



## Royal College of Physicians Accreditation Unit Policy on independent consultancy by assessors

### About this document

This policy clarifies the Accreditation Unit's (AU) position and expectations of assessors providing consultancy to services. It applies to all professional and lay assessors working for one of the AU's accreditation schemes, referred to herein as assessors.

### Definitions

Consultancy relates to work delivered to a service outside of the normal accreditation pathway, either as an individual or part of an agency (of which they may be a director or employee). This work is delivered independently (ie not through the AU), and may or may not be to meet a scheme's accreditation standards. For example:

- review of service building plans or documents
- provision of templates or documents
- provision of advice and support.

A professional assessor is defined as any assessor who isn't a lay assessor (such as a clinical, nurse or management assessor).

### Guidelines for professional assessors

If assessors provide consultancy in addition to their role with the AU it is their responsibility to be aware of and avoid any perception of conflict of interest. This is to ensure services are assured of the impartiality of the AU. Any consultancy must be conducted privately, not involve the AU in anyway and comply with the guidelines in this policy.

Assessors must not offer consultancy during the assessment process, training days, or during any other activity carried out on behalf of the AU. Assessors must not provide any consultancy to a service for which they are part of the assessment team within 2 years of the date of the site assessment.

If a service requests consultancy from an assessor who is assessing the service then the assessor should decline and state that it would be a conflict of interest. We also request that assessor notifies the AU of this request.

Assessors that provide consultancy must make it clear that this is not linked to an accreditation scheme run by the AU in any way, or use the RCP or AU, or its schemes, in any promotional material or stationery. Assessors must make it clear that provision of consultancy does not guarantee the award of accreditation.

Assessors must make a full declaration of interests to the AU of any consultancy work that they provide, either directly or indirectly (for example, advising a company that provides consultancy). Assessors must make a declaration when the interest or potential interest arises, and at the expression of interest stage of the assessment. The AU considers any previous consultancy provided to a service as a potential conflict of interest.

## Guidelines for lay assessors

Lay assessors provide an independent and objective review of a clinical service from a patient’s perspective. Therefore, lay assessors must not provide consultancy to any healthcare services, regardless of whether the AU operates an accreditation scheme in that particular clinical service.

## Quality improvement services offered by the AU

In November 2016, the Clinical Service Accreditation Alliance published standards that will be used to assess clinical accreditation schemes. These standards require clear separation of the assessment of clinical services from any provision of consultancy type advice, such as a Quality Improvement Support (QIS) service, to minimise any potential conflict of interest arising from the decision making process in awarding accreditation. As such, the AU no longer provides a QIS service nor can it recommend any third party quality improvement services.

## Code of conduct

The assessor code of conduct contains further information, and can be accessed at the following website: [www.rcplondon.ac.uk/about-rcp/our-aims/college-reports/documents-and-policies](http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/about-rcp/our-aims/college-reports/documents-and-policies). This policy is in addition to the assessor code of conduct and all assessors are expected to adhere to both policies.

The AU will review each case of conflict of interest objectively. A written determination of whether a conflict exists will be filed and sent to the assessor involved.

## Further information

For further information on this policy, please contact the AU. If an assessor is unsure whether they are involved in work, or could be involved in work, which would be in contravention of this policy then they are strongly encouraged to proactively discuss this with the AU.

Document control	
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