

SHFG Partnership and funding policy

This policy is applicable to members of the SHFG only, and not those in the wider Health Behaviours team or Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences.

Definitions:

- 5 • **Partnership:** working *with* an organisation e.g., co-production with grassroots organisations, co-applicants on grants, sites in which field trials are conducted;
- **Funding:** any financial incentive e.g., grant/fellowship, consultancy fee, prize, free conference position.
- **Conflict of interest:** when an individual/organisation has an incentive to take actions
- 10 that breach their underlying obligation or role¹

Background

Much of our research is facilitated upon the receipt of external funding (e.g. to pay salaries, research costs, bench fees). Significant evidence demonstrates the attempts made by certain commodity industries to shape the production of knowledge in ways that favours them and their profits. Specific and extensive evidence documents how the commercial food and drinks industry (hereafter 'food industry') have used research funding to their advantage, and at the expense of scientific rigour (e.g., ²⁻⁴). Such actions have been attributed to inherent differences in the primary goals of academia and the food industry,⁵ which mean that when partnerships or funding is exchanged between academia and the food industry, conflicts of interests can arise. Where and how that partnership and funding are acquired influences the scientific integrity of the resultant research, and in turn the reputation of those associated with the research.

Risks associated with partnerships and funding may be particularly high for research commonly undertaken in SHFG, which is often used to inform regulation that affects the food industry and potentially, their profitability. Our work also touches on risk from other industries, such as risk from gambling, alcohol, tobacco, and oil. Because of their increasing reach into primary prevention (and in particular weight management), pharmaceutical industries may also have interests that are in conflict with our academic goals. From herein, reference to 'industry' refers to commercial activities of manufacturers, retailers or distributors of food, beverages, gambling, alcohol, tobacco, oil and pharmaceuticals.

To mitigate this risk, we are developing clear and enforceable guidelines within this policy that aim to ensure:

1. Ethical partnerships and funding (see 'definitions') is taken by SHFG members, which does not undermine the integrity or reputation of research/researchers;
2. Decisions made about partnerships and funding are transparent to both SHFG members and the general public;
- 5 3. Decisions made in regard to (1) and (2) are fair as possible to SHFG members, without undermining the integrity or reputation of the SHFG group overall.

We aim to publish this policy on the SHFG webpages.

Sources

10 There is no internationally agreed guidance for interacting with industry, so we drew on existing guidance:⁶

Avoiding conflicts of interest and reputational risks associated with population research on food and nutrition: the Food Research risk (FoRK) guidance and toolkit for researchers.

Cullerton K, Adams J, Forouhi N, Francis O, White M. BMJ 2024.

<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2023-077908>

15 We also draw on comparable examples of partnership, funding, or sponsorship policies.⁷

Principles of partnership and funding

Partnership and funding decisions will adhere to the following rules:

1. **Partnership:** SHFG members can undertake research *with but not for* industry.
2. **Funding:** SHFG members will not accept any real funding from industry. Note that
20 some in kind funding is permissible, but it would need to be logged in a register of interests e.g. free position at an industry partially/indirectly funded conference (but not an honorarium).
3. **Gifts:** Gifts from industry (any item/service not integral to the performance of work-
25 related activities e.g. hospitality, chocolates etc.) cannot be accepted if they exceed £20 in value. If it is not clear whether the gift exceeds this value, then it should not be accepted. Note that this threshold is arbitrary and will be reviewed during the annual policy review process. The purpose is to exclude trivial gifts from the policy (e.g. pens borrowed during business meetings).

30 All activities that fall under the 'partnership' category will be monitored in a SHFG register of interests (stored in SHFG shared drives; only shared outside the group upon request).

Guiding decisions about partnership and funding: the FoRK toolkit

To follow the principles, SHFG members will use tool A and B from the FoRK toolkit (see appendix). These are supplied in an appendix and summarised below:

5 **Tool A:** matrix designed to be used to assess risks associated with both the type of food sector organisation AND the type of interaction.

Tool B: is a 'thinking tool' to identify the risks and benefits of interacting with a commercial food sector organisation and the likelihood of these risks and benefits occurring.

Process and oversight

10 The SHFG Senior Team (consisting of all group members at grade 8 or higher) will be responsible for assuring adherence to this policy. This will include the following activities:

- Deciding on whether proposed activity falls within the category of 'partnership' or 'funding'.
- Monitoring and updating the register of interests.
- Deciding on whether to proceed with proposed partnerships based on completion of the FoRK tools.
- 15 • Reviewing this partnership and funding policy on an annual basis.

20 This partnership and funding policy was agreed on the 30th June 2025. It applies to all new funding and partnerships within the SHFG from the date of this policy. It does not apply in retrospect.

References

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- 25 3. Mialon, M., Ho, M., Carriedo, A., Ruskin, G. & Crosbie, E. Beyond nutrition and physical activity : food industry shaping of the very principles of scientific integrity. 1–13 (2021).
- 30 4. Pedroza-Tobias, A., Crosbie, E., Mialon, M., Carriedo, A. & Schmidt, L. A. Food and beverage industry interference in science and policy: efforts to block soda tax

implementation in Mexico and prevent international diffusion. *BMJ Glob Health* **6**, e005662 (2021).

5. White, M. *et al.* What role should the commercial food system play in promoting health through better diet? *BMJ* **368**, m545–m545 (2020).
- 5 6. Cullerton, K., Adams, J., Forouhi, N. G., Francis, O. & White, M. Avoiding conflicts of interest and reputational risks associated with population research on food and nutrition: the Food Research risk (FoRK) guidance and toolkit for researchers. *BMJ* e077908 (2024) doi:10.1136/bmj-2023-077908.
7. The Association of Directors of Public Health. *The Association of Directors of Public Health Ethical Collaboration and Sponsorship Policy About ADPH.*
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