



ASSOCIATION OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS IN OPHTHALMOLOGY

Conflict of Interest Policy

Introduction

The Association of Health Professions in Ophthalmology (AHPO) is a professional organisation that promotes the practice, education, training and research in the field of ophthalmology and vision science throughout the United Kingdom, by promoting high standards of care and treatment of patients with disease or disability affecting the eyes or vision, advancing public education in ophthalmology and vision science, and representing the needs and interests of ophthalmology and vision science in the provision and advancement of health care.

The Association of Health Professions in Ophthalmology (AHPO) is an Awarding Body for Certificates and Diplomas in Ophthalmic and Vision Science. AHPO is also a Training Organisation that provides a distance-learning programme of study for the qualifications that it awards. AHPO must avoid any conflict of interest that may arise with its stakeholders that could adversely affect any activities undertaken as an Awarding Body in carrying out its responsibilities.

In this document "Awarding Body" refers to the Examinations Committee of AHPO.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to offer guidance on how to deal with possible conflicts of interest that may arise as a result of AHPO's role as an awarding organisation. It applies to all individuals whenever they interact or potentially interact with any of AHPO's Awarding Body functions.

This policy:

- defines what is meant by a conflict of interest
- identifies the potential areas for conflict of interest
- states the responsibilities for identifying, managing and reporting conflicts of interest

Scope

- This policy covers the whole of AHPO and relates to all its qualifications
- This policy applies to all stakeholders and includes: the Trustees of AHPO, AHPO administrative staff, members of AHPO Council, members of the AHPO Examinations and Education Committees, AHPO examiners and external examiners, assessors, tutors, and workplace mentors.

Definition of conflict of interest

In general, a conflict of interest is a situation where an individual or organisation has competing interests or loyalties. For the purpose of this policy conflict of interest is defined where:

- Awarding Body activity, or any activity undertaken on its behalf, has the potential to lead it to act contrary to its interests in the development, delivery and award of qualifications in accordance with the Ofqual General Conditions of Recognition
- A person who is connected to the development, delivery or award of qualifications on behalf of the AHPO Examinations Committee has interests in any other activity that could have the potential to lead that person to act contrary to his or her own interests in the development, delivery or award of qualifications in accordance with the Ofqual General Conditions of Recognition
- An informed and reasonable observer would conclude that either of these situations was the case.

Examples of potential conflicts of interest are:

- Where the training delivery function and the awarding function rest within one organisation
- When an individual has personal interests or working interests that conflict with their professional association with the AHPO Examinations Committee
- When an individual is marking for the AHPO Examinations Committee and works for another organisation that delivers AHPO qualifications and/or is involved in the delivery of AHPO qualifications
- When an individual working for the AHPO Examinations Committee has a friend or relation taking AHPO qualifications
- When an individual is a member of the AHPO Examinations Committee who writes AHPO distance learning materials and/or also teaches AHPO qualifications

Identifying conflicts of interest

AHPO is committed by its quality assurance procedures and by Ofqual, its regulator, to identify and monitor all conflicts of interest that relate to it and to any circumstances in which the Awarding Body might reasonably foresee that a conflict of interest may arise, in order that its operations are not jeopardised.

Stakeholders of AHPO are required to make a declaration of any direct or indirect or possible conflict of interest or relationship with any person or organisation that may adversely affect or jeopardise the operations of the Awarding Body.

Managing conflicts of interest

The Awarding Body will take all reasonable steps to ensure that no conflict of interest that relates to its operations has an adverse effect. When this does happen, it will take all reasonable steps to mitigate the adverse effect as far as possible and correct it.

Governance

Responsibility for the management of potential and actual conflicts of interest lies ultimately with the Trustees of AHPO. The trustees have a responsibility to ensure that all staff and stakeholders are made aware of the conflict of interest policy.

AHPO has organisational structures that ensure no internal conflict of interest can exist. The Awarding Body functions of AHPO are the responsibility of the AHPO Examinations Committee, and the distance learning programme and workplace training are the responsibility of the AHPO Education Committee. Members of the Education Committee and staff employed or delegated to deliver the distance learning programme and workplace training (tutors and workplace mentors) cannot be members of the Examinations Committee and vice versa

AHPO members of staff

Each individual is responsible for ensuring that they are familiar with the Conflict of Interest Policy. Members of the AHPO Examinations Committee are required to sign an annual declaration that there is no conflict of interest. They are also expected to make a declaration at any other time, should they have a conflict of interest. Staff are updated regularly about conflicts of interest.

Examiners, Assessors and External Examiners

The AHPO Examinations Committee ensures that all examiners sign an annual declaration that there is no conflict of interest. They are also required to make a declaration at every assessment session when marking, to indicate there is no conflict of interest.

Tutors, mentors and writers of course materials

Tutors, trainers and writers of course materials dealing with the AHPO Examinations Committee are required to declare a conflict of interest as and when this occurs. All assessments are set and marked by the AHPO Examinations Committee, thereby ensuring that there is no possible conflict of interest

between tutors or candidates in the marking process. When an individual is a tutor or workplace mentor or has prepared course materials, and also undertakes marking as an examiner, they are required to declare this as outlined above.

Responsibilities/reporting of conflict of interest by internal stakeholders

- The Chairman of Awarding Body is responsible for communicating this policy to relevant AHPO members, contracted staff and employees on an annual basis. All relevant members of staff will be required to sign on an annual basis a declaration stating they have read and understood this policy.
- The Chairman of Awarding Body is responsible for ensuring that contracted staff and employees are trained about conflict of interest.
- The Awarding Body is responsible for ensuring this policy is reviewed on an annual basis and that Awarding Body procedures contain measures that anticipate and manage potential conflicts of interest with and by AHPO stakeholders.
- The Awarding Body must receive all declarations of conflict of interest by AHPO stakeholders in writing so that these may be logged and the appropriate action(s) taken. Serious cases of conflict of interest will be reported to the Chairperson of the Examinations Committee. The ultimate penalty would be termination of contract.
- Each internal and external stakeholder has responsibility for ensuring they are familiar with and are meeting the conditions laid down in this policy. If there is any doubt about a conflict of interest, they should report it in writing to the Chairperson of the Examinations Committee.
- AHPO staff members are required to inform the Chairperson of the Examinations Committee if any friends or relatives who are entered for AHPO assessments in order to stop any potential conflict of interest as and when this occurs.

Responsibilities/reporting of conflict of interest by external stakeholders

- Each internal and external stakeholder has a responsibility for ensuring they are familiar with and are meeting the conditions laid down in this policy. If there is any doubt about a conflict of interest, they should report it in writing to the Chairperson of the Examinations Committee.
- Individual stakeholders should not take on any activities that may be considered to be conflicting or competing with Awarding Body activities.

How to report any actual or suspected conflicts of interest

Declarations of conflict of interest may be sent to the Chairperson of the Examinations Committee to info@ahpo.net

or by post to:

Chairperson of the Examinations Committee
AHPO, Bretby House, Stanhope, Burton on Trent, DE15 0PT.

Ofqual Reference

This policy relates to the Ofqual criteria for recognition: *A.5: Conflicts of interest*