

B2-C1 Worksheet: Conflicts of Interest in the Civil Service (Administrative Law Focus)

Article

When Nadia joined a government procurement team, she expected paperwork. What she did not expect was how often a one-page declaration could change the mood of a room. Before any contract meeting, managers ask staff to keep an eye on their interests register, then confirm whether anything has shifted since the last update. Last month, Nadia was asked to approve a shortlist for a consultancy tender. Halfway through, she recognised a former colleague on the bidder list and chose to step aside, even though no one had suggested she should.

In administrative law, the point is not only actual bias but also the appearance of bias. Departments try to draw the line between legitimate expertise and improper influence, especially where public money is involved. Ethics officers carry out checks on gifts, hospitality and outside work, and some teams have begun to clamp down on side roles that sit too close to official duties. When a decision looks rushed or opaque, officials can come under fire from auditors, journalists or a court on judicial review. Internal guidance spell out when to declare an interest, record the steps taken and, if necessary, reassign the file.

For Nadia, the hardest part was practical: how to keep the work moving while staying impartial. Her director paired her with a colleague to work out a handover plan and document what she had seen before stepping away. If disclosures are missed, a team can end up in a formal inquiry, with sanctions that range from retraining to dismissal. Yet most days the system feels mundane: short declarations, tidy minutes and the discipline of asking who should be involved when officials sign off on decisions.

True/False

Decide if each statement is True (T) or False (F).

1. Nadia works on a government procurement team.
2. Before contract meetings, staff confirm their interests register is up to date.
3. Nadia stayed on the tender after recognising a former colleague because it was allowed.
4. Administrative law is concerned only with actual bias, not the appearance of bias.
5. Ethics officers check issues such as gifts, hospitality and outside work.
6. The department is loosening controls on side roles that overlap with official duties.
7. If disclosures are missed, the matter can escalate into an inquiry with sanctions.
8. Most of the system relies on routine records and clear minutes, not constant investigations.

Phrase Match

Match the phrases (1-10) to the correct definitions (A-J).

Phrases (1-10)	Definitions (A-J)
1. keep an eye on	A. remove yourself from a situation to avoid involvement
2. step aside	B. find a solution or understand something after thinking
3. draw the line	C. perform a task or duty
4. carry out	D. explain something clearly and in detail
5. clamp down on	E. be criticised strongly and publicly
6. come under fire	F. set a clear limit on what is acceptable
7. spell out	G. give formal approval for something
8. end up	H. take firm action to stop unwanted behaviour
9. work out	I. watch something carefully over time
10. sign off on	J. finally arrive in a particular situation or place

Synonym Match

Match the words (1-10) to the correct synonyms (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. impartiality	A. purchasing
2. recusal	B. violation
3. procurement	C. withdrawal
4. oversight	D. penalty
5. disclosure	E. adherence
6. breach	F. revelation
7. compliance	G. investigation
8. sanction	H. fairness
9. allegation	I. supervision
10. inquiry	J. accusation

Discussion Questions

Student A

1. Have you ever had to step aside from a decision because it felt awkward or unfair? What happened?
2. In your job, do you keep an eye on any rules about gifts, hospitality or side work?
3. What helps you draw the line between helping a friend and staying professional?
4. Have you ever had to carry out a procedure you did not fully agree with? How did you handle it?
5. What would make you feel confident to speak up if you thought a colleague might come under fire later?
6. Do you prefer clear written rules that spell out every step, or flexible guidance? Why?
7. How would you work out a quick handover if you suddenly could not stay on a case?
8. Have you ever signed off on something and then worried you had missed a detail?

Student B

1. Why does administrative law focus on the appearance of bias as well as actual bias?
2. Should public bodies clamp down on all outside work by civil servants, or only on high-risk roles?
3. When is recusal enough, and when should a decision be re-made from scratch?
4. How much disclosure is reasonable before it becomes invasive or discourages recruitment?
5. Do strict sanctions improve compliance, or do they mainly create box-ticking behaviour?
6. Should oversight be internal (within a department) or external (auditors, ombudsman, courts)?
7. How should procurement processes balance speed, value for money and impartiality during emergencies?
8. If a public official ends up in a conflict of interest unintentionally, what response is proportionate?

Answer Key

True/False: 1=T, 2=T, 3=F, 4=F, 5=T, 6=F, 7=T, 8=T

Phrase Match: 1=I, 2=A, 3=F, 4=C, 5=H, 6=E, 7=D, 8=J, 9=B, 10=G

Synonym Match: 1=H, 2=C, 3=A, 4=I, 5=F, 6=B, 7=E, 8=D, 9=J, 10=G