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Owner and version control

# BPN Conflict of Interest Policy

## 1. Overview of the policy

### 1.1 Conflict of Interest- definition

A **Conflict of Interest (COI)** arises when an individual's or organization's judgment or actions in relation to **Best Practice Network (BPN)** could be influenced by competing interests or loyalties, whether actual, perceived, personal, or professional.

Conflicts of interest may be:

- **Actual or perceived** – Whether real or just apparent.
- **Personal or organisational** – Affecting an individual or BPN as a whole.
- **Financial or non-financial** – Including monetary gain, relationships, or other influences.

#### Examples of Conflicts of Interest at BPN

BPN must avoid situations where conflicts could compromise integrity, such as:

- **Financial stakes** in an apprenticeship training provider or employer partner.
- **Reciprocal agreements** with other End-Point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs) or training providers.
- **Tutors/assessors** with existing ties to employers linked to apprentices.
- **BPN staff** having close personal relationships (e.g., family, partners) with employers or candidates.
- **BPN representatives** involved in decisions affecting someone with whom they have a personal connection.

#### Commitment to Integrity:

BPN proactively identifies, discloses, and manages conflicts to uphold fairness and trust in our services.

### 1.2 Scope of the policy

This policy applies to the delivery of **Best Practice Network (BPN) Apprenticeships** and all other programmes subject to internal and external quality assurance.

The policy aims to:

- **Ensure integrity** by designing EPA, apprenticeship, and programme tools free from conflicts of interest and bias.
- **Safeguard apprentices and candidates** registered with BPN.
- **Mitigate risks** by minimising the potential for Adverse Effects.
- **Support stakeholders** in effective risk management and mitigation.
- **Ensure compliance** with all relevant legislation and guidance.

- **Continuously improve** our products and services through refinement and best practices.

### 1.3 Coverage

This policy applies to all individuals involved in the delivery of BPN programmes, apprenticeships, and end-point assessments (EPA), including but not limited to:

- **Governance & Leadership:** The Advisory Boards (including sub-committees) and Senior Leadership Team (SLT).
- **Assessors & Tutors:**
  - End-point assessors conducting EPA activities.
  - Apprenticeship Tutors supporting apprentices.
  - Associates performing assessment roles (e.g., EPA, IQA).
- **Design & Delivery Teams:**
  - Qualification design teams developing EPA tools.
  - EPA delivery teams (administration, finance, etc.).
- **Stakeholders:** Employers, training providers, candidates, and apprentices.
- **BPN Panels:** Members handling appeals, complaints, sanctions, or malpractice cases.
- **Partner Organisations:** Awarding Organisations, External Quality Assurers (EQAs), EPAOs, and certification bodies.

#### Compliance for EPAO Partners

For EPAO partners, this policy supplements—but does not replace—the requirements outlined in the Contract. Non-compliance with BPN's Apprenticeship Services EPA policies may constitute **maladministration, malpractice, or a contractual breach**. Ensure all policies are thoroughly reviewed and implemented.

#### Related Policies

This policy should be read alongside the following, available on our **website**:

- Malpractice and Maladministration Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Reasonable Adjustments Policy
- Fair Access and Special Considerations Policy
- Recruitment Policy
- Feedback Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

### 1.4 Purpose of the policy

**BPN (Best Practice Network)** is committed to upholding the highest standards of integrity, transparency and ethical conduct. We foster a culture of openness, ensuring our operations – and those of our partners and stakeholders – remain free from malpractice, corruption or any form of misconduct.

This policy enables our apprentices, trainees, staff, partners, candidates and external organisations to raise genuine concerns in good faith, without fear of detriment or adverse treatment. Protected disclosures typically relate to matters that may conflict with Best Practice Network's commitments to probity, accountability and proper governance.

## 1.5 Who needs to know about the policy?

This policy must be known by:

- All BPN staff
- SLT members
- BPN Associates
- All stakeholders
- Candidates and apprentices
- Advisory board members
- All staff involved in EPA

EPAO Partners must ensure:

1. All apprentices understand this policy
2. All staff (including site, sub-site, and contractual personnel) involved in:
  - EPA design
  - Delivery
  - Management
  - Assessment
  - Quality assurance

are made aware of and familiar with the policy contents.

