

What is a Conflict of Interest?

A Conflict of Interest (COI) exists when your duty and responsibilities in your role with the University intersects with any private, personal or professional activity or interest. The relevant policy is Conflict of Interest which can be accessed [here](#).

- an **actual conflict** involves a direct conflict between a staff member's duties and responsibilities to the University and a competing interest or obligation, whether personal or involving a third party.
- a **perceived conflict** exists where it could reasonably be perceived, or give the appearance, that a competing interest could improperly influence the performance of a staff member's duties and responsibilities to the University.
- a **potential conflict of interest** arises where a staff member has an interest or obligation, whether personal or involving a third party, that could conflict with the staff member's duties and responsibilities to the University.

If a person fails to declare a COI because of self-interest, apathy, and lack of understanding or because of a misguided belief that they are not required to declare it, then they place themselves, their colleagues/students and the university at risk. The risks are not just reputational risks as in some cases serious misconduct may be involved.

It is inevitable that you will eventually be exposed to a conflict of interest, whether this be a personal conflict, awareness of a conflict on the part of another, or actively raising a conflict issue with management.

How do I identify if I have a Conflict of Interest?

As an individual you should regularly consider your circumstances and how it might impact on your role. Ask yourself questions including:

- Are you engaging in secondary employment?
- Do you or your close family members have a private business that has any connection to UQ?
- Could your role be influenced by your hobbies or volunteer interests, political, professional or union affiliations?
- Who do you have significant relationships with, and what do those people do?
- Do you have any negative or positive bias towards any person or group that you work with at UQ?

It is important that you immediately take action to appropriately declare and manage any conflict of interest in the workplace. If you are unsure, it is always best to declare. Most COIs can be appropriately managed.

Managing a Conflict of Interest

Staff and appointees of the university are obligated to declare any COI, regardless of whether it is actual, perceived or potential. When we declare a COI, we have an opportunity to explain what the conflict is and to suggest strategies to manage the COI. The COI declaration form provides an opportunity to do this.

Supervisory responsibilities

Supervisors/managers, no matter what level, have a responsibility to carefully consider any COI discussed/declared to them. Further, they are obligated to carefully consider the risks and whether or not they can be managed. It is important that they carefully review any declaration for accuracy and completeness to ensure that all risks engendered by the COI are covered. Simply acknowledging a COI is not sufficient.

The COI declaration process also provides supervisors/managers an opportunity to detail expectations of the proposed management plan or where the COI cannot be managed to direct the staff member/appointee to remove themselves from the activity or decision in question.

Discovery of an undeclared COI, even after it has past, will be treated by the university as if it were still active for the purposes of investigation/misconduct considerations.

Examples of COI situations with potentially serious consequences include:

- Recruiting a relative or friend to fill a position at UQ without following a recruitment process.
- UQ staff member supervising a relative or friend.
- A UQ staff member hiring a friend or relative to work at UQ as a consultant.
- A UQ staff member with a financial interest in an external company engaging that company to undertake services for UQ.
- A UQ staff member favouring a particular vendor via a procurement process because they are a relative or friend.
- A UQ researcher involved in research which has been used to commercialise a product has been engaged by the company to undertake work as a paid consultant.
- UQ staff member using insider knowledge to help a company win a contract with UQ.

The COI online system

Since 2019 COI's for fixed term and continuing staff must be disclosed via the online system ([Disclosure and management of interests - Current staff - University of Queensland \(uq.edu.au\)](#)). However, for academic title holders and casual staff there is a paper-based form to complete. It is important to discuss your COI with your supervisor. If you are using the online tool any declaration you make may bypass your supervisor and be sent directly to the head of your organisational unit, hence the importance of having a conversation with your actual line supervisor so they are fully aware of any conflicts.

Advice and guidance

Please refer to the COI policy for further information or contact the Integrity Unit for guidance. The IU has collated some examples of common COI situations within UQ and provided some suitable management plans to assist in dealing with COI issues. This material is available for all staff to access on the IU website. There are additional COI resources available [here](#).