



## Policy on identification and management of conflicts of interests

### **A Preamble**

#### **A.1 Introduction and purpose of the policy**

This policy describes the way in which IOAS identifies and manages actual and potential conflicts of interest that any individual may have when they are involved in any way with IOAS accreditation activities.

#### **A.2 Scope**

This policy relates to all individuals involved in any way with IOAS, which includes but may not be limited to BoD, IC or AC members, staff, external assessors and other contracted personnel.

Related documents: “Policy on Minutes” [PL0207](#), “Meetings Policy” [PL0201](#), “Declaration of Interest” [FR0205](#).

#### **A.3 Definitions**

Reference is made to IOAS General Operating Manual for definitions.

#### **A.4 Access and Distribution**

This document is distributed to IOAS Board, Impartiality Committee and Accreditation Committee members and staff after any update has been finalised. It is available at IOAS web site.

#### **A.5 Authority and revision**

This policy is approved by the BoD. It is the responsibility of IOAS Executive Director (ED) to review the appropriateness of the policy from time to time. It may be revised when the need arises. Its effectiveness in meeting the quality policy of IOAS will be assessed during Internal Audit and any measures for improvement notified to the ED and the BoD.

### **B Policy**

#### **B.1 Declaration of Interests**

**B.1.1** All individuals involved in any way with IOAS accreditation activities must declare any and all connections with current IOAS clients and the wider organic community as laid out in the declaration of interest form FR0205. Any conflicts arising from their own relationships and/or their family members relationships with identified parties must be considered. When completing the declaration, individuals must consider both those interests which are considered to raise a definite conflict and also those additional cases where an objection from the certification body (CB) would be considered acceptable. Note that CBs that are in direct competition with one another are considered to have mutual conflicts.

**B.1.2** These declarations must be updated annually by the 30th March. However, IOAS requires that all individuals disclose any potential conflict of interest whenever it may arise. Failure to comply with this requirement is considered a breach of contract and will lead to disciplinary actions up to and including termination of employment or in case of external assessors, revoking of assignments, termination of contracts, being removed from the approved list of assessors, and maybe subject to financial penalties.

**B.1.3** IOAS management shall review the information provided on the declaration of interests (FR0205) taking into account the role that the individual will play within the IOAS. If the individual is appointed as an assessor, working/having worked as independent assessor/inspector shall not be considered as a conflict to work as an assessor for IOAS but a relationship with certain CBs shall be considered as a conflict if the same individual is appointed as a member of any of the IOAS committees.

**B.1.4** IOAS management shall determine the Conflict Grade Level assigned to all declared interests. Level 1 is a definite conflict; Level 2 indicates that the individual is excluded as a precaution; Level 3 indicates that work may be assigned to that individual, however any objection from the CB in question would be accepted and the work shall be reassigned in that case.

**B.1.5** To complete this review, reference is made to the Annex of this policy which indicates the types of conflicts to consider, provides a scoring system for grading the conflict, and ageing rules to determine when a conflict may be downgraded, and dropped when it expires.

**B.1.6** IOAS will determine both those interests which are considered to raise a definite conflict and also those cases where an objection from the CB or a scheme owner would be considered acceptable.

**B.1.7** Impartiality and Accreditation Committee member COI declarations shall be brought to the management team at least annually for review and consideration to help ensure all applicable conflicts and potential conflicts for the individuals in these critical roles are identified and categorized appropriately. Other cases that require discussion may also be brought to the management team at any time.

**B.1.8** IOAS may choose to extend the period of exclusion if the individual's involvement with an organisation was in a key position (such as upper management) in which they are likely to have been the main architect of key structures and policies. Similarly, IOAS may choose to reduce the conflict rating or period if it is determined that the conflict will not affect the accreditation process. Any deviation from the guidance in the Annex must be justified and this justification shall be clearly documented on [FR0205](#).

**B.1.9** IOAS will post a summary of the conflicts and their Grades in the Client area of our website, indicating the final Conflict Grade Level as assigned by IOAS.

**B.1.10** IOAS shall keep all committee members, staff and external assessors updated on any new application acceptance and invite them to inform on any possible conflict.

## **B.2 Avoidance of Conflict**

**B.2.1** Members of the BoD, the IC and the AC, the staff and the external assessors may not take part in any work, decisions, discussions or assessments concerning CBs or scheme owners for which they are determined to have a conflict.

**B.2.2** Members of the BoD, AC and the IC shall not have conflicts determined for more than 25% of the applicant or accredited certification bodies. In such event the member shall be required to resign.