## 1.6 Obtaining copies of the policy

Partners and employers can download copies of the policy from our website.

## 1.7 Reviewing the policy

We will review this policy annually and may revise it as required in response to the findings of any review.

## 1.8 Complaint

Partners, candidates, apprentices, and employers have the right to express their dissatisfaction regarding our actions, products, or services. Our Feedback Policy in particular outlines when we will and will not accept a complaint, and when our decisions are final. Please see our Feedback Policy for more information.

# 3. Introduction

This policy outlines the responsibilities of all partners and stakeholders in identifying, managing, and mitigating conflicts of interest in accordance with their contractual agreements. It also ensures compliance with regulatory requirements set by:

- The **Department for Education (DfE)**
- **Ofqual Conditions of Recognition (A4.7)**

### Managing Conflicts of Interest

BPN is committed to proactively identifying, monitoring, and managing all **existing and reasonably foreseeable conflicts of interest** in line with standard procedures. Significant conflicts will be escalated to

the **Managing Director** when necessary.

Conflicts will be closely monitored, particularly during periods of change, to **minimise potential adverse effects**. Failure to manage conflicts appropriately can have serious consequences, including:

- **Unfair advantage** – Favouring one apprentice or employer over another
- **Non-compliance** – Failure to meet assessment requirements
- **Compromised quality** – Reduced reliability in quality assurance and sampling
- **Invalid assessments** – Undermining the credibility of assessment decisions
- **Incompetency risks** – Apprentices lacking necessary skills, posing risks to employers
- **Reputational damage** – Potential removal from the **Register of End-Point Assessment Organisations (RoEPAO)** or the **APAR**

By adhering to this policy, BPN ensures **fairness, integrity, and compliance** in all operations, safeguarding the interests of apprentices, employers, and the organisation.

## 4. Types of Conflict of Interest

Conflicts of interest may arise in various situations relating to our business activities. Such conflicts must be identified, disclosed, and managed appropriately to maintain integrity and compliance.

### 1. Undisclosed Conflicts

- Where an appointed individual (e.g., an **Independent End-Point Assessor (IEPA)**, **partner**, **tutor**, **invigilator**, or **Internal Quality Assurer (IQA)**) fails to declare an actual or potential conflict of interest.

### 2. Conflicting Roles Within or Outside BPN

- Where an individual holds a position of authority at **BPN** that conflicts with their interests in another organisation.
- Where an individual's role in one part of the **BPN Group** conflicts with their interests in another part of the group.
- Where personal interests or relationships could influence, or appear to influence, professional judgment.

### 3. External Work & Personal Ties

- Where an individual working for or on behalf of **BPN** has personal interests (paid or unpaid) in another business that:
  - Uses **BPN's** products or services, or
  - Competes with **BPN**.
- Where an individual has **friends or family members** taking **BPN assessments** (e.g., exams).
- Where an individual undertakes additional **paid work (employed or self-employed)** or **voluntary work** outside **BPN** that conflicts with their duties.

#### 4. Regulatory & Procedural Conflicts

- Where a **BPN division** implements processes that conflict with regulatory responsibilities (e.g., as an **End-Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO)** or **Apprenticeship Training Provider**).

#### 5. Specific to End-Point Assessment (EPA) & Apprenticeship Delivery

- Where an individual involved in **EPA** is linked to or employed by the same organisation as the **apprentice** or the **on-programme training provider**.
- Where an **EPA assessor** has prior personal or professional connections to the **apprentice, their employer, or the training provider** (e.g., friends or relatives involved in delivery).
- Where an individual involved in **EPA** works for a **competitor** of the **on-programme training provider**.
- Where an individual involved in **apprenticeship delivery** works for a **competitor** of the **EPA provider**.
- Where an individual's or organisation's role in assessment could be compromised by **any other conflicting interests**.

