



Code of Conduct regarding Conflict of Interests

Preamble

KCE is the Belgian Health Care Knowledge Centre.

ZonMw is the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development.

KCE and ZonMw have launched a joint call initiative for Belgian-Netherlands Funding of International Trials (BeNeFIT).

Applicants for research grants in this call must have full confidence that:

- decisions will be taken without bias and without regard to personal interest;
- information about their applications will not be disclosed to anyone except those directly involved in the decision-making process.

Those prepared to contribute to the process of assessment and decision-making must have every confidence that the rules for assessment procedures are such that there can be no doubt about the integrity of assessors and decision-making bodies. That is why KCE and ZonMw will apply this code of conduct for their joint BeNeFIT call, on the basis of the principles outlined above.

1. Declaration

All those involved in decision-making procedures should consider whether they are in any way biased in favour or against any of the applications, and whether they have any form of involvement with any of the applications or applicants.

Before commencing their tasks, they are required to sign a declaration of involvement/non-involvement. By doing so, they also pledge to observe confidentiality concerning both the content of the applications and the decision-making process regarding them.

2. Involvement with applications and applicants

Forms of involvement with applications or applicants which must be reported in this declaration include those in the following non-exhaustive list:

2.1 Involvement with the application

- being an applicant or co-applicant within the same evaluation round;
- having been involved in the preparation of the application.

2.2 Involvement with the applicant or co-applicant

Having a personal relationship, such as:

- a family relationship with the applicant or co-applicant (up to and including the 3rd degree);
- friendship;
- a personal conflict.

Having a professional relationship, such as:

- supervising or having supervised the doctoral work of the applicant or co-applicant;
- collaborating with the applicant or co-applicant on research projects and/or publications, or having done so in the last three years, or planning to do so in future;
- being colleagues within the same section/department or similar organizational unit, or planning to be so in the future;
- having a hierarchical relationship with the applicant or joint applicant, or planning to have such a relationship in the future, up to and including the level of a faculty or similar organizational unit;
- a professional conflict.

Having an economic interest, such as:

- being in a position to derive some material advantage from participating in the decision-making process or from information obtained during that process.

3. Policy on involvement

3.1 Where there is any form of involvement with an application (particularly any of the forms of involvement specified in subsection 2.1), the person concerned must not:

- act as a reviewer in relation to any application in this call;
- be a member of any advisory body within this call;
- act as a member of the decision-making body within this call in terms of participating either in deliberations, including the preparatory written procedures, or in the decision-making process.

3.2 Where there exists any form of involvement with an applicant or co-applicant (particularly any of the forms of involvement specified in subsection 2.2), basically the same rules apply as in the case of involvement with an application (see subsection 3.1).

Depending on the extent of involvement, the number of applications with which the person concerned is found to have an involvement, the role of that person in the decision-making process, and the impact of the relevant grant programme, it may be decided to take other measures to prevent the relevant form(s) of involvement with the applicant influencing the decision-making process.

Such a decision must be taken by the directors of KCE and ZonMw and communicated to the committee concerned. If some form of this indirect involvement is later identified at a meeting of an advisory or decision-making body, the decision must be taken by the committee chair after consulting the committee members and obtaining the consent of the secretary; the directors of KCE and ZonMw remain responsible for a decision taken in this way.

In both cases, the decision and the reasons for it must be specified in the reports of the committee meetings.

The decision must include the measures to be taken, which must certainly include:

- the exclusion of the person concerned from the committee's deliberations of the application concerned, including the preparation of preparatory documents and considerations;
- reporting on the assessment process in such a way that the decision-making body will be in a position to check the relevant evaluation and/or prioritization and modify it if it sees fit.

The relevant advisory or decision-making body should be informed about these measures before it starts its work and must report afterwards whether the measures proved effective in preventing decisions being influenced by any form of involvement.