



Bridgnorth Area Schools' Trust

Conflicts of Interest Policy

FREQUENCY OF REVIEW:	Every two years
COMMITTEE:	Audit
APPROVED:	Summer 2018
AUTHOR:	Director of Finance and Business
DATE OF NEXT REVIEW:	Summer 2020 unless there is a material change

BRIDGNORTH AREA SCHOOLS' TRUST (BAST)

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST POLICY

1. Legal framework

This policy takes its legal framework from the following legislation and statutory guidance:

- Companies Act 2006
- Conflicts of Interest: A Guide for Charity Trustees (Charity Commission).

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following other documents:

- Academies Financial Handbook (Education and Skills Funding Agency)
- Articles of Association
- Terms of Reference
- Code of Conduct

2. Definition of a Conflict of Interest

2.1 BAST adopts the guidance of the Charity Commission, which advises that a conflict of interest is any situation in which a relevant individual's personal interests or loyalties could, or could be seen to, prevent them from making a decision only in the best interests of the Trust.

2.2 Conflicts of interest usually arise where either:

- there is a potential financial or measurable benefit directly to a relevant individual, or indirectly through a connected person; or
- a relevant individual's duty to the Trust may compete with a duty or loyalty they owe to another person or organisation.

An example of a conflict of interest would be where a Trustee or Governor (or a close relation of such) is a sole proprietor or partner in a supplier from which a Trust academy could make purchases and the Trust or Governor is involved with the selection of suppliers.

2.3 To avoid repetition within this document, the phrase 'Relevant Individuals' is used to include all Members, Trustees, Governors, Staff including those in the central Trust Team (including Clerks) and Staff in each academy.

2.4 Reference to the 'Trust' should be interpreted as including all its schools.

3. Background and Statement of Intent

3.1 BAST Members, Trustees, Governors and Staff have an obligation under both company and charity law to act in the best interests of the Trust and in accordance with its regulatory documents.

In addition, the Trust is subject to rules and regulations in relation to transactions with connected parties. In general terms, connected parties include family, relatives or business partners of a Relevant Individual as well as businesses in which a Relevant Individual has an interest through ownership or influence.

Situations may arise where personal, private or family business and pecuniary interests conflict with those of the Trust. This may create tensions, inhibit free and open discussion and result in decisions or actions that are not in the interests of the Trust.

It is vital that the decision-making processes, decisions and the application of decisions at the Trust and its academies are, and are seen to be, free from personal or other bias such that the Trust is not laid open to criticism, challenge or reputational damage. In spending public money, it is imperative that Relevant Individuals do not benefit personally from the decisions that they make.

To this end, all Relevant Individuals are required to declare any business and pecuniary interest which leads to, or may potentially lead to, a conflict of interest and, wherever possible, to avoid situations in which there is or may be a conflict of interest. Declarations of business and pecuniary interests are recorded in a Register of Business and Pecuniary Interests.

Any financial transactions between the Trust and related parties are required by legislation to be disclosed in the Trust's published audited accounts each year.

The Trust seeks to identify conflicts of interest and take appropriate action to prevent them from affecting any decisions made, such that the best interests of the Trust are safeguarded.

3.2 This policy sets out the framework for ensuring that decisions are made in the best interests of the Trust, free from personal or other bias and do not unfairly favour any individual or organisation connected with the Trust, in line with its legislative context. It intends to

- Ensure that every Relevant Individual understands what the Trust considers to constitute a conflict of interest or a potential conflict of interest;
- Ensure that every Relevant Individual understands that they have a responsibility to identify and declare any business or pecuniary interest that might arise;
- Ensure that every Relevant Individual formally records in the Trust's Register of Business and Pecuniary Interests the interest and their responsibility to take any necessary actions to ensure that the interest does not affect the decision-making of the Trust.

4. Register of Business and Pecuniary Interests

4.1 The Register of Business and Pecuniary Interests is maintained by the Clerk to the Trust Board (in the case of Members, Trustees and Governors), by the Director of Finance and Business (in the case of Oldbury Wells and central Trust Staff) and by the Headteachers at each of the primary schools.

4.2 In the case of Members, Trustees and Governors, the Register is also published on the Trust website in accordance with the requirements of the Academies Financial Handbook.

5. Identifying Conflicts of Interest

5.1 Relevant Individuals are expected and required to identify and declare formally all interests that might conflict with the interests of the Trust. Those failing to identify and declare any conflicts of interest will fail to comply with their personal legal responsibility to avoid conflicts of interest and act only in the best interests of the Trust.