### 5. Conflict of interest declaration and management

If a conflict of interest arises—or if partners, employers, associates, or candidates anticipate one—they must promptly notify the relevant BPN Team using the **Declaration of Conflict-of-Interest Form (Appendix B)**. We will collaborate with the involved parties to mitigate risks and resolve the issue. If resolution is not possible, the matter will be escalated to the **EPAO and Examinations Manager**. All declarations must be submitted via email using the **Appendix B template**, addressed to the assessment team under the subject "**Conflict of Interest**", with all relevant details included.

#### Review & Resolution Process

- Declarations will be reviewed **per cohort**, with concerns addressed as needed.
- A **formal annual review** will be conducted to assess ongoing risks.
- **When in doubt, declare.** If an activity may present a conflict, it must be reported.
- Where necessary, corrective actions—such as **removing an individual from EPA involvement** or **reassigning assessments to an impartial assessor**—will be taken and documented.

#### Urgent Concerns & Whistleblowing

All EPA partners and stakeholders must **immediately escalate urgent concerns** to an appropriate manager, director, or board member, as outlined in the **Whistleblowing Policy** (which allows for confidential reporting). Individuals are **protected under this policy** when reporting in good faith.

#### Ongoing Monitoring

We reserve the right to **proactively monitor and address conflicts** based on risk level or recurrence frequency.

### 4.1 Responsibilities

#### Conflict of Interest Declarations

All partners and associates must:

- Complete the **Declaration of Conflict of Interest Form (Appendix B)**.

- Notify the **BPN Team** of any changes in their conflict-of-interest status.
- Submit **annual declarations** to ensure ongoing compliance.

### Confidentiality & Information Sharing

All parties must adhere to **strict confidentiality protocols**, operating on a "**need-to-know**" basis. Information will only be shared with individuals who require it to **deliver, monitor, or manage** EPA (End-Point Assessment) or programme activities.

Assessments will be monitored through:

- **Spot observations**
- **Employer and learner feedback**
- **Remote monitoring activities**

#### **BPN's Commitments**

BPN will take all reasonable steps to:

#### **1. Compliance with Regulatory Requirements**

- Adhere to **Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA)** and **Department for Education (DfE)** guidelines on conflicts of interest.
- Follow any relevant requirements in **Assessment Plans** or **Apprenticeship Standards**.

#### **2. Assessment Integrity & Validity**

- Ensure assessments remain **fit for purpose** and **valid**, even where conflicts cannot be avoided.

#### **3. Confidentiality of Assessment Materials**

- Provide **training** to minimise risks of **unauthorised disclosure** of confidential materials.

#### **4. Conflict Management**

- Manage conflicts at **both organisational and individual levels**.
- Maintain **clear separation** between **training delivery** and **assessment processes** to prevent adverse effects.
- **BPN will not deliver both on-programme training and EPA** for the same apprentices under the same standard.

#### **5. Staff & Assessor Oversight**

- Issue **conflict-of-interest policies** and provide **training** to staff.
- Include **identical requirements** in contracts for **freelance assessors and employees**.
- Conduct **CV and employment history checks** for assessors to ensure no prior conflicts with EPA activities.
- Notify assessors of **apprentice and employer names** (in compliance with data protection policies) to verify impartiality.
- Provide a **code of conduct** for each EPA activity (e.g., observations, interviews, portfolio assessments), including conflict-of-interest guidelines.

## 5. Reporting improper conduct

If you suspect someone is acting improperly—whether a partner, colleague, employer, candidate, or apprentice—please refer to our **Whistleblowing Policy**. This policy provides a safe and confidential way to raise concerns about unethical, unlawful, or inappropriate behaviour.

### What to do if you witness misconduct or feel uneasy:

1. **Review the Whistleblowing Policy** – Ensure you understand the reporting procedure.
2. **Raise Your Concern** – Follow the outlined steps to escalate the issue confidentially.
3. **Uphold Integrity** – Your vigilance helps maintain a trustworthy and ethical workplace.

## 6. Managing Conflict

### 1. Declaration and Recording

All conflicts of interest (COI) **must** be declared and recorded for each cohort. Declarations will be:

- Maintained in a central register.
- Evaluated and formally reviewed **annually**.

