

Conflict of Interest (Register of Interests) Policy

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1.4	25 Aug 2023	Reviewed. Only change is that Members, Trustees, Advocates and Governors are now referred to as governance colleagues.	

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Policy sets out the Framework for ensuring that the decisions and decision-making processes at the Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust are, and are seen to be, free from personal bias and do not unfairly favour any individual or company connected to the Trust.
- 1.2 Governance colleagues (Members, Trustees/Directors, Advocates & Governors) and Senior Employees of the Trust have an obligation to act in the best interests of the Trust and in accordance with its Articles of Association in order to avoid situations

where there may be a conflict of interest.

- 1.3 Situations may arise where family interests or loyalties conflict with those of the Trust. They may create problems as they can inhibit free discussions, result in decisions or actions that are not in the interests of the Trust and risk the impression that the Trust has acted improperly.
- 1.4 This policy aims to ensure that:
 - a) Every Governance Colleague and Senior Employee understands what constitutes a conflict of interest and that they have a responsibility to identify and declare any conflicts that might arise.
 - b) Every potential conflict of interest is identified, prevented and recorded, ensuring that the conflict does not affect the decision-making of the Trust.

2. Definition

- 2.1 For the purpose of this document:
 - a. Members, Trustees/Directors, Advocates and Governors are referred to as Governance colleagues;
 - b. The Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust is referred to as The Trust;
 - c. Students refers to all students being educated or on site at any one of the schools within the Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust.

3. Legal Framework

- 3.1 This Policy takes its legal framework from the following legislation and statutory guidance:
 - a) Companies Act 2006;
 - b) Conflicts of Interest: A Guide for Charity Trustees;
 - c) The ESFA Academies Trust Handbook;
 - d) The Articles of Association of the Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust.
 - e) Section 33 of Financial Reporting Standard 102
 - f) Section 9.15 and appendix 1 of the Charities SORP.

4. What is a Conflict of Interest?

- 4.1 The Trust adopts the definition of the Charity Commission which states that a Conflict of Interest is any situation where a Trustee or Senior Employee's personal interests or loyalties could, or could be seen, to prevent the Trustee or Senior Employee from making a decision in the best interests of the Trust.
- 4.2 Conflicts of interest usually arise in the following situations:
- 4.3 Benefits to Governance Colleagues/Senior Employees - There is a potential financial or measurable benefit directly to a governance colleague or senior employee, or indirectly through a connected person. Examples of benefits are where the governance colleagues or senior employees decide to:

- a) sell, loan or lease Trust assets to a governance colleague or senior employee
- b) acquire, borrow or lease assets from a governance colleague for the Trust
- c) pay a governance colleague for carrying out their governance colleague role
- d) pay a governance colleague for carrying out a separate paid post within the Trust, even if that governance colleague has recently resigned as a governance colleague
- e) pay a governance colleague, or a person or company closely connected to a governance colleague or senior employee, for providing a service to the Trust. This covers anything that would be regarded as a service and includes legal, accountancy or consultancy services through to painting or decorating the trust's premises, or any other maintenance work
- f) employ a governance colleague's or senior employee's spouse or other close relative at the Trust
- g) make a grant to a governance colleague, or a person who is a close relative of a governance colleague
- h) allow a governance colleague or senior employee to influence service provision to their exclusive advantage

4.4 Conflict of Loyalty - a governance colleague's or senior employee's duty to the Trust may compete with a duty or loyalty they owe to another organisation or person. A conflict of loyalty could also arise where the religious, political or personal views could interfere with the ability of the governance colleague or senior employee to decide the issue only in the best interests of the Trust. For example, a governance colleague's or senior employee's loyalty to the Trust could conflict with his or her loyalty to:

- a) another organisation, such as their employer
- b) another charity or trust of which they are a governance colleague
- c) a member of their family
- d) another connected person or organisation

4.4 The test is always that there is a conflict of interest if the governance colleague's or senior employees' other interest could, or could be seen to, interfere with the governance colleague's or senior employees' ability to decide the issue only in the best interests of the Trust.

