

Inclusion is at the
heart of our trust



Conflicts of Interest Policy



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Version	Date	Author	Note of revisions
2.0	September 2021	CFO	New document – condensed version of policy as The Trust Governor takes Members, Trustees and Governors to the relevant information when they sign their declaration.
3.0	September 2022	CFO	No amendments required.
4.0	October 2023	COO	No amendments required.
5.0	January 2024	COO	Amalgamated Governance and Staff policy into one document.
6.0	March 2025	CC	QEB amended to LGC ESFA amended to DfE 7.3 updated to reflect conflicts of interest being captured via a Microsoft form.
6.1	March 2026	CC	No amendments, minor formatting



Introduction

This policy sets out the framework for ensuring that the decisions and decision-making processes at Oak Learning Partnership ('the trust') are, and are seen to be, free from personal bias and do not unfairly favour any individual or company connected with the trust or schools.

Trustees, Local Governance Committee (LGC) Members and school staff have an obligation to act in the best interests of the trust and school community to avoid situations where there may be a potential conflict of interest.

Situations may arise where family interests or loyalties conflict with those of the trust or its schools. Such interests may create problems as they can inhibit free discussions, result in decisions or actions that are not in the interests of the trust or its schools, and risk the trust or school's reputation.

The trust has created this policy to:

- Ensure that every Trustee, LGC member and staff member understand what constitutes a conflict of interest, and that they have a responsibility to identify and declare any conflicts that might arise.
- Record the conflict and the actions taken to ensure that the conflict does not affect the decision-making of the trust or its schools.

1. Definitions

- 1.1 Within this policy, all references to 'the Trust' will be taken to mean Oak Learning Partnership and any of its schools.
- 1.2 Any reference to 'the board' shall mean the trust board and the Local Governance Committees in each of the schools.
- 1.3 For the purpose of this policy, a person is defined as having a '**business or pecuniary interest**' if they have a monetary or financially vested interest in a business or service, which could prevent the individual from acting in the trusts or school's best interests.
- 1.4 '**Conflicts of interest**' are any situations where an individual's personal interests or loyalties could, or could be seen to, prevent the individual from making a decision in the best interests of the trust or school. The most common types of conflict of interest can be separated into '**financial conflicts**' and '**loyalty conflicts**'.
- 1.5 '**Financial conflicts**' are when an individual is connected to a person and/or organisation and could receive money or something else of value from the selection of their decision. Individuals' expenses, e.g. member or trustee expenses, are not included in this definition.
- 1.6 '**Loyalty conflicts**' are unrelated to money or individual benefits; rather, these conflicts are concerned with other reasons relating to an individual's loyalty or duty to another organisation which would impair their decision-making in consideration to their obligation to prioritise the trust or school's best interest.
- 1.7 A '**connected person**' broadly relates to an individual's family, relatives, or business partner. To determine if an individual is considered connected in case-specific issues, we will seek legal advice if necessary.
- 1.8 The term '**significant shareholder**' refers to any individual or relative of an individual holding more than 20 percent of the share capital or exercising more than 20 percent of the voting power in an organisation.
- 1.9 An '**interested party**' is defined as a person who has a close relation to a person with a vested interest, e.g. a spouse.
- 1.10 '**At cost**' refers to the cost of a good or service (not including contracts of employment), without profit.

2. Roles and responsibilities

2.1 The board will be responsible for:

- Ensuring that all members of staff, including volunteers, act in accordance with this policy at all times.
- Identifying any conflicts of interest that have not been previously declared.
- Making complete declarations on an annual basis, and ensuring they are up-to-date.
- Ensuring there are measures in place to manage and identify any conflicts of interest.
- Operating and making decisions in the best interests of pupils, the school and the trust.
- Independently and objectively making decisions about executive pay and benefits, scrutinising each decision so conflicts of interest are avoided.
- Operating and making decisions in line with their charitable objectives, where applicable.

2.2 The chair of the LGC will be responsible for:

- Ensuring, in liaison with the headteacher, that all members of the LGC have declared any conflicts of interest, in accordance with the Declared Conflicts of Interest Register.
- Considering the risks associated with an individual who has declared a conflict of interest participating in any decision-making or voting and seeking advice from the trust's HR team.
- Setting professional standards of governance and accountability for the LGC.

