

RTU Press Policy on Declaration of Conflict of Interest

When a researcher, author, editor, or reviewer has a financial or personal interest or belief that could affect his/her objectivity, or inappropriately influence his/her actions, a potential conflict of interest exists. Such relationships are also known as dual commitments, competing interests, or competing loyalties.

Anything that could interfere with full and objective peer review, editorial decision making, or publication of research submitted to one of the journals is defined as conflict of interest.

The most obvious conflicts of interest are:

- Direct: employment, stock ownership, grants, patents.
- Indirect: honoraria, consultancies to sponsoring organizations, mutual fund ownership, paid expert testimony.

Examples of conflicts of interest

1. Financial

- Paid employment or consultancy;
- Patent applications (pending or actual), including individual applications or those belonging to the institution to which authors are affiliated and which the authors may benefit from;
- Research grants (from any source, restricted or unrestricted);
- Travel grants and honoraria for speaking or participation at meetings;
- Gifts
- Ownership of stocks or shares (e.g. a researcher may own shares in a pharmaceutical company which had commissioned the research).

2. Non-financial competing interests include:

a) Professional

- Acting as an expert;
- Membership in a government or other advisory board;
- Relationship (paid or unpaid) with organisation and funding bodies including non-governmental organisations, research institutions, or charities;
- Membership in lobbying or advocacy organisations;
- Writing or consulting for an educational company.

b) Personal

- Personal relationships (i.e., friend, spouse, family member, current or previous mentor, adversary) with individuals involved in the submission or evaluation of a paper, such as authors, reviewers, editors or members of editorial board;
- Personal convictions (political, religious, ideological, or other) related to a paper's topic that may interfere with an unbiased publication process (at the stage of authorship, peer review, editorial decision making, or publication).

Having a conflict of interest is not in itself unethical, and there are some that are unavoidable. Considerations that should be taken into account include: whether the person's association with the organization interferes with their ability to carry out the research or paper without bias; and whether the relationship, when later revealed, make a reasonable reader feel deceived or misled.

Therefore, authors, funders, reviewers and editors related to the submitted article should assess possible financial and non-financial interests that could influence objectivity of their report, unbiased work with the manuscript or its reviewing, the decision on publishing, and if in doubt, declare the respective conflicts of interest.

For example:

Authors are required to declare if

- they serve on the editorial board of the journal to which they are submitting,
- have acted as an expert in the respective process,
- have sat or currently sit on a committee for an organisation that may benefit from publication of the paper.

Reviewers are required to declare if

- they have held grants,
- co-authored the paper,
- work in the same institution or organisation with the authors of the study they are asked to review,
- are in an adversarial relationship with authors.

Editors – academic or professional, paid or unpaid – are required to refuse to evaluate the paper if they cannot do it in an objective way because of personal relationships with authors.

Editor-in-chief takes editorial decisions taking into consideration the information given in Declaration of Competing Interest and may publish it if that might influence a reader's perception of a paper. The Editor-in-chief may also decide not to publish the paper on basis of the declared conflict of interest.