

ORIEL COLLEGE, OXFORD

Policy and Procedure on Conflicts of Interest arising in Undergraduate Admissions

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Oriel 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. This Policy and Procedure complements the College's Conflicts of Interest Policy;
- 1.3. The maintenance of the College's reputation and the probity of its decision-making are of prime importance in the admissions process. These should not be compromised for the sake of any other consideration, including the fulfilment of quotas. Both bias and the perception of bias in the admissions process is to be avoided insofar as is reasonably possible;
- 1.4. 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, depending on the degree of the conflict;
- 1.5. This Policy and Procedure is overseen by the Tutor for Admissions and is drawn to the attention of each assessor at the start of the undergraduate admissions round by the Admissions Officer on behalf of the Tutor for Admissions.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This Policy and Procedure applies to all aspects relating to the assessment and admission of candidates for undergraduate study at Oriel College;
- 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 consider 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 to the Tutor for Admissions 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 might 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, including academic and non-academic staff of the College;
- (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 assessor 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 assessor has another significant association (e.g. in promoting the school as an active member of an Old Boys'/Girls' Association), or where a Senior Member of the College has expressed to the assessor an interest in the candidate;
- (d) A teaching Fellow's role as trustee of the College – e.g. 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 The Tutor for Admissions will prioritise the maintenance of the College's reputation and the probity of its decision-making process. Candidates will not normally be considered where there is a close family connection to a Fellow of the College or to a member of the College's academic staff in the same subject area to which the candidate has applied. The Admissions Officer will seek to ensure that such candidates are reallocated to another college.

4. Procedures

- 4.1 It is an assessor's own responsibility to raise concerns relating to their actual or potential conflicts of interest directly with the Tutor for Admissions at the earliest possible opportunity;
- 4.2 When a potential conflict of interest is declared by an assessor to the Tutor for Admissions, the Tutor for Admissions and assessor will discuss the potential conflict in order to agree the nature of the conflict and to record declarations;
- 4.3 Declarations will be stored in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998; they will be held on file in the Academic Office and then destroyed after 12 months;
- 4.4 The Admissions Officer will seek alternative assessors for whom no conflict of interest exists. In cases where no suitable member of College can be found, additional assessors will normally be sought from another college in order to obtain independent grading and/or ranking of the candidate as appropriate for the information of the College's assessors and the Tutor for Admissions;
- 4.5 Where candidates are available for consideration who are ranked by the faculty comparably or more highly than a candidate for whom assessors have declared a conflict of interest, assessors should consider these candidates as well as the candidate about which a conflict has been declared;

4.6 It should be noted that many assessors 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 assessors should not take place between September, following the general Open Day, and the end of the admissions round in January;

4.7 The Tutor for Admissions will report to Education Committee outlining the conflicts declared during that admissions round and the actions taken to manage these;

Where the assessor needing to make a declaration, or otherwise requiring advice, is the Tutor for Admissions, or if the Tutor for Admissions is conflicted, advice will be sought from the Provost.

12/2/19