Examples of interests which should be declared include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Being an employee, director, advisor or partner of another business or organisation;
- Holding another public office;
- Trusteeships and governorships at other institutions and charities;
- Significant shareholdings;
- Owning a debt to someone/an organisation;
- Appointments of influence or control within a business or organisation;
- Being a member of a club, society, group, collective, co-operative or association whether business, professional, recreational, sporting, political, religious or social;
- Having received a gift, hospitality or other benefit from someone/an organisation;
- Having a professional, legal or moral obligation to someone else;
- Holding or expressing political, religious or personal views that may indicate prejudice or predetermination for or against a person, group or issue;
- Being a spouse, partner, relative or close friend, or business or private associate of someone who has one of these interests.

5.2 It is only expected that such interests would be declared if they might conflict with the interests of the Trust e.g. links with firms or organisations from which the Trust may wish to buy goods or services; the ownership of shares in or the owing of a debt to a company that does, or might, supply goods and services to the Trust.

5.3 A relative is defined as a close member of family or a member of the same household, who may be expected to influence, or be influenced by, the Relevant Individual. This includes, but is not limited to, a child, grandchild, parent, sibling, spouse, civil partner or cohabitee.

5.4 Having a professional, legal or moral obligation to someone else would include, but is not limited to, disclosure of close family relationships between Relevant Individuals and between Relevant Individuals and other Trust employees.

5.5 Significant shareholdings include companies in which the Relevant Individual or relative of the Relevant Individual (taken separately or together) holds more than 20% of the share capital or is entitled to exercise more than 20% of the voting power at any general meeting of that company. However, in the case of a company which has shares listed on a recognised stock exchange, an interest must be declared where a Relevant Individual holds more than 1% of the issued capital.

5.6 An organisation is influenced or controlled by the Relevant Individual or relative of the Relevant Individual (taken separately or together) if that individual is able to secure that the affairs of the body are conducted in accordance with the individual's wishes.

6. Declaring a Conflict of Interest

6.1 It is expected that conflicts of interest are identified and declared at an early stage. If an interest is not declared immediately for any reason, there is a legal and moral obligation to declare such an interest at a later date as soon as the Relevant Individual becomes aware that it has become an interest that might conflict with the interests of the Trust and/or might influence their involvement in and/or the conduct of and/or outcome of discussions or decisions being made by the Trust.

6.2 All Relevant Individuals are required to keep an updated entry record of any conflicts or potential conflicts of interest in the Trust's Register of Business and Pecuniary Interests.

6.3 The Register shall be circulated to all Relevant Individuals annually or more frequently on request. In the case of Members, Trustees and Governors, the Register is also published on the Trust website in accordance with the requirements of the Academies Financial Handbook. All Relevant Individuals undertake to review the Register and to draw attention to any potential conflicts of interest which they consider have been omitted or overlooked by any Relevant Individual. If in doubt about whether or not there is a conflict of interest, there should be a presumption to include it on the Register.

6.4 All Relevant Individuals are obliged to complete and sign a declaration of their business and pecuniary interests even if their declaration is 'None'.

6.5 All formal meetings of the Trust have a standard agenda item at the beginning of each meeting to enable any actual or potential conflicts of interest to be declared. Relevant Individuals are required to declare any interest which they have in an item to be discussed at the earliest opportunity and before any discussion of the item itself.

6.6 If a Relevant Individual is uncertain whether or not they have a conflict of interest, they should declare the issue and discuss it with the meeting.

6.7 If an individual is aware, or becomes aware, of an undeclared conflict of interest affecting themselves or any other Relevant Individual, they should notify the meeting immediately.

7. Managing Conflicts of Interest

7.1 All Relevant Individuals must consider their conflicts of interest such that any potential effect on decision-making is eliminated and must follow the legal or governing document requirements on how conflicts of interest must be handled.

Articles of Association

Article 97 of the Articles of Association states that "Any Trustee (i.e. Director) who has or can have any direct or indirect duty or personal interest (including but not limited to any Personal Financial Interest) which conflicts or may conflict with his duties as a Trustee shall disclose that fact to the Trustees as soon as he becomes aware of it. A Trustee must absent himself from any discussions of the Trustees in which it is possible that a conflict will arise between his duty to act solely in the interests of the Academy Trust and any duty or personal interest (including but not limited to any Personal Financial Interest)."

