

NERC policy on conflicts of interest for members of NERC boards, advisory groups and peer review panels

Introduction

NERC uses the expertise, knowledge and advice of the international academic and research community, government agencies, industry and elsewhere. Their involvement is an essential contribution to the Council's decision-making processes, many of which lead to the allocation of public funds.

Why do we need a conflict of interest policy?

NERC needs to set out clearly how it expects its committee and board members to act in considering the allocation of funds and in the wider decision-making and advisory contexts.

The aim of this policy is to protect both the organisation and the individuals involved from any appearance of impropriety.

How does NERC define a 'conflict of interest'?

A conflict of interest is defined as the committee or board member being associated or involved in any way with an institution, department or individual that has submitted a funding proposal or would otherwise benefit from a decision; and/or has been involved in the development, or implementation of proposals seeking Council funds or in the evaluation of research investments.

How does NERC apply its conflict of interest policy?

a. The Chair of a meeting will be briefed on declared conflicts of interest and will draw attention to these before the meeting starts.

b. NERC will remove all papers relating to a registered conflict of interest from the respective member's meeting papers.

c. At the start of each meeting the Chair should remind the committee/board members that they should declare if any item on the agenda is likely to give rise to an actual or potential conflict of interest.

d. The Chair should consider if the interest is sufficient to require the member to leave the room when that matter comes up for discussion, or to remain in the room but without expressing any opinion on the issue.

e. If there is doubt as to whether the member should be asked to leave, the Chair may discuss this with the rest of the committee. The member may be asked to leave the room while the committee decides.

f. If the absence of a member who has declared an interest will compromise the committee's expertise, the member may be invited to speak on 'matters of fact'.

g. If the committee member concerned is the Chair, then another member should chair that item.

h. If in doubt, the Chair and committee should assume that the actual or potential conflict of interest may call into question the objectivity and impartiality of the committee's consideration of that issue.

i. All conflicts of interest declared, and actions taken, should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting, ensuring a proper audit trail.

NERC's Register of Declarations of Interest for Boards and Advisory Groups

a. On taking up their appointments, all Committee members must declare any private, professional or commercial interests that could conflict with NERC's interests. These interests may be *direct* or *indirect*, *monetary* or *non-monetary*, which the public might reasonably think could influence the committee members' judgment¹.

b. NERC will record the declarations of interest centrally and update them every year.

c. Members should provide updated information as changes occur.

d. NERC will put the register on its website so the public can inspect it, and the website detail will be published in the NERC Council's annual report.

¹ In-line with guidance from HM Government, *Corporate governance in central government departments: Code of good practice 2011*(HMT/Cabinet Office, July 2011).

NERC's Register of Declarations of Interest for Peer Review Panels

Peer Review Panels are made up of members of the [NERC Peer Review College](#) and other UK and international experts as required to meet the needs of the specific call or programme. NERC has published its process for managing [conflicts of interest in peer review](#).