5. Identifying the Conflict of Interest

- 5.1 Governance colleagues and Senior Employees are expected to identify any conflicts of interest at an early stage.
- 5.2 A standard agenda item must be included at the beginning of each Board of Trustee and Committee Meetings to enable the declaration of any actual or potential conflicts of interest.
- 5.3 If a governance colleague is uncertain whether or not he or she is conflicted, he or she should err on the side of openness, declaring the issue and discussing it with the

other governance colleagues.

- 5.4 If a governance colleague is aware of an undeclared conflict of interest affecting another governance colleague, they should notify the other governance colleagues or the Chair.
- 5.5 If a conflict of interest is identified outside of a meeting, the governance colleague or senior employee must complete a Conflict of Interest Form and submit it to the relevant Governance Professional to the Board of Trustees or Local Stakeholder Board.
- 5.6 On an annual basis, or when a Trustee or Senior Employee joins the Trust, a Conflict of Interest Form must be completed to enable the Register of Interest to be kept up to date.

6. Dealing with the Conflict of Interest

- 6.1 Governance colleagues must consider the conflict of interest so that any potential effect on decision-making is eliminated.
- 6.2 Where available, legal or governing document requirements on how a conflict of interest must be handled is to be used, however, in serious cases, it can be decided that removing the conflict of interest itself is the most effective way of preventing it from affecting the decision-making.
- 6.3 Examples of Important legal or governing document requirements are:
 - a) Academies Trust Handbook, Section 5.35 to 5.59 Related party transactions, which deals with goods or services provided by individuals or organisations connected to the Trust and any applicable "at cost" requirements.
 - b) The Trust's Articles of Association, Articles 97-98 and Articles 6.2-6.9 which cover Conflicts of Interest.
- 6.4 Serious conflicts of interest include, but are not limited to, those which:
 - a) Are so acute and extensive that the governance colleague is unable to make their decisions in the best interest of the Trust or could be seen to be unable to do so.
 - b) Are present in significant or high-risk decisions of the governance colleagues.
 - c) Mean that effective decision-making is regularly undermined or cannot be managed in accordance with the required or best practice approach.
 - d) Are associated with inappropriate governance colleague benefit.
- 6.5 Benefits to governance colleagues/senior employees - Where there is a proposed financial transaction between a governance colleagues/senior employees and the Trust, or any transaction of arrangement:
 - a) The benefit must be authorised in advance by the Audit Risk & Assurance Committee. If there is no Committee meeting planned within the time frame of authorisation being required, then the Chair of the Audit Risk & Assurance Committee and one other Audit Trustee can be contacted to authorise the benefit. Where the Chair of the Audit Risk & Assurance Committee is affected then the Chair of the Trust and one other Audit Committee member must

authorise the benefit.

- b) Affected governance colleagues are expected to be absent from any part of any meeting where the issue is discussed or decided.
- c) The affected individual should not vote or be counted in deciding whether a meeting is quorate.

6.6 Conflicts of Loyalty - Where there is a conflict of loyalty and the affected Trustee does not stand to gain any benefit and there are no specific governing document or legal provisions about how the conflict of loyalty should be handled, the affected governance colleagues should declare the interest. The remainder of the Trustees must then decide what level of participation, if any, is acceptable on the part of the conflicted Trustee. The options might include, but are not limited to, deciding whether the conflicted Trustee:

- a) Having registered and fully declared the interest, can otherwise participate in the decision.
- b) Can stay in the meetings where the decision is discussed and made, but not participate.
- c) Should withdraw from the decision-making process in the way described above.
- d) If a conflict of interest is raised outside of a meeting and there is no meeting planned within the time frame of the conflict needing to be reviewed, the Chair of the Trust plus one other Trustee or LSB Chair, plus one LSB Governor, can be contacted to consider the conflict of interest and determine the resolution. If the person affected is the LSB Chair, then the Chair of the Trustees plus one other Trustee must consider the conflict of interest and determine the resolution. Where the Chair of the Trust is affected then a Member and one other Trustee must consider the conflict of interest and determine the resolution. The resolutions must be recorded on the Conflict of Interest Log.