2.3 The governance professional will be responsible for:

- Keeping an accurate and up-to-date record of interests for all trust members, trustees and LGC members, which is reviewed annually, and can be accessed by relevant people.
- Keeping accurate meeting minutes.
- Publishing the Declared Conflicts of Interest Register is published on the trust website for trust members and trustees.

2.4 The trust Human Resources team will be responsible for:

- Keeping an accurate and up-to-date record of interests for all staff and volunteers, which is reviewed annually, and can be accessed by relevant people.
- Keeping accurate meeting minutes.

2.5 The accounting officer will be responsible for:

- Being the trust's lead in financial matters, including a personal responsibility to government and to the DfE's accounting officer.
- Completing and signing a statement on regularity, propriety and compliance each year and submitting this to the DfE with the audited accounts.
- Ensuring the trust board is compliant with the trust's articles of association, funding agreement, and 'Academy trust handbook'.
- Notifying the DfE's accounting officer immediately, in writing, if the board is not compliant.

2.6 The headteacher will be responsible for:

- Ensuring, in liaison with the chair of the LGC, that all members of the LGC have declared any conflicts of interest, in accordance with the Declared Conflicts of Interest Register.
- Ensuring that the Declared Conflicts of Interest Register is published on the school website.
- Ensuring that any staff member who is responsible for proposing a course of action or handling the school's budget has declared any conflicts of interest.
- Deciding who else is considered an 'interested party', and ensuring they declare any conflicts of interest.

- 2.7 Staff and volunteers will be responsible for:
- Declaring any conflicts of interest.
 - Acting in accordance with this policy at all times.
 - Identifying any conflicts of interest that have not been previously declared.
 - Following the trust's Whistleblowing Policy where there are concerns that a conflict of interest has not been declared, and an individual might have subsequently benefitted.
 - Ensuring that all individuals in a discussion do not have a vested interest in the subject.

3. Identifying conflicts of interest

- 3.1 All staff and volunteers will be able to demonstrate that they do not have a vested interest in any decision-making or budget spending. All staff and volunteers will remain objective and act within the best interests of the trust, its schools and its pupils.
- 3.2 Members of the board will declare any conflicts of interest at an early stage and inform the relevant people, e.g. the headteacher. Members of the board will ensure that any conflicts of interest do not prevent them from making a decision that would be in the best interests of the trust, its schools and its pupils.
- 3.3 Members of the board, and the relevant members of staff will declare any relevant confirmed or suspected interests arising out of:
- Holding another public office
 - Being an employee, director, adviser or partner of another business or organisation
 - Pursuing business opportunities
 - Being a member of a club, society or association
 - Having a legal or professional obligation to someone else
 - Having a beneficial interest in a trust
 - Owning or occupying a piece of land
 - Owning shares or some other investment or asset
 - Having received a gift, hospitality or other benefit from someone/an organisation
 - Owning a debt to someone/an organisation
 - Holding or expressing strong political or personal views that may indicate prejudice or predetermination for or against a person or issue
 - Being a governor, associate member or trustee at any other educational establishment
 - Being a spouse, partner, relative or close friend of someone who has one of these interests
- 3.4 All interests and connections that could influence the trust or school's reputation with the public will be declared.
- 3.5 Staff and volunteers that have a relative whom they know to have a declarable interest will declare this information.
- 3.6 If the trust's members, trustees or LGC members have a relative whom they know to have relevant interests, this will be declared.
- 3.7 Only relevant interests will be declared, e.g. the spouse of the owner of a catering service when the trust is seeking a new catering company.
- 3.8 Any interests that do not directly benefit individuals or their relatives will not need to be declared, e.g., being a small shareholder in a large national company rather than a significant shareholder.

4. Identifying conflicts of loyalty

- 4.1 Members of the trust board, LGC members and relevant staff will declare any interest that might conflict with their loyalty to:
- Another organisation, such as their employer.
 - A member of their family.
 - Another connected person or organisation.
 - Another governing board or committee of which they are a member.
 - The individual that appointed them to the governing board.
- 4.2 Members of the board will also be required to declare any conflicts of interest where their religious, political or personal views could interfere with their ability to make decisions in the best interests of the trust or schools.

5. The register of interests

- 5.1 Each declaration of interest will be recorded on the trust or school's Declared Conflicts of Interest Register.
- 5.2 This register will allow all trust members, trustees, LGC members and relevant employees to identify any business, commercial, financial or personal interests they have.
- 5.3 Details of each interest will be recorded on the register, including the following:
- The nature and name of the business and/or interest
 - The date the interest began
 - A brief description of duties or responsibilities
 - The date of cessation of interest
 - The date of entry onto the register
 - Relevant material interests which occur through close family relationships between those individuals and employees.
- 5.4 The trust or school will keep a Declared Conflicts of Interest Register that details the nature of interests declared.
- 5.5 The declaration registers will be stored centrally, where they can be accessed by relevant members of staff, as well as inspected by Ofsted or anyone else who has a right to it to carry out their statutory duties.
- 5.6 The DPO will ensure that the registers are protected in accordance with the trust's Data Protection Policy.
- 5.7 The trust board will decide who else has access to the registers, including other staff members, trustees, and parents.
- 5.8 If an individual has no interest to declare, they will indicate this by stating 'nil' on their conflicts of interest form, before signing and dating the declaration.

- 5.9 If an individual is unsure whether they have a conflict of interest, the CEO or headteacher will advise the individual to declare any possible interests until they can confirm their interests at a later date.
- 5.10 Any conflicting interests or relationships will be described in sufficient detail using appropriate language to clarify under what circumstances an individual's position might be brought into question.
- 5.11 If a new interest becomes applicable during the school year, it will be the responsibility of the individual concerned to amend the Declared Conflicts of Interest Register.
- 5.12 The Declared Conflicts of Interest Register will be published publicly on the trust or schools website; however, certain interests of staff members may be omitted from the published copy, unless they are also a LGC member or relevant member of staff.
- 5.13 The relevant business and pecuniary interests of trust members, trustees, LGC members and accounting officers will be published publicly on the website. The trust will have discretion over the publication of interests of other individuals named on the register. Trustees will consider any other interests they deem relevant and, if there is any doubt, register them regardless. The board of trustees will be responsible for keeping their register of interests up-to-date through regular review.

6. Governing board benefits

- 6.1 Members of the board will only be permitted to benefit from the trust or school where there is an explicit authority in place in the school's governing document.
- 6.2 The board benefits will include any payments or benefits to members, or a connected person, apart from their reasonable out-of-pocket expenses. Benefits will also include situations where a member of the board could receive property, loans, goods or services from the trust or school.
- 6.3 Where there is a proposed sale or lease of land to a member of the board, or to a person or company closely connected with a member, this will require authorisation from the DfE before it is granted, even if the disposal is at full market value.
- 6.4 The payment of reasonable expenses to a member of the board will not be a benefit and therefore will not create a conflict of interest or require authorisation.

7. Declaring interests

- 7.1 Wherever possible, the CEO and Chair of Trustees or headteacher and chair of the LGC will make arrangements to avoid a conflict of interest arising.
- 7.2 The stipulations below will apply to all members of the board, the headteacher and any others in attendance at meetings, including the Senior Leadership Team.
- 7.3 The board will be provided with a standard agenda item at the beginning of each meeting, to declare any actual or potential conflicts of interest. Declarations will be made annually in writing via a Microsoft form, unless they are made at a meeting where official minutes are being taken. Where the Microsoft form cannot be completed the form at the end of this policy will be used.

- 7.4 All members of the board will be required to declare any interest that has been outlined as an item to be discussed, at the earliest possible opportunity and before any discussion of the item itself.
- 7.5 If a member is unsure whether they are conflicted, they will declare the issue and discuss it with the rest of the board.
- 7.6 If a member is aware of an undeclared conflict of interest affecting another member, they will be required to notify the rest of the board for appropriate action.
- 7.7 If the person making the declaration is only one of a number participating in the board's discussion and decision-making process, the declaration will be made to the other participants. If the person making the declaration is the only person making a decision on behalf of the board, the declaration will be made to the CEO or headteacher. If the person making the declaration is the CEO or headteacher, the declaration will be made to the chair of the board.
- 7.8 Staff will declare conflicts of interest to the headteacher and ensure that this information is up to date.
- 7.9 If new conflicts of interest arise for trustees, LGC members or staff, they will inform the chair of the board, the CEO or the headteacher and the registers will be updated.

8. Removing conflicts of interest

- 8.1 The board will consider any conflict of interest declared, ensuring that any potential effect on decision-making is eliminated.
- 8.2 If an individual has declared an interest, they will be required to leave the room when the matter is being discussed.
- 8.3 Where there is a conflict of loyalty and the affected member does not stand to gain any benefit, they will be required to declare the interest.
- 8.4 The rest of the board will decide on what level of participation in decision-making, if any, is acceptable on the part of the conflicted member.
- The board will decide whether the affected member:
 - Can participate in the decision, after having registered and fully declared their interest.
 - Can stay in the meetings where the decision is discussed and made but not participate.
 - Must be withdrawn from the decision-making process.
- 8.5 When deciding which course of action to take, the board will:
- Always make their decisions in the best interests of the trust, the school and its pupils.
 - Always protect the trust and school's reputation and be aware of the impression that their actions and decisions may have on others.
 - Always be able to demonstrate that they have made decisions in the best interests of the trust, the school and its pupils, and independently of any competing interest.
 - Require the withdrawal of the affected member from any decisions where their other interest is relevant to a high-risk or controversial decision or could significantly affect the member's decision-making.

- Allow a member to participate where the existence of their other interest poses a low risk to decision-making in the trust or school's interest or is likely to have only an insignificant bearing on their approach to an issue.
 - Be aware that the presence of a conflicted member can affect trust between other members of the board, could inhibit free discussion, and might influence decision-making in some way.
- 8.6 If the board is discussing the appointment of a post or making decisions that may lead to a staff vacancy, regarding a role for which a trustee or LGC member could apply, the member in question will be required to leave the discussion, as this is classed a conflict of interest.
- 8.7 Members of the board who have declared an interest will not be able to vote or make decisions regarding that topic, including any financial activity connected to the matter, and will not be present when the vote is taken.
- 8.8 The governance professional will record an entry in the minutes when an individual withdraws from a meeting.
- 8.9 Declarations will be clearly recorded so that there can be no potential for misunderstandings.
- 8.10 In circumstances where participation is unavoidable, the chair of the board will consider the risks associated with the situation and advice will be sought from the school's HR team. An entry of the situation, including the outcome, will be recorded in the minutes.
- 8.11 The governing board will follow any legal or governing document requirements on how a conflict of interest must be handled, but may, in serious cases, decide that removing a conflict of interest itself is the most effective way of preventing it from affecting their decision-making.
- 8.12 Serious conflicts of interest will include, but will not be limited to, those which:
- Are so acute and extensive that the member is unable to make their decision in the best interests of the school and its pupils.
 - Are present in significant high-risk decisions of the trustees.
 - Mean that effective decision-making is regularly undermined or cannot be managed in accordance with the required or best practice approach.
 - Are associated with an inappropriate governing board benefit.
- 8.13 To remove a conflict of interest, the board will undertake appropriate action, including:
- Not pursuing the course of action.
 - Proceeding with the issue in a different way so that a conflict of interest does not arise.
 - Securing the resignation of the member affected by a conflict of interest.
 - Not making member appointments that would knowingly introduce a conflict of interest.

9. Records of proceedings

- 9.1 Each time a declaration has been made during a meeting, or an individual has withdrawn from a discussion, a record will be kept in the meeting minutes.
- 9.2 At a minimum, the following information will be recorded:
- The nature of the conflict
 - Which members were affected
 - Whether the conflicts of interest were declared in advance
 - Whether anyone withdrew from the discussion

- How the trustees reached the decision made
- A description of what was disclosed and in what circumstances
- A cross-reference to an entry in the Declared Conflicts of Interest Register
- The chair of the board, CEO or headteacher will sign and date the recording

10. Non-compliance

- 10.1 Any member of the board who fails to reveal information to enable the board to fulfil its responsibilities may be in breach of the Board Code of Conduct – as such, these incidents will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis accordingly.
- 10.2 The board will consider suspending a member if they fail to declare information that brings the board’s reputation into question.
- 10.3 Where necessary, any member of staff found to be withholding information about a conflict of interest will be subject to disciplinary action in line with the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.
- 10.4 Any staff member or member of the board who fails to declare an interest and is found to be in conflict with their decision-making will be required to explain the reasons for their omission to the rest of the board.

