

Rules for Handling Conflicts of Interest in the Advisory Activity of the Senate Commissions of the DFG

Preamble

According to the organisation's statutes, the duties of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) include the provision of advice to parliaments and public interest bodies on issues regarding science and research.

Within the DFG, this duty is performed particularly by the Senate and the permanent Senate Commissions appointed by it for this purpose, as well as the other Senate Commissions; their work is based exclusively on research-driven objectives.

The independence of the persons involved is of great importance for the advisory duty and the acceptance of the advisory results. To ensure and document this, the rules laid down under section II 1 and 2 apply to the members and permanent guests of the DFG Senate Commissions and their subunits, such as working groups, as well as to the members of the commission secretariats.

The procedure for the implementation of the principles laid down in II 1 and 2 is regulated for the members and permanent guests of the Commissions under II 3 and for the members of the secretariats within the framework of the respective employment relationship.

I Members and Guests of Senate Commissions

Eligible to be appointed as members of a Commission are scientists and academics from universities or other public or publicly funded research institutions. If the special task of a Commission requires it, researchers from other organisations, e.g. in the industrial sector, are also eligible. However, researchers working at other organisations should be regularly involved in the activity of a Commission only as members of the subunits of the Commission. They may be appointed as members or permanent guests of a Commission if the Senate finds that only the selected person can provide the necessary expertise and that the person's participation in a subunit of the Commission is not sufficient for this purpose.

Scientists and academics from federal or state agencies whose ex-officio responsibilities lie within the scope of the activity of a Commission may participate as permanent guests.

Members of the Senate Commissions are appointed ad personam on the basis of their scientific expertise and receive no remuneration from the DFG for their participation.

II Conflicts of Interest

1 General principle

At each stage of advisory activity, the participation of persons who are subject to an objective conflict of interest that may cast doubt on the independence of their judgement must be avoided.

2 Criteria for the identification of conflicts of interest

Circumstances that may constitute a conflict of interest include in particular:

- personal economic interests, or financial interests of persons with whom a close personal relationship exists, that may directly or indirectly affect the outcome of the consultation as documented in a decision made by the Commission;
- close (paid or unpaid) collaboration (currently or within the past 12 months) with individuals or organisations for whom the Commission's decision may have economic implications;

- current or prospective funding of research projects undertaken by members or guests of the Commission provided by individuals or organisations for whom the Commission's decision may have economic implications.

3 Procedure

Members and permanent guests of the Commissions will be notified of the DFG Rules for Handling Conflicts of Interest prior to their first involvement.

Before commencing their participation in the Commission or after extending their membership, members and permanent guests must confirm in writing that they accept the rules on dealing with conflicts of interest and will always disclose in a timely manner any circumstances that could constitute a conflict of interest.

In addition, they, as well as any guests invited to a meeting of the Commission or one of its subunits, will be asked in the invitation letter to indicate in view of the agenda whether circumstances according to II 2 or other circumstances exist that may constitute a conflict of interest. The DFG Head Office must be notified of such circumstances in a timely manner in advance of the meeting.

Furthermore, the chairperson of the meeting will remind the participants before each meeting of the rules for handling conflicts of interest. Possible conflicts of interest should be disclosed no later than at this time.

After the disclosure, the chairperson of the meeting will decide (where appropriate in consultation with the DFG Head Office) whether the circumstances manifest a conflict of interest that precludes participation in the deliberations on the matter at hand. In this case, the person concerned must leave the meeting room for the duration of the deliberations on the relevant agenda item. The decision of the chairperson of the meeting must be documented in the minutes.

If the chairperson of the meeting (if necessary in consultation with the DFG Head Office) does not consider a disclosure to be indicative of a conflict of interest that requires exclusion, the person concerned may participate in the deliberations and decision-making following the disclosure. In this case, the disclosed facts and the reasons for permitting participation must be recorded in the minutes.

If it is established in retrospect that a person who was subject to a conflict of interest has participated in the deliberations, the chairperson of the meeting will decide (where appropriate in consultation with the DFG Head Office) whether the entire process of deliberations shall be repeated. This is the case if the person should not have been permitted to participate in the deliberations in accordance with paragraph 3 under this section.