6.7 In deciding which course of action to take regarding a Conflict of Interest, Trustees:

- a) Must always make their decisions only in the best interest of the Trust
- b) Should always protect the Trust's reputation and be aware of the impression that their actions and decisions may have on those outside the Trust.
- c) Should always be able to demonstrate that they have made decisions in the best interest of the Trust and independently of any competing interest.
- d) Should require the withdrawal of the affected Trustee from any decisions where the Trustee's other interest is relevant to a high risk or controversial Trustee decision or could, or be seen to, significantly affect the Trustee's decision-making at the Trust.
- e) Can allow the Trustee to participate where the existence of the other interest poses a low risk to the decision-making in the Trust's interest or is likely to only have an insignificant bearing on their approach to an issue.

- f) Should be aware that the presence of a conflicted Trustee can affect trust, could inhibit free discussion, and might influence decision-making in some way.

7. Recording the Conflict of Interest

- 7.1 The Trust must keep a Register of Interests for the Board of Trustees, Senior Employees and all other governance colleagues, which must be published on their websites. This Register of Interest is downloaded from GovernorHub and must be kept up to date through regular review. A standing agenda item at each meeting facilitates as a review.
- 7.2 The Academy Trust Handbook sections 5.45 to 5.48 covers what must be captured in the Register of Interest and what must be published on the website.
- 7.3 A Declaration of Interest Log must be kept by each Board of Trustees and Local Governing Body, which details the potential conflicts, the discussions and the resolutions. This log is stored in the GovernorHub under each Trustee/Governor's profile.
- 7.4 The Logs will be monitored by the Trustees Audit Committee to ensure that actions forming part of the resolution are appropriate, are following legal requirements and have been implemented correctly.

8. Confidentiality

- 8.1 Trustees or Senior Employees cannot use information obtained from the Trust for their own benefit or that of another organisation if it has been obtained in confidence or has special value such as commercial sensitivity.

9. Monitoring and Enforcement

- 9.1 The Trust's Audit Committee will undertake continuous monitoring of its activities and the Trustees/Senior Employees to ensure that any conflicts of interest are identified and mitigated as soon as possible.
- 9.2 Trustees and Senior Employees who fail to declare an interest and are found to be in conflict with the best interests of the Trust will be expected to explain to the Audit Committee their reasons for their omission.
- 9.3 Members reserve the right to terminate the membership of the relevant Trustee, if they are found to have knowingly and deliberately failed to declare an interest and has brought the Trust into disrepute.
- 9.4 It will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter if a Senior Employee is found to have knowingly and deliberately failed to declare an interest and brought the Trust into disrepute.

10. Policy Circulation

- 10.1 This Policy will be published on the Trust's website and included in the Trust's Policy Monitoring Schedule
- 10.2 This Policy will be circulated to every all governance colleagues and Senior Employee

by sending an email to the link on the Trust's website on an annual basis and when a new governance colleague or Senior Employee joins the Trust.

- 10.3 The Trustees, are responsible for overseeing, reviewing and organising the revision of the Conflict of Interest Policy.

11. Appendix A - Declarations of Interests Form

Our trust is committed to acting with integrity and impartiality. To this end, we must keep a register of the relevant business and pecuniary interests of governance colleagues and we are also required to publish these interests on the Trust's website.

These interests are anything that might sway your decision making or affect your ability to act in an impartial way. For example, if you:

- Are a governance colleague at another school or charity
- Work for a company that the school might engage the services of (e.g., a catering or payroll provider, etc.)
- Have a personal relationship with any other governance colleagues or employees of the trust (e.g. spouse, partner, relative, etc.)
- Have a partner who supplies services to the school

If you are not sure an interest counts, err on the side of caution and declare it. We ask that you update us whenever your circumstances change so we can ensure our register of interests is accurate.

Governance colleagues are reminded that completion of this form does not remove the requirement upon them to disclose orally any interest at any specific meeting and to leave the meeting for that agenda item.

A summary of the relevant information declared on this form (and on GovernorHub) will be published on the Trust/school's website to comply with statutory obligations.

Guidance notes

Governance colleagues have a legal duty to act only in the best interests of their schools. Where a situation arises in which they cannot do this due to a personal interest they have, steps should be taken to identify, prevent and record the conflict. This ensures governance colleagues are acting in the best interests of the school.

Declaring your conflicts of interest is a legal requirement within the School Governance (Roles, Procedures and Allowances) (England) Regulations 2013 and for academies, in the Articles of Association and Academies Trust Handbook. However, making an annual declaration does not remove your requirement to make an oral disclosure of the interest and temporarily leave the meeting, where the interest is relevant to something being discussed.

Pecuniary interests

Generally, governance colleagues should not participate in any discussions in which they may directly or indirectly benefit from a pecuniary interest, except where the relevant authority has authorised this i.e. legislation for maintained schools or articles of association for academies. A direct benefit refers to any personal financial benefit and an indirect benefit refers to any financial benefit you may have by virtue of a relationship to someone who stands to gain from a decision of the governing board. Both direct and indirect interests must be declared.

Non-pecuniary interests (conflicts of loyalty)

There may be a non-pecuniary interest whereby the governor does not stand to gain any benefit but a declaration should still be made. For example, this might be where a governor has a family member working in the school. While the governor might not benefit personally, their judgment could be impaired if something was brought up that would affect the family member.

Electronic forms are used to collate information from all Trustees / Governors / Associates & Advocates and include the following information:

- Date of appointment
- Directorships, partnerships or employment together with the nature of interest
- Governance colleague roles at other educational institutions or charities together with nature of link
- Personal relationships (including spouse/partner and close relatives) and the nature arising from this link
- Relevant business or personal interests of spouse/partner and close relatives together with the relevant interest
- If no interests are to be noted 'None' chosen be chosen on the form and dated.

12. Appendix B Withdrawal from Meetings Guidance

FOR GUIDANCE, A SUMMARY OF THE RELEVANT PART OF THE REGULATIONS ABOUT WITHDRAWAL FROM MEETINGS AND DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST ARE SET OUT BELOW.

WITHDRAWAL FROM MEETINGS - HAVING AN INTEREST

The general principle is that no-one should be involved in a decision where his or her personal interests may conflict with those of the governing board or, where his or her interest is greater than any other member of the governing board

- The regulations apply to all members of the Trust Board / governing board and the principal and any others in attendance at the meeting, though if a matter is to be voted upon, then only to the members of the governing board.
- The governance professional shall only be required to withdraw when the board is discussing their pay/contract or disciplinary action against them.
- Governance colleagues have to withdraw when their own appointment, reappointment or removal as a member of the governing board or a committee is under consideration.
- Any Trustee / governor who is employed to work at the school (other than the principal), must withdraw from a meeting where the pay or performance appraisal of any particular person employed to work at the school is under discussion.
- The principal must withdraw from any meeting where his/her own pay or performance appraisal is under discussion.
- If a person has any pecuniary interest, direct or indirect in any contract, proposed contract or any other matter under discussion at a meeting s/he shall at the meeting disclose the fact and -

- (a) withdraw from a meeting during the consideration or discussion of the meeting;
 - (b) not vote on any question with respect to that matter.
- A person has an indirect pecuniary interest if:
 - (a) s/he, or any nominee of hers/his, is a member of a company or other body with which a contract is under consideration or has been made;
 - (b) s/he is a partner in business or in the employment, of a person with whom the contract is made or under consideration.
 - A person has a direct or indirect pecuniary interest in a matter if a relative (including a spouse) living with her/him, has a direct or indirect pecuniary interest.
 - The principal (whether a governor or not), a governor who is a teacher or member of the non-teaching staff, or any teacher who is in attendance in an advisory capacity should not have an interest that is greater than the interest of the generality of teachers at the school.
 - A person present at a meeting of a selection panel at which the subject for consideration is that person's appointment (or that of his/her relative or spouse) to a post as a teacher or otherwise at the school, a transfer or promotion or retirement or shall be a candidate for the resulting vacancy, s/he shall be deemed to have an interest.