



STAFF HANDBOOK

Under Review

January 2008

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Introduction

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is the organisation through which the Government channels its support for the Arts. It is a statutory body and is governed by a Council of up to fifteen members. The Council is advised by various panels and committees which it appoints. Its policies and programmes are implemented by an executive staff headed by the Chief Executive.

The purpose of the Staff Handbook is to provide staff with basic information about the Council, conditions of employment, codes of practice, and key internal policies and procedures.

The Council aims to provide and promote a safe and harmonious working environment where all employees are treated with dignity and respect based on the fundamental principles of fairness and equality for all.

In serving its clients and the public, the Council is also committed to the public service values of: selflessness; integrity; objectivity; accountability; openness; honesty and leadership.

It is the responsibility of everyone to ensure these principles are upheld in all dealings with staff, clients and the public.

In all situations, the Council will act in accordance with current legislation and regulations on employment, equality, health and safety, information processing and data protection as they apply to Northern Ireland.

The handbook does not give full details in every area and reference is made to policy documents and other sources where more detailed information may be obtained. Where these are Arts Council publications, hyperlinks are inserted in the handbook. Where it has no policies or procedures of its own or where policies require periodic updating, the Council normally follows those contained in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Staff Handbook. The Council's Director of Corporate Services retains a copy of the NICS Staff Handbook which may be consulted if required.

Each member of staff is issued with a copy of the Arts Council's Staff Handbook on joining the Council. Thereafter, updates are made electronically and made available to all staff via the public server and/or the internal website. Staff will be advised when such updates are issued.

Cross Referenced Links in this Handbook

This 'core' section of the Staff Handbook contains references to policies which you can link to automatically when you access the electronic version of this document on the Public Server. Most of the policies are already in place. Others are under development or are being reviewed. In other cases we use the relevant NICS policy. The status of each policy can be seen in the table below.

Key: P = in Place; D = in Development; R = being Revised; N = NICS Handbook

Hyperlink in Text	Filename on Public Server	Status
Equal Opportunity Policy	Appendix H	P
Joint Declaration of Protection	Appendix K Cover	P
Employment Procedures	Appendix A (rev Nov03)	P
Overtime Entitlement	Appendix B	P
Policy on Employer's Discretions	Appendix P	P
Performance Management System	PMS Guidance Notes (in ACNI PMS folder – a separate folder on the server)	P
Staff Development and Training	Appendix Q	P
Sabbatical Leave, Career Breaks etc	Appendix C	P
Flexible Working Hours	Appendix O	P
Annual Leave Arrangements	Annual Special & Sick Leave Policy	R
Management of Sickness Policy	Sickness Absence Policy	P
NICS Maternity, Paternity and Adoptive Leave Arrangements	Maternity Arrangements	N
Working Time Regulations	Appendix M	P
Health & Safety at Work Policy	Appendix D	P
Fire & Emergency Evacuations Procedures	Fire & Emergency Evacuations Procedures	P
Lone Workers Policy	Appendix R	P
Harassment in the Workplace	Appendix I	R
Code of Conduct	Code of Conduct	R
Disciplinary Procedure	Appendix E – Disciplinary	R
Grievance Procedure	Appendix E – Grievance	R
Redundancy Agreement	Appendix J	P
Internet and Email Policy	Internet and Email Policy	R
Whistleblowing Policy	Whistleblowing Policy	P

Section 1: Recruitment and Retention of Staff

1.1 Equal Opportunity Policy

It is the Arts Council's intention to ensure equal opportunity for all job applicants and employees and to eradicate direct or indirect discrimination so that no person shall receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of sex, marital status, religious belief, political opinion, disability, ethnic origins, sexual orientation, age or Trade Union membership or shall be disadvantaged by any conditions or requirements which are neither justified nor required for the job.

All recruitment, promotion and training opportunities will be based on merit as measured by qualifications, experience, ability, personal attributes and job performance. The Arts Council will also apply equal opportunity principles to all personnel matters such as pay, staff reporting, redundancy, disciplinary and grievance procedures.

Click to read the full text of the Council's [Equal