**B.2.3** Staff persons (persons employed on a full time or part time basis, permanent or temporarily or from which services are contracted in a continuous manner by IOAS), may not have on-going involvement in CBs in any capacity including management, consultancy or ownership. Any other activity within the organic sector should be sanctioned by IOAS through its ED. In the case of persons employed on a freelance basis or external assessors, the conflicts will be assessed in relation to the assignments.

**B.2.4** A record of decided conflicts will be maintained and made available in the IOAS IT system.

**B.2.5** In sending out any confidential material the list will be consulted by the office and material withheld as appropriate.

**B.2.6** Before any BoD, AC or IC meeting or discussion on any other sensitive issue regarding a CB, the chairperson will refer to the conflicts records and also ask members to declare whether there exists any potential conflict of interest regarding the CB in question, as well as make such a declaration him/herself.

**B.2.7** Members of the AC who may have been involved in the assessment of an applicant may not be involved in the respective accreditation decision.

**B.2.8** Members with conflicts may not take part in any decision and will be asked to leave the room before any decision is made.

**B.2.9** In the minutes of its meetings this procedure and the measures taken to handle potential conflicts shall be reflected.

### **B.3 Additional Precautionary Measures**

**B.3.1** Members of the BoD and all IOAS committees are appointed as individuals and do not serve as representatives of any certification bodies or other organisations.

**B.3.2** Applicant and accredited CBs are able to check the composition of the Board, the IC, and the AC by referring to IOAS web site. CBs may object to specific individuals taking part in the discussion or decision making regarding their file (see application information [FR0503](#)). The ED (or in his/her absence) the AED shall consider any such objections and either accept or reject the petition.

**B.3.3** The certification body will be informed of the identity of the assessor prior to the visit. If serious grounds for challenging the appropriateness of the assessor are submitted in writing, the Programme Manager may at his/her discretion, reassign the assessment.

**B.3.4** After leaving IOAS, assessors shall not be involved in any way for at least one year with the CBs they had carried out assessments to.

**B.3.5** Specific comments from file checks in assessment reports are required to identify the operations with a code number only and not the operator name (see Assessment Visit Procedures [PR0504](#))

**B.3.6** IOAS AC members do not normally receive the original CB documentation such as policies, procedures and financial data. Unless there is good reason, they receive only the combined screening and assessment report, findings, and the Client Manager's summary of compliance.

**B.3.7** Individuals shall not accept any payments, gifts or favours of any kind from applicant or accredited certification bodies, scheme owners, or certified operators.

**B.3.8** The conflict of interest review process of every individual and the results thereof may be reviewed by the Impartiality Committee.

## Annex

### Conflict grading guidelines

Level 1 = definite conflict

Level 2 = probable (individual excluded as precaution)

Level 3 = possible (CB objection would be acceptable)

Relationship category	Explanation of the conflict Note: 'Work with the CB' includes but is not limited to consulting, projects, audits, inspections, training, or any other work whether for financial gain or on volunteer or cooperative basis.	Conflict ageing Note: Initial conflict score applies whilst relationship/conflict remains
Cat A	You are a current or previous staff/Committee/Board member of the CB listed.	First 5 years after the end of the relationship, remains in level 1. Then becomes set at level 3.
	You have a close relationship to one or more personnel of the CB (family/relative/friend or close related/enemy).	
	You have financial interest in the CB (stocks, shares, investments, other).	
	You individually have been contracted directly or indirectly for work with the CB.	
Cat B	The CB you work(ed) for has a contract arrangement for work with the CB but you were/are not engaged with that in any way (if involved it is Cat A).	First 3 years after the end of the relationship, remains in level 1. From 4 to 5 years remains level 3, then dropped.
	You are/were Board/ Committee member of a CB that has a contract arrangement for work with the CB but you were/are not engaged with that in any way (if involved it is Cat A).	
	The CB you work(ed) for is in direct competition with the CB, ie working in the same countries and offering the same services in those countries.	
Cat C	You work as an Accreditation Body (AB) assessor and have conducted assessments of the CB (only applicable for IOAS committee members).	First 3 years after the end of the relationship, remains in level 2. From 4 to 5 years remains level 3, then dropped.
	A relation or close friend has financial interest in the CB.	
	You or a relation/close friend is involved with a company currently certified by the CB.	
Cat X	Any other relationship not considered above.	

The above is a guide and may be amended depending on the circumstances. Conflicts can also be "SET" to prevent ageing.