

NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL SERVICE CODE OF ETHICS

1. Civil Service values

- 1.1 The Civil Service supports Ministers in developing and implementing their policies, and in delivering public services. Civil servants are accountable to Ministers.
- 1.2 As a civil servant, you are appointed on merit on the basis of fair and open competition and are expected to carry out your role with dedication and a commitment to the Civil Service and its core values: integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality. In this Code:
 - a) ‘integrity’ is putting the obligations of public service above your own personal interests;
 - b) ‘honesty’ is being truthful and open;
 - c) ‘objectivity’ is basing your advice and decisions on rigorous analysis of the evidence; and
 - d) ‘impartiality’ is acting solely according to the merits of the case and serving equally well Ministers of different political persuasions.
- 1.3 These core values support good government and ensure the achievement of the highest possible standards in all that the Civil Service does. This in turn helps the Civil Service to gain and retain the respect of Ministers, the Assembly, the public and its customers.
- 1.4 This Code sets out the standards of behaviour expected of you and all other civil servants. These are based on the core values. Individual departments may also have their own separate mission and values statements based on the core values, including the standards of behaviour expected of you when you deal with your colleagues.

2. Standards of Behaviour

2.1 Integrity

2.1.1 You must:

- a) fulfill your duties and obligations responsibly;
- b) always act in a way that is professionalⁱ, and that deserves and retains the confidence of all those with whom you have dealings;
- c) make sure public money and other resources are used properly and efficiently;
- d) deal with the public and their affairs fairly, efficiently, promptly, effectively and sensitively, to the best of your ability;
- e) handle information as openly as possible within the legal framework; and,

f) comply with the law and uphold the administration of justice.

2.1.2 You must not:

- a) misuse your official position, for example by using information acquired in the course of your official duties to further your private interests or those of others;
- b) accept gifts or hospitality or receive other benefits from anyone which might reasonably be seen to compromise your personal judgement or integrity; or
- c) disclose official information without authority. This duty continues to apply after you leave the Civil Service.

2.2 Honesty

2.2.1 You must:

- a) set out the facts and relevant issues truthfully, and correct any errors as soon as possible; and
- b) use resources only for the authorised public purposes for which they are provided.

2.2.2 You must not:

- a) deceive or knowingly mislead Ministers, the Assembly, or others; or
- b) be influenced by improper pressures from others for the prospect of personal gain.

2.3 Objectivity

2.3.1 You must:

- a) provide information and advice, including advice to Ministers, on the basis of the evidence, and accurately present the options and facts;
- b) take decisions on the merits of the case; and
- c) take due account of expert and professional advice.

2.3.2 You must not:

- a) ignore inconvenient facts or relevant considerations when providing advice or making decisions; or
- b) frustrate the implementation of policies once decisions are taken by declining to take, or abstaining from, action which flows from those decisions.

2.4 Impartiality

2.4.1 You must:

- a) carry out your responsibilities in a way that is fair, just and equitable and reflects the Civil Service commitment to equality and diversity and the obligations of your department or agency under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

2.4.2 You must not:

- a) act in a way that unjustifiably favours or discriminates against particular individuals or interests.

2.5 Political Impartiality

2.5.1 You must:

- a) serve Ministers, whatever their political persuasion, to the best of your ability in a way which maintains political impartiality and is in line with the requirements of this Code, no matter what your own political beliefs are;
- b) act in a way which deserves and retains the confidence of Ministers, while at the same time ensuring that you will be able to establish the same relationship with those whom you may be required to serve in the future; and
- c) comply with any restrictions that have been laid down on your political activities.

2.5.2 You must not:

- a) act in a way that is determined by party political considerations, or use official resources for party political purposes; or
- b) allow your personal political views to determine any advice you give or your actions.

3. Rights and Responsibilities

3.1 Your department or agency has a duty to make you aware of this Code and its values. If you believe that you are being required to act in a way which conflicts with this Code, your department or agency must consider your concern, and make sure that you are not penalised for raising it.

3.2 If you have a concern, you should start by talking to your line manager or someone else in your line management chain. If for any reason you would find this difficult, you should raise the matter with your department's nominated officers who have been appointed to advise staff on the Code.

3.3 If you become aware of actions by others which you believe conflict with this Code you should report this to your line management chain; alternatively you may wish to seek

advice from your nominated officer. You should report evidence of criminal or unlawful activity to the police or other appropriate authorities.

- 3.4 If you have raised a matter covered in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.3, in accordance with the relevant proceduresⁱⁱ, and do not receive what you consider to be a reasonable response from your department or agency, you may report the matter to the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Irelandⁱⁱⁱ. The Commissioners will also consider taking a complaint direct. Their address is:

Office of the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland
5th Floor
Windsor House
Bedford Street
Belfast BT2 7SR
Email: ocsc@nics.gov.uk

- 3.5 If the matter cannot be resolved using the procedures set out above, and you feel you cannot carry out the instructions you have been given, you will have to resign from the Civil Service.
- 3.6 This Code is part of the contractual relationship^{iv} between you and your employer. It sets out the high standards of behaviour expected of you which follow from your position in public and national life as a civil servant. You can take pride in living up to these values.

ⁱ Including taking account of ethical standards governing particular professions.

ⁱⁱ The Whistleblowing legislation (the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998) may also apply in some circumstances. The Standards of Conduct Policy of the NICS Staff Handbook gives more information.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Civil Service Commissioners' Appeals leaflet gives more information: www.nicscommissioners.org. This Code does not cover HR management issues.

^{iv} The NICS HR Handbook outlines contractual responsibilities for Northern Ireland Civil Servants.