



The Church of Scotland

Faith Nurture Forum – Initial Ministerial Education (IME) Student Policy

Conflict of Interest

1. Introduction

Faith Nurture Forum recognises that on occasion, students can find themselves in a situation that may give rise to conflicts of interest, whether potential or actual, perceived or alleged. Where students can identify a conflict and measures can be put in place to prevent the conflict affecting decision-making then the harmful effects of a conflict of interest can be prevented. The proper handling of conflicts of interest is an essential part of proper governance of a charity.

Conflicts of interest affect all types and sizes of organisations. In the charity context, a conflict of interest can lead to decisions which are not in the best interests of the charity and which are invalid or open to challenge. Conflicts of interest can also be damaging to a charity's reputation and to the public's confidence and trust in the organisation.

The Faith Nurture Forum has developed this policy to provide guidance to all students regarding conflicts of interest in order to avoid any actual or potential conflicts of interest, perception of bias or misuse of authority.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all prospective and current students of the Faith Nurture Forum. Students should be aware that staff of the Faith Nurture Forum are governed by a similar policy, and with similar expectations regards conflicts of interest.

3. Purpose

Faith Nurture Forum accepts that conflicts of interest will arise from time to time. This policy aims to ensure that any conflict is identified and managed properly. It is the responsibility of each individual to recognise situations in which he or she has a conflict of interest or might reasonably be seen by others to have a conflict, to disclose that conflict and to take such further steps as may be appropriate as set out in more detail under the procedure below.

The Faith Nurture Forum recognises that students may be related to or have personal relationships with other members of the Church of Scotland whilst studying. Faith Nurture Forum does not discourage nor intend to discourage those in such relationships from applying to study or from developing and progressing within the Church of Scotland.

This policy outlines the expectations placed on students so that any conflict of interest is dealt with fairly and consistently. A key purpose of this policy is to protect individuals so that they are not open to allegations of any impropriety arising from any conduct or relationship.

If an individual is uncertain about how this policy might affect their activities or has any questions about its application, they should contact Faith Nurture Forum.

4. Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest is any situation in which someone's personal interests or loyalties could, or could be seen to, prevent them from acting only in the best interests of the organisation.

A conflict of interest arises when the interests of an individual are incompatible or in competition with the interests of the organisation. Such situations present a risk that an individual will act or be perceived to act based on external influences that are not in the best interests of the organisation.

The most common types of conflict include:

- direct financial interest – where there is, or appears to be, an opportunity for personal financial gain; and
- indirect financial interest – the financial gain of a close relative or close friend or business associate.

The level of financial interest should not be a determining factor in deciding whether a conflict should be disclosed. The Faith Nurture Forum expects disclosure of any financial interest, however small. In addition, conflicts can arise where any financial interest is not as clear:

- non-financial or personal conflicts - a non-financial interest can take many forms and is generally one where there is, or appears to be, an opportunity for personal benefit, advantage or enhancement to prospects for the individual (direct), or similar gains to someone in their immediate family or a person with whom the individual has a close personal relationship (indirect).
- Conflicts of loyalties – a particular type of conflict of interest in which loyalty or duty to another person or organisation could prevent the individual from making a decision only in the best interests of the organisation.

5. Conflicts of loyalty/personal relationships

It is recognised that one type of conflict of interest in an organisation can arise as a result of conflict of loyalty, where students and staff/office holders are in a personal relationship.

For the purpose of this policy personal relationships are:

- Family relationships (including current and former spouses and partners, children, parents, siblings and grandparents and half/step members of family of the same degree);
- Close personal friendships including romantic/sexual attachments; and
- Business/commercial/financial relationships involving other members of the Church of Scotland.

It is recognised that relationships may occur between students and other parts of the Church, including staff of the employing agencies, or within organisations with which there is a contractual relationship. This procedure applies equally to such relationships and it is expected that the student will make Faith Nurture Forum aware of the relationship, where doing so is required in terms of this policy.

5.1 Disclosure of a Personal Relationship

Students must use the form at Appendix 1 to declare any personal relationships they have (or have had) with any other members of staff in the Faith Nurture Forum or other employing agency or office-holder of the Church or with a consultant, contractor or supplier to the Church, which may give rise to an actual or potential conflict of interest, trust or breach of confidentiality. The

completed declarations will be retained on the students' personal file in Faith Nurture Forum for as long as they are an IME Programme student.

At the discernment stage, applicants are expected to state, on the application form, if they have a potential conflict of interest. Existing staff of Faith Nurture Forum, or office holders, who have a personal relationship with any applicant must not be involved in any way in the discernment process. Where the applicant, if successful, would work closely with someone with whom they have a personal relationship, the implications of this will be considered and resolved as part of the process.

Students in personal relationships will be expected to maintain professional working relationships and boundaries whilst at work and when representing the Faith Nurture Forum. Individuals who declare a personal relationship at work will be treated fairly and with due regard to equality issues. Students are encouraged to speak confidentially to Faith Nurture Forum if there are any questions arising from potential disclosures.

Any failure to disclose a potential, actual or perceived conflict of interest is a serious issue and could result in disciplinary action.

5.2 Supervisory arrangements

It is not good practice for one individual in a personal relationship to be the supervisor or point of contact for the other. In such a situation, alternative and appropriate arrangements will be made. In particular, and in all cases, the more senior individual in a personal relationship must not in any circumstances have any responsibility for any of the following transactions and decisions relating to the individual in which they are in a relationship with:

- making any decisions or processing any documents relating to payments, grants or stipend
- authorising leave of any kind
- placement supervisor
- authorising payments or other expenses
- performance management
- investigating complaints involving the other individual in question
- conducting hearings or formal meetings in relation to sickness absence, disciplinary matters, grievances or poor performance.

6. Procedure for dealing with breaches of this policy

Where there is any breach of this policy, Faith Nurture Forum will initially try to deal with the situation informally. It may be necessary to deal with students in a more formal manner, however, through use of the disciplinary or other appropriate procedure.

7. Monitoring and Review

The impact of this policy will be monitored and the policy is subject to amendments as necessary. This policy will be reviewed every two years as a minimum.

Date First Published:	September 2018
Date of Last Review:	December 2020
Frequency of Review:	2 years
Approved by:	E&S Committee

Declaration form: Conflict of Interest

Name of Student:

NAME OF CONNECTED PERSON	DEPARTMENT/EMPLOYING AGENCY/CHURCH (etc.)	NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP (e.g. spouse, partner, child, sibling, other personal relationship etc.)

Any potential conflicts of interest (please specify):

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Actions taken to prevent the above (please specify):

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Date of Declaration:

Student Signature:

Faith Nurture Forum Representative Signature:

Print Name: