

Conflict of Interest and Impartiality Policy

Document Owner: Director of Development

Approved By: Director of Development

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1. Purpose

The credibility of the Vegetarian Society's certification schemes depends upon certification decisions being made fairly, consistently and objectively.

This policy sets out the principles used to identify, manage and minimise conflicts of interest and to maintain impartiality throughout the certification process.

2. Commitment to Impartiality

The Vegetarian Society is committed to ensuring that certification decisions are based solely on the published certification criteria and the evidence provided by applicants.

Commercial, marketing or other external considerations shall not influence certification decisions.

3. Identifying Conflicts of Interest

A conflict of interest may arise where an individual involved in certification has a personal, financial or professional interest that could affect, or be perceived to affect, their objectivity.

Examples include:

- personal relationships with an applicant;
- financial interests in an applicant's business;

- previous involvement in developing or manufacturing the product being assessed;
- any other circumstance that could reasonably call impartiality into question.

4. Managing Conflicts

Any member of staff who identifies an actual or potential conflict of interest must notify their manager as soon as practicable.

Where a conflict exists, appropriate action may include:

- allocating the application to another Certification Assessor;
- obtaining a second technical opinion;
- escalating the decision to the Director of Development;
- seeking advice from an independent technical expert where appropriate.

5. Maintaining Impartiality

The Vegetarian Society supports impartial certification by:

- assessing products against published certification criteria;
- using documented assessment procedures;
- supporting assessments through the ingredient assessment system and technical knowledge base;
- recording certification decisions;
- escalating complex or novel technical issues where appropriate.

6. Responsibility

All staff involved in certification are responsible for maintaining impartiality and complying with this policy.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that potential conflicts are identified and managed appropriately.

7. Review

This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains appropriate to the operation of the Vegetarian Society's certification schemes and reflects good certification practice.