

# **CODE OF CONDUCT FOR EMPLOYEES OF THE STAFF COMMISSION FOR EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARDS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This Code of Conduct for employees of the Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards has been prepared following a recommendation (number 47 in the First Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life) that it should be mandatory for the board of each executive Non Departmental Public Body to adopt a Code of Conduct for its employees.

## **DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. Employees should familiarise themselves with the contents of the Code and should act in accordance with the principles set out in it.
2. Employees have a duty to:-
  - discharge public functions reasonably and in accordance with the law;
  - recognise ethical standards governing particular professions.

The Commission Secretary has overall responsibility, working under the Commission, for propriety in a broad sense, including conduct and discipline.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

3. Employees should be aware:-
  - of their accountability to the Commission;
  - of the respective roles of the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI) and the Commission as set out in the Management Framework Document;
  - that the Minister responsible for the Commission is ultimately accountable to Parliament for its independence, effectiveness and efficiency.

The Commission has responsibilities as an employer. These are set out in the Code of Practice for Commission Members.

4. Employees should conduct themselves with integrity, impartiality and honesty. They should not deceive or knowingly mislead the Commission, DENI, Ministers, Parliament or the public.

## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

5. Employees should abide by the rules adopted by the Commission in relation to:-

- private interest and possible conflict with public duty;
- the disclosure of official information; and
- political activities.

They should not misuse their official position or information acquired in their official duties to further their private interests or those of others. Key members of staff, such as the Secretary, Deputy Secretary and staff working on contracts, should ensure that any possible conflicts of interest are identified at an early stage and that appropriate action is taken to resolve them.

## **INTEGRITY**

6. Employees should not use their official position to receive, agree to accept or attempt to obtain any payment or other consideration for doing, or not doing, anything or showing favour, or disfavour, to any person. They should not receive benefits of any kind from a third party which might reasonably be seen to compromise their personal judgement and integrity. Under the Prevention of Corruption Act 1916, employees of public bodies may be required to prove that the receipt of payment or other consideration from someone seeking to obtain a contract is not corrupt.

## **RELATIONS WITH THE PUBLIC**

7. Employees who deal with the affairs of the public should do so sympathetically, efficiently, promptly and without bias or maladministration. They should offer the public the highest standards of conduct and service.

## **USE OF RESOURCES**

8. Employees should endeavour to ensure the proper, economical, effective and efficient use of resources.

## **OFFICIAL INFORMATION**

9. Employees owe a general duty of confidentiality to their employer at common law. They are required, therefore, to protect official information held in confidence. Nothing in the Code should be taken as overriding existing statutory or common law obligations to keep confidential or, in appropriate cases, to disclose certain information.

## **STAFF CONCERNS ABOUT IMPROPER CONDUCT**

10. If employees believe they are being required to act in a way which:-
  - is illegal, improper, or unethical;
  - is in breach of a professional code;

- may involve possible maladministration, fraud or misuse of public funds;
- is otherwise inconsistent with this Code;

they should either raise the matter through the management line or else approach in confidence a nominated official or Commission member entrusted with the duty of investigating concerns about illegal, improper or unethical behaviour. Employees should also draw attention to cases where there is evidence of criminal or unlawful activity by others and may also report cases where they believe there is evidence of irregular or improper behaviour elsewhere in the organisation, but where they have not been personally involved, or if they are required to act in a way which, for them, raises a fundamental issue of conscience.

11. Where an employee has reported a matter covered in paragraph 10 above and believes that the response does not represent a reasonable response to the grounds of his or her concern, he or she may report the matter in writing to a nominated official in DENI who will investigate the matter further. Appendix A provides information on the reporting of allegations of improper conduct to the Department of Education.

#### **AFTER LEAVING EMPLOYMENT**

12. Employees should continue to observe their duties of confidentiality (see paragraph 9 above) after they have left the employment of the public body. Employees should be made aware of any rules on the acceptance of business appointments after resignation or retirement.

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**The Seven Principles of Public Life**

**Selflessness**

Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

**Integrity**

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

**Objectivity**

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

**Accountability**

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

**Openness**

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

**Honesty**

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

**Leadership**

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example

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The Government endorsed the Seven Principles of Public Life in "Spending Public Money: Governance and Audit Issues", Cm 3179, March 1996