Where a COI is identified, the **QA Director or Senior Responsible Officer** will document:

- The nature of the conflict.
- Steps to manage/mitigate it.
- Its scope, duration, and next review date.

### 2. Breach Identification and Reporting

Breaches may be identified via:

- Whistleblowing.
- Audits.
- Other reporting mechanisms.

**All breaches must be escalated to the Managing Director (MD)** and investigated as follows:

1. **Investigation:** Led by the BPN Responsible Officer (includes interviews; **4-week timeframe**).
2. **Report:** Findings submitted to the MD and Senior Leadership Team (SLT).
3. **SLT Recommendations:** Actions agreed.
4. **Appeals Process:** If applicable.
5. **Recording:** Full documentation of outcomes.

### 3. Mitigation Measures

Where required, corrective actions may include:

- Reorganising activities or key functions.
- Appointing alternative assessors or tutors.
- Removing an individual from EPA design or delivery.
- Adjusting an assessor's **risk rating** (if applicable).
- Increasing monitoring or sampling.
- Referring decisions to an **independent assessor**.

### 4. Safeguarding Independence

BPN will:

- Remove individuals from assessments where a COI arises.
- Ensure no assessor/investigator is employed by the apprentice's organisation or involved in their training/line management.

- **Prohibit** sole assessment decisions by anyone involved in on-programme delivery.

**Rationale:** The integrity of EPA outcomes and BPN’s credibility depend on impartiality. Any actual or perceived COI undermines this.

## 5. Ongoing Monitoring

For resolved COIs:

- **Quarterly reviews** for one year.
- All actions recorded in the declaration.

## 6. Reciprocal Arrangements (if applicable)

BPN will avoid reciprocal assessment arrangements with other EPAOs (where organisations assess each other’s learners). If unavoidable:

- Independent scrutiny **must** be applied.
- All steps taken to minimise risk of adverse effects.

## 6.1 Contractual arrangements/third party management

BPN will take prompt and appropriate action if third-party activities jeopardize our compliance with the **Conditions of Recognition**, enforcing contractual terms where necessary. All agreements with staff and third parties granted access to confidential assessment information will explicitly outline:

- Their obligations in managing conflicts of interest,
- The process for reporting potential conflicts.

### Mitigation of Conflicts of Interest

As of the effective date of this policy, BPN **does not** deliver apprenticeship training—nor do we intend to—for any apprenticeship standards where we serve as an **End-Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO)**. This significantly reduces potential conflicts of interest.

## 7. Mandatory disclosure and confidentiality

### 7.1 Mandatory disclosures

Maintaining the integrity of our assessments is essential. We recognise that partner organisations may engage with multiple End-Point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs) or Training Providers. Consequently, if issues arise, more than one EPAO or Training Provider could be affected.

### 7.2 Confidentiality

Where necessary, we may require access to confidential information. Any such information will be securely handled and used solely for investigative purposes in compliance with applicable data protection laws. Disclosure to third parties will only occur when legally mandated—for example, to regulators, law enforcement, or other statutory authorities.

## 8. Termination for Convenience

We are committed to taking fair and proportionate actions under this policy. Whenever possible, we will collaborate with our partners and employers to resolve issues amicably. However, this policy does not restrict our right to terminate the relationship in accordance with the terms of our agreement.



## 9. Contacts

Your contact for this policy.

If you have any queries about the contents of the policy, please contact BPN:

Email: [chrisgarcia@bestpracticenetwork.co.uk](mailto:chrisgarcia@bestpracticenetwork.co.uk)

Telephone: 01179 209200

Post: Best Practice Network, Newminster House, 27-29 Baldwin Street, Bristol, BS1 1LT

## Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Abbreviation/Term	Meaning
<b>Contract</b>	A legally binding agreement, which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Service Level Agreements (SLAs)</li><li>• Partnership agreements</li><li>• Contracts for goods/services</li><li>• Other signed agreements with partners.</li></ul>
<b>EPA (End-Point Assessment)</b>	A final evaluation confirming an apprentice's <b>knowledge, skills, and behaviours (KSBs)</b> for their role. Conducted after training completion and <b>Gateway</b> approval. Key features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Must be unbiased (assessed by an independent third party or expert panel).</li><li>• Required for issuing an apprenticeship certificate.</li></ul>
<b>EPAO (End-Point Assessment Organisation)</b>	An approved organisation that conducts EPAs.
<b>Gateway</b>	The stage where an employer (with input from the <b>Independent Training Provider</b> ) confirms an apprentice's readiness for EPA.
<b>ITP (Independent Training Provider)</b>	A training provider working with employers to prepare apprentices for <b>Gateway</b> .
<b>IEPA (Independent End-Point Assessor)</b>	An impartial assessor who evaluates an apprentice's KSBs against the apprenticeship standard.
<b>LIEPA (Lead Independent End-Point Assessor)</b>	The lead assessor responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Internal quality assurance</li><li>• Standardizing EPA practices</li><li>• Serving as the sector expert.</li></ul>
<b>Ofqual</b>	<b>Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation</b> – The UK government body regulating exams, assessments, and vocational qualifications (England & Northern Ireland).
<b>Partner</b>	Any stakeholder involved, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Apprentices</li><li>• Employers</li><li>• Employees</li><li>• Training providers (ITPs)</li><li>• External quality assessors.</li></ul>

## Appendix B: Declaration of Conflict-of-Interest Form

### Conflict of Interest - Disclosure Form

**Assessment-In-Confidence** (When completed)

Name	
Position (please tick)	<input type="checkbox"/> Programme Board and SLT <input type="checkbox"/> End-point assessors undertaking end-point assessment activities. <input type="checkbox"/> Associates acting in the capacity as EPA or IQA or Apprenticeship Tutor <input type="checkbox"/> Qualification design team (those designing the EPA or programme tools) <input type="checkbox"/> The EPA or Apprenticeship delivery team (admin, finance etc) <input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders, including employers, providers, and apprentices. <input type="checkbox"/> Programme Board and sub committees <input type="checkbox"/> BPN panel members such as appeals, complaints, sanctions, and malpractice. <input type="checkbox"/> Partner organisations to include Awarding Organisations/External Quality Assures (EQAs) and certification bodies. <input type="checkbox"/> Other. Please Specify _____
Location	
Organisation (if applicable)	
<b>Conflict of Interest or potential conflict of interest</b>	
<i>Describe the conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest that have the potential to impact on your ability to carry out, or be seen to carry out, your allocated role or your organisation's role with regards to the Best Practice Network Apprenticeship End Point Assessment Conflict of Interest Policy.</i>	
<b>Describe the expected roles/duties you are required to perform.</b>	

#### **Declaration of Compliance with BPN Conflicts of Interest Policy:**

##### **Acknowledgement of Policy & Training**

I confirm that I have read, understood, and complied with the **Best Practice Network (BPN) Policy on Conflicts of Interest**.

I further confirm that **conflict of interest training** was provided as part of my induction.

##### **Accuracy of Disclosed Interests**

I declare that the details provided regarding my private interests (or my organisation's interests) are **accurate and complete** to the best of my knowledge.

##### **Ongoing Responsibilities**

I am aware of my obligation to:

- Take reasonable steps to avoid **real or perceived conflicts of interest** in connection with my employment (or my organisation's engagement).
- Promptly notify **Best Practice Network** of any material changes in my personal or professional circumstances that may affect this declaration.

<b>Signature:</b>
<b>Date:</b>

**Action by Manager**

Describe the action proposed to mitigate the real or perceived conflict which has been disclosed and the reasons for the decisions

The above action has been discussed with the employee and is appropriate to resolve the real or apparent conflict of interest disclosed above.

Signature of Manager:

Date:

Employee Endorsement:

Date:

When finalised this form is to be forwarded by email with subject header "Conflict of Interest" to [chrisgarcia@bestpracticenetwork.co.uk](mailto:chrisgarcia@bestpracticenetwork.co.uk) . You are advised to retain a copy.