

Information sheet on close relationships and conflicts of interest in appointment and habilitation procedures

General

- **Close relationships** within the meaning of this leaflet are certain connections between participants in appointment and habilitation procedures, that is between candidates, committee members, reviewers and representatives of the Equal Opportunities Working Party. The latter three groups of people are referred hereinafter as “persons involved in the procedure”.
- **All close relationships to candidates have to be disclosed in good time by the persons involved in the procedure.** Close relationships to other persons involved in the procedure have to be disclosed if the impression of a special dependency could arise.
- The closer a relationship between a person involved in the procedure and a candidate is, the more likely it is that this person has a **conflict of interest**. In case of a mentor relationship, there is always a conflict of interest.

Types of close relationships and conflicts of interest

- Any kind of **cooperation** (in research, teaching, science management, community services, public relations, etc.) represents a close relationship.
- Regular cooperation with a candidate, in particular close or long-term cooperation, makes it difficult to form an objective and independent judgment and is therefore to be regarded as a conflict of interest.
- Especially in case of collaborations in the last five years, it may be necessary to explain why there is no conflict of interest. The same applies if a future cooperation is currently being planned. In case of doubt, joint projects or publications in the last five years are to be regarded as a conflict of interest.
- A current **official relationship of dependency** (especially an immediate superiority or subordination) between a person involved in the procedure and a candidate generally constitutes a conflict of interest.
- A current **thesis supervision** between a person involved in the procedure and a candidate always constitutes a conflict of interest.
- In addition to work-related close relationships, there are also **private constellations**, in particular family, partnership, friendship, enmity. In case of such personal dependencies, a conflict of interest is generally to be assumed.
- Furthermore, a professional or private **competitive situation** can also cause a conflict of interest.
- **Special case of overlapping functions:** All persons involved in the procedure should be aware of their respective roles, and they should separate these roles accordingly. For example, you can have different interests as a member of a department management than as a member of an appointment committee.

Consequences in case of conflicts of interest

- In **habilitation procedures**, a conflict of interest towards the candidate excludes an activity as a person involved in the procedure in any case.
- In **appointment procedures**, the list of candidates is often not yet known when the persons involved in the procedure are appointed, and furthermore there are several applications, so in such cases it can be sufficient if the biased person abstains from the specific application. If, however, other committee members or the Equal Opportunities Working Party raise reasonable doubts about further participation, then the such biased person should resign from committee membership or not be commissioned with writing a review. The same applies if somebody has a conflict of interest towards several candidates.
- **Conflicts of interest between persons involved in the procedure:** If there is such a strong dependency that a person involved in the procedure cannot act sufficiently independently, then the committee should discuss which of the such involved persons should resign.