11. Related party transactions

- 11.1 The trust will be even-handed in its relationship with related parties by ensuring:
- Trustees’ compliance with their statutory duties to avoid conflicts of interest, not accept benefits from third parties, and declare interest in proposed transactions or arrangements.
 - A register of interest has been completed by the governance professional.
 - No member of the trust uses their connections to the trust for personal gain.
 - All payments are permitted by the articles of association or by authority from the Charity Commission.
 - The Charity Commission approves payments to a trustee where there is a significant advantage to the trust.
 - Any payment provided to a person satisfies the ‘at cost’ requirement.
- 11.2 All related party transactions will be reported to the DfE in advance of transactions taking place, using the DfE’s online form. This will be applied to all contracts and agreements made on or after 1 September 2023. The DfE’s prior approval will be obtained, using the online form, for contracts for the supply of goods or services to the trust by a related party where any of the following limits apply:
- A contract exceeding £40,000
 - A contract or other agreement of any value that would mean the cumulative value of contracts and other agreements with related party exceeds, or continues to exceed, £40,000 in the same financial year ending 31 August
- 11.3 Prior DfE approval will not be required where contracts and other agreements for the supply of goods or services are with:
- Colleges, universities and schools which are sponsors of the academy trust.
 - State funded schools and colleges, including academies.

- 11.4 For the purposes of reporting to the DfE, transactions with related parties will not include salaries and other payments made by the trust to a person under a contract of employment through the trust's payroll.
- 11.5 When completing the DfE's online form, all the information required to complete the form will be collected – it is not possible to partially complete a form and then return to it.
- 11.6 The following information will be required to create a record for the supplier:
- The name of the supplier
 - The supplier's address
 - The supplier's company number which can be found using the Companies House website (for limited companies)
 - The statement which best describes the relationship between the supplier and the trust
 - Confirmation that the supplier is listed on the trust's register of interests
 - Confirmation that the trust has a statement of assurance from the supplier
 - Confirmation that the trust has an open-book agreement with the supplier
- 11.7 The following information about the related party transaction will be required:
- A short description of the goods or services
 - Details of the proposed cost
 - The start and end date of any contract or agreement
- 11.8 When seeking approval for a related party transaction, evidence including the following will be required:
- How the trust agreed to the related party transaction
 - That the trust followed its Tendering and Procurement Policy
 - That the trust tested the market before making a decision
 - How the trust managed any conflicts of interest
 - A copy of the agreement and proposed contract
- 11.9 The board of trustees and accounting officer will manage personal relationships with related parties to avoid both real and perceived conflicts of interest, promoting integrity and openness in accordance with the seven principles of public life. The chair of the board of trustees and the accounting officer will ensure their capacity to control and influence does not conflict with requirements.
- 11.10 The trust will recognise that some relationships with related parties may attract greater public scrutiny, such as:
- Transactions with individuals in a position of control and influence, including the chair of the board and the accounting officer.
 - Payments to organisations with a profit motive, as opposed to those in the public or voluntary sectors.
 - Relationships with external auditors beyond their duty to deliver a statutory audit
- 11.11 The trust will keep up-to-date records and make sufficient disclosures in their annual accounts to show accordance with the high standards of accountability and transparency required within the public sector.
- 11.12 The trust's register of interests will include business and pecuniary interests, including:
- Directorships, partnerships and employments with businesses.
 - Trusteeships and governorships at other educational institutions and charities.

- For each interest: the name of the business; the nature of the business; the nature of the interest; and the date the interest began.
- Any other interests deemed relevant by the board of trustees.

11.13 The register of interests will identify any relevant material interests from close family relationships between the trust's members, trustees and LGC members. It will also identify relevant materials arising from close family relationships between those individuals and employees. Relevant business and pecuniary interests of members, trustees, LGC members and the accounting officer will be published on the trust's website. The governance professional will maintain a Related Party Transactions (RTP) Register, which will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Policy.



Declaration of Conflicts of Interest Form

I hereby certify I understand that it is my responsibility to declare the nature of all business or personal interests, whether direct or indirect, of myself, my partner and/or members of my immediate family, that could unfairly benefit from my relationship and connection with the trust or its schools. I agree to inform the Trust of any changes to the declared interests, or new conflicts of interest, at the earliest possible opportunity.

I confirm I have read the Conflicts of Interest policy and I understand the types of interests that need to be declared:

I wish to declare an actual or potential conflict of interest and have included further details below:

Name	Signature

Role and School/Trust	Date

Full details of the declared conflict of interest, including any company name, the nature of the business and the nature of the interest	Is the conflict actual or potential?	Date of conflict arising	Date of cessation of interest