Articles 6.2 – 6.9 of the Articles of Association detail the circumstances in which the Trust may or may not authorise a transaction with, or benefit to, a Member or Director of the Trust (or a connected party) and the procedures to follow to ensure that legal authority is assured.

7.2 In serious cases, Relevant Individuals may decide that removing the conflict of interest itself is the most effective way of preventing it from affecting decision-making. Serious conflicts of interest include, but are not limited to, those which:

- are so acute and extensive that the individual is unable to contribute to a decision in the best interests of the Trust, or could be seen to be unable to do so
- are present in significant or high-risk decisions of the Trust
- mean that effective decision-making is regularly undermined or cannot be managed in accordance with the required or best practice approach
- are associated with inappropriate personal gain or benefit.

8. The Decision-making Process

8.1 Charity law states that Directors can only benefit from the Trust where there is an explicit authority obtained in advance. Authority is required where there is the possibility of benefit, therefore it is imperative that there is proper authority for any situation where a Director could benefit, irrespective of whether there is any actual benefit to the Director. The Trust seeks to ensure that proper procedures are in place to authorise benefits or potential benefits to all Relevant Individuals.

8.2 Where there is a proposed financial transaction between the Trust and a Relevant Individual, or any transaction or arrangement which confers a benefit to the Relevant Individual, which does not contravene the Trust's governing documents:

- the benefit must be authorised in advance by the Resources Committee. If there is no Resources Committee meeting planned within the time frame of authorisation required, then the Chair of the Resources Committee and one other member of this Committee can be contacted to authorise the benefit. Where the Relevant Individual is the Chair of the Resources Committee, then the Chair of the Board plus one other member of the Resources Committee must authorise the benefit.

Where the Relevant Individual is a Trustee, it may be necessary to obtain the prior written approval of the Charity Commission in accordance with Article 6.6 depending on the nature of the benefit e.g. property transactions.

- the Relevant Individual must absent him/herself from any part of the meeting in which the issue is discussed or decided.
- the Relevant Individual must not vote or be counted as part of the quorum for the matter.

8.3 Where there is a conflict of loyalty and the Relevant Individual does not stand to gain any benefit and the Trust's governing documents do not specify how the conflict of loyalty must be handled, the Relevant Individual should declare the interest which should be duly registered and the rest of the meeting must then decide the acceptable level of participation of the Relevant Individual.

The options may include, but are not limited to, the decision to:

- allow the Relevant Individual to participate in the decision;
- allow the Relevant Individual to remain in the meeting where the decision is discussed but not participate;
- require the Relevant Individual to absent him/herself from the part of the meeting in which the issue is discussed or decided.

8.4 When deciding which course of action to take regarding the conflict of loyalty, the following must be borne in mind:

- the decision must be made only in the best interests of the Trust and be demonstrably so;
- the conflict must pose no risk or low risk to the decision-making being made in the best interests of the Trust;
- due regard to the protection of the Trust's reputation must be paid and the impression given to those outside the Trust;
- the presence of a conflicted individual could affect trust between participants of the meeting and inhibit free discussion or influence decision-making.

9. Records of proceedings

9.1 Minutes should record details of any and all discussions on potential conflicts of interest and the decisions made.

10. Confidentiality

10.1 Relevant Individuals must not use information obtained directly or indirectly at or from the Trust for their own benefit (financial or otherwise) or the benefit of another individual, entity or organisation. All information obtained shall be deemed to have been obtained in confidence.

11. Monitoring and enforcement

11.1 The Trust's Audit Committee will monitor proceedings to ensure that any conflicts of interest are identified and mitigated as soon as possible.

11.2 Any Relevant Individual who fails to declare an interest and is found to be acting not in the best interests of the Trust will be required to explain the reasons for their omission and may face appropriate disciplinary action.

12. Policy circulation

12.1 This policy will be circulated to every Relevant Individual with a copy of the declarations of business and pecuniary interests form on an annual basis which affirms that they have:

- Received a copy of the policy;
- Read and understood the policy;
- Agreed to comply with the policy.

12.2 The Conflicts of Interest Policy will be published on the Trust's website and be reviewed in accordance with the Policy Approval Schedule.

The Conflicts of Interest Policy has been adopted by the Trustees of Bridgnorth Area Schools' Trust

Signed _____
Chair of Audit Committee

Dated _____

Signed _____
Headteacher

Dated _____