. Defining Conflict of Interest

Conflict of interest involves circumstances that create a risk that an individual's ability to apply judgement or act in one's role is, or could be, impaired or influenced by a secondary interest. Providing services via third parties increases the potential for conflicts of interest as organisations act as both commissioner and provider of related services.

It is important to recognise the risk of conflicts of interest as failure in doing so, may give the impression that the organisation or individual is not acting in the public interest and could potentially damage reputation.

Conflicts might occur if individuals have *inter alia*:

i. A direct or indirect financial interest;
ii. Non-financial or personal interests;
iii. Conflicts of loyalty with competing loyalties between the organisation they owe a primary duty to, and some other individual.

2. Management of conflict of interest

An adequate system is in place at Future Focus in order to, primarily, identify and manage conflicts of interest before there is the need to eliminate them. The procedure is to make everyone aware of what to do if they suspect a conflict.

The policy is one whereby:

i.   Decision-making is efficient, transparent and fair.

ii.   Rules are clear and robust but not excessively prescriptive.

The system is based on the principle that all individuals involved will act honestly, volunteer information about conflicts and exclude themselves from decision-making where conflicts exist.

Prompts and checks exist in order to reinforce and ascertain compliance with these procedures and policies.

3. Principles and Policy

Future Focus has in place principles and policies should a conflict of interest arise.

As a principle, the system assumes that all individuals at the centre:

i.   Act honestly;

ii.   Volunteer information about conflicts;

iii. Exclude themselves from decision-making where conflicts exist.

The policy is as follows:

i.   The Quality Assurance Manager with support from all relevant staff will constantly try to identify, record, disclose, monitor and properly manage any conflict of interest or loyalty, be it from staff, lecturers or management;

ii.   All reasonable steps are taken to ensure that no conflict of interest or loyalty will have an adverse effect on any aspect of the centre;

iii.   When a conflict of interest has an effect on the centre, all reasonable steps are taken to mitigate the adverse effect and if possible reverse it;

iv.   It is agreed that should an assessor have a conflict of interest with a student, they will not undertake any assessment connected with that student;

v.   If a conflict of interest situation leads to a complaint, then the complaints procedure will be implemented.

Preventive measures involving prompts and checks reinforce this policy, predominantly where the risk of conflicts of interest is high.

4. Prevention

Promotion of ethical standards is achieved by defining what behaviours and practices are acceptable and unacceptable, and by clearly stating what will happen when people do not comply.

Staff must confirm compliance with this regularly.

i.   There must be openness and transparency about situations where conflicts can and do arise.

ii.   The policy is one whereby everyone is made aware of what to do if they suspect a conflict and ensure decision-making is efficient, transparent and fair.

Should conflicts arise, these would be clearly detailed, including a record of the action taken to manage the conflict. There will be abstention and withdrawal from decision-making when participation places an individual in a conflicted position.

5. Compliance

The mechanism to detect non-compliance involves management of internal controls and independent oversight to detect breaches of policy.

Such controls include:

i.   External checks that ascertain that conflicts are properly managed;
ii. Independent checks to support risk of oversight;
iii. Internal reporting system that ensures that concerns are raised and highlighted

In the case of non-compliance, a system of proportionate, personal consequences is in place and includes

i.   Disciplinary action such as dismissal
ii. Management actions such as retroactive cancellation of a decision or contract
iii. If the conflict cannot be resolved in any other way, options could include divestment, transfer, and restriction of activity or resignation.