

Recognising and dealing with conflicts of interest.

We all find ourselves having to balance competing interests from time to time. As a professional you need to be able to weigh up the pros and cons of different courses of action, know when you have enough information to support robust decisions, and reflect on and critically evaluate the approaches you have used. Being able to identify potential conflicts of interest, and knowing how to deal with them, is equally important. Amendments to the criteria for ClfA accreditation recognise this: at Associate grade, you are expected to be able to use established frameworks to recognise and resolve the conflicts of interest you encounter.

A conflict of interest may arise when there is a risk that your judgement or actions are, or could be, influenced or impaired by another interest. It is not unethical to have a conflict of interest, providing you manage it appropriately. Identifying and communicating the existence of a potential conflict of interest is usually the first step.

So what might constitute a conflict of interest? An obvious example would be where Person A is responsible for supervising or training Person B whom they have a personal relationship with. Conflicts of interest may be actual, potential or perceived – Person A may show Person B no favouritism, but others may assume or perceive that the conflict exists and this may impair Person A's ability to do an effective job.

Conflicts of interest are often linked to financial interests. Financial incentives to complete work ahead of a deadline could affect decisions about the nature and amount of work required. Specialists might find themselves being asked to advise on the potential for further work on an assemblage which they may then tender to undertake.

Potential conflicts can also arise out of competing loyalties. You might be working for an organisation advising a developer on a development near where you live that is unpopular (for reasons unconnected with the archaeological significance of the site) and wish to get involved in a residents' campaign to oppose it. Depending on your role and level of responsibility within the organisation, you may have little or no influence over the advice your organisation gives, but the developer may feel that the impartiality of that advice is compromised and challenge it as a result.

In all cases, the ClfA Code of conduct sets out a high-level framework to support archaeologists dealing with potential conflicts of interest. Depending on the nature of the potential conflict, the next port of call may be the relevant ClfA Standard, organisational policies and procedures, contractual documents or specialist good practice guidance. It won't be possible (or necessary) to avoid all potential conflicts of interest, but transparency is vital. If you identify a potential conflict and you tell the relevant people about it, applying the Codes of conduct and the other frameworks mentioned above (along with some common sense) will help you manage it professionally. If you don't recognise or think about the issues, it could lead to problems and even an allegation of professional misconduct.

You can find tools and resources for dealing with conflicts of interest, and other ethical issues, on our website at <https://www.archaeologists.net/membership/ethics>