

Declaration of interests: potential for conflicting interests

The following note sets out areas in which there could be a potential conflict of interest between the roles of Chair of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics and Chair of the Health Research Authority. It acknowledges two areas where conflicts could arise, and sets out how these would be managed.

The role of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics is to examine ethical issues arising from new developments in biological and medical research. It is an independent body funded by the Nuffield Foundation, the Wellcome Trust and the Medical Research Council. The funding bodies play no part in determining the work programme, topics for study, or the content of reports of the Council.

The role of the Health Research Authority is to protect and promote the interests of patients and the public in health research. It is essentially the research regulator, resourcing and supporting the National Research Ethics Service and also the standardised submission system IRAS (Integrated Research Application System). Its mission is to make research regulation proportionate and consistent. In itself, the HRA has no remit to determine ethical standards, but has an established National Research Ethics Advisors' Panel that enables it to 'keep abreast or emerging ethical issues'. This is independent of the HRA and has an independent chair.

There are two potential areas of conflict between the HRA and NCoB.

1. Topic selection. The NCoB periodically seeks views on potential topics from various stakeholders and is also open to unsolicited recommendations. The Council maintains published criteria against which topics are selected, and there is an established process for taking views and exploring potential topics through the Council's Future Work Sub-Group and an Annual Forward Look meeting with external contributors. Decisions on topics to take forward are then taken by the full Council. In the event that the HRA were to make a recommendation to the Council as to a topic that it might consider, or to make representations to the Council about a proposed topic, the Chair of the Council would step out of the Future Work Sub-Group, and withdraw from any consideration of that issue in Council.

2. In relation to recommendations, where there is a potential for recommendations to be made to the HRA in a Council Report. This raises two issues, one concerning the development of recommendations, which takes place in the working party, with a sub-group of Council members (not including the Chair) identified to work with them to ensure a robust and high quality report. Here, if a conflict were to emerge over a particular recommendation, it could be managed by declaration and abstention from discussion, inviting the Council's Deputy Chair to chair that part of the Council meeting. The second issue concerns handling issues at the HRA, where the existing National Research Advisors' Panel would consider ethical matters as an independent advisory group to the HRA, which would expect to accept that advice, but in such an event the Chair would be absent from the part of the meeting in which the matter was being considered.

**NCOB Chair
June 2012**