



## **Statement of Policy and Procedure on Conflicts of Interest arising in Undergraduate Admissions**

**RESPONSIBLE COMMITTEE:** Educational Policy Committee

**RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:** Fellow for Access and Admissions

**LINKED DOCUMENTS:** na

**ANNUAL REVIEW DATE:** First meeting of Hilary Term

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 St John's College is committed to the highest standards of probity in its procedures for selecting undergraduates as part of the University of Oxford's admissions process;

1.2 The existence of a conflict of interest does not necessarily mean that a person cannot participate in the undergraduate admissions process; however, it is important that actual and potential conflicts are acknowledged, and that appropriate actions are discussed, agreed, recorded, and implemented, to ensure that the reputation of the College and the probity of its decision-making are not compromised;

1.3 This Policy and Procedure is overseen by the Fellow for Access and Admissions as appropriate, and is drawn to the attention of each assessor at the start of the undergraduate admissions round each November by the Undergraduate Admissions & Outreach Officer on behalf of the Fellow for Access and Admissions;

1.4 A copy of this Policy is available on the college website.

### **2. Scope**

2.1 This Policy and Procedure applies to all aspects relating to the assessment and admission of candidates for undergraduate study at St John's College, Oxford;

2.2 For the purposes of this policy, an "assessor" is any person who is engaged by the College to assess and/or make decisions on individual admissions candidates, at any stage in the process, or who administers the recording or communication of admissions decisions on behalf of the College.

### **3. Policy**

3.1 All assessors are required to recognise and disclose issues that might give rise to conflicts of interest relating to the admission of undergraduate students, whether these conflicts are actual or may reasonably be perceived to exist;

3.2 A conflict of interest arises when an individual's personal or family interests, or loyalties, come into conflict with – or can reasonably be perceived to be in conflict with – that individual's duties to the College;



3.3 A conflict of interest arising in the context of the undergraduate admissions process must actively be declared under this Policy and Procedure even where the assessor has declared it elsewhere in the College (e.g., if the assessor is a Fellow, as part their annual Trustee declaration; or it is otherwise made known to immediate colleagues);

3.4 The existence of a conflict of interest will depend on an assessor's individual situation. However, assessors should be aware that the following broad categories of actual or perceived conflicts of interest could arise in the context of the undergraduate admissions process:

- (a) **Personal** – e.g. the candidate is a relative or friend of the assessor, or the relative of a friend or colleague;
- (b) **Pecuniary** – (financial gain) e.g. the assessor, or a partner or spouse where their finances are interdependent, has received remuneration for advice given on Oxford University admissions to any individual or organisation (whether the candidates advised have applied to the College or not);
- (c) **Institutional** – e.g. the candidate is a student at a school where the tutor has a formal role in the operation of the school (e.g. as a governor), or where a teacher or governor is a relative or close personal friend, or where the tutor has another significant association (e.g. in promoting the school as an active member of an Old Boys'/Girls' Association);
- (d) **A teaching Fellow's role as trustee of the College** – the candidate is connected with an individual who is known to the tutor as a benefactor, potential benefactor, or other significant friend to the College;

3.5 It should be noted that many tutors and others will have perfectly proper dealings with schools and prospective applicants throughout the year as part of their admissions and access/outreach work, and a process for recording and discussing actual or potential conflicts of interest is in no way intended to restrict these proper activities, or to prevent a tutor from being involved with the admission of students from schools with which they have conducted outreach work. However:

- (a) assessors who receive gifts or hospitality, from outside the Collegiate University, in connection with admissions and access/outreach work must declare these under this process;
- (b) in order to avoid a perception of personal influence, meetings between individual (potential) candidates and College tutors/assessors should not take place between September, following the general Open Day, and the end of the admissions round in January;

3.6 This Policy will be reviewed annually in Hilary term by the Education Policy Committee on behalf of Governing Body. Proposals for amendments arising in the light of experience may be brought forward to that Committee, for recommendation to Governing Body, outside that review cycle.

#### 4. Procedure

4.1 It is an assessor's own responsibility to raise concerns relating to their actual or potential conflicts of interest directly with the Fellow for Access and Admissions at the earliest possible opportunity;

4.2 On having a potential conflict of interest being declared by the assessor to the Fellow for Access and Admissions, the Fellow for Access and Admissions and the assessor will discuss the issue in order to agree the seriousness or otherwise of the conflict and any action required, and to record both the nature of the conflict of interest and any agreed action taken, as part of the admissions process;

4.3 The Fellow for Access and Admissions will report to Education Policy Committee, in a confidential annex to the annual report on the undergraduate admissions process, outlining the conflicts declared during that admissions round and the actions taken to manage these;



4.4 Where the assessor needing to make a declaration, or otherwise requiring advice, is the Fellow for Access and Admissions, or if the Fellow for Access and Admissions is conflicted, advice will be sought from the Vice President (Academic).

**5. Data Protection**

5.1 The information provided will be processed in accordance with data protection principles as set out in the Data Protection Act 1998. Data will be processed only to ensure that Fellows and all staff act in the best interests of the College. The information provided will not be used for any other purpose.

**POLICY HISTORY**

Date of GB Approval	Brief summary of changes	Confirmation that linked documents have been updated as necessary	College policy register updated
Dec 2019	First draft of policy	na	Yes (Kate Doornik)