



## UNIT FOR RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT IN RESEARCH (URCR)

### Guidelines to handle conflicts of interest in Research and in Relation to Recruitment & Promotions

#### INTRODUCTION

Conflicts of interest can affect researchers, editors, reviewers and research performing organizations in their various dimensions: recruitment, promotion and other management decisions and actions. A conflict of interest takes place whenever a person who is trusted to act impartially, has got personal/financial interests that can lead to biased professional judgments and/or actions.

Assuming that true objectivity is almost impossible to achieve, it is essential to raise awareness on the impact of personal and organizational factors on one's judgements and actions. This awareness aims to point out that the key value is **transparency** and that having conflicts of interest is not incorrect in itself. What is incorrect is not declare one's own conflicts of interest.

Although **financial relationships** (employment, stock ownership, grants, patents, honoraria, consultancies to sponsoring organizations, mutual fund ownership,) raise the most obvious competing interests, **personal relationships, academic competition, and intellectual passion** also lead to situations of conflicts of interest.

**At i3S, all researchers, administrative/HR staff and recruitment and promotion committee members are required to disclose a relationship that could constitute a competing interest - even if one does not believe it might affect one's own judgment.**

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## 1. Conflicts of Interest in Research

- a) When submitting a paper, researchers should explicitly state whether potential competing interests do or do not exist, according to the information outlined above.
- b) Researchers should always disclose potential competing interests to study participants and state in the manuscript whether they have done so.
- c) Researchers are required to describe the role of the study sponsor(s), if any, in study design; in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; in the writing of the report; and in the decision to submit the paper for publication.
- d) Reviewers must also disclose any competing interests that could bias their opinions of the manuscript.
- e) Whenever researchers have some doubts on any potential source of conflict of interest, they can look for the support from the Unit for Responsible Conduct in Research to clarify the situation.

## 2. Conflicts of Interest in Relation to Recruitment & Promotions

i3S relies on each staff member to observe principles of fairness, impartiality and equal opportunity in relation to their roles as members of committees and boards which oversee recruitment and promotion activities.

It is expected that individuals acting on behalf of i3S in a decision-making capacity must not permit any potential conflict of interest to interfere with that obligation which might compromise the integrity of the decision concerning recruitment and promotion.

The responsibility for avoiding potential or actual conflicts of interest begins with the committee/board member themselves.

If a situation arises at any time that could present a conflict of interest, he or she must make full disclosure of the relevant information to the Chairperson of the Committee. **Hence, it is the responsibility of the individual to declare a potential conflict of interest that arises or is likely to arise**

### a) DOCUMENTATION / DRAFTING

No individual who intends to be an applicant for a position within i3S may be involved in drafting the documentation relating to the post or the information for candidates.

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## **b) ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

In all of the examples provided below, the selection committee/promotion board member must notify the relevant Chairperson of the conflict prior to initiating the selection/promotion process:

- a) The selection committee/promotions board member has a family relation to the applicant, has or has had a personal relationship with the applicant;
- b) The selection committee/promotions board member has been named as a referee by a candidate;
- c) Any other reason as considered relevant by the selection committee/promotions board member.

## **CONFLICTS WHICH CANNOT BE MANAGED**

- a) Following the declaration of a conflict of interest in relation to a candidate under consideration, the Chairperson will decide in the light of the nature of the interest, if the member concerned is to be asked to withdraw from any decision about the candidate.
- b) Withdrawal of a member or of the Chairperson will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

## **CONFLICT WHICH MAY BE DEEMED MANAGEABLE**

Where it is decided that the member concerned is to remain on the committee/board, the Chairperson is responsible for managing the decision-making process and it is recommended that the individual concerned should speak last in the course of discussions on the candidates that are referred to in the declaration of the conflicts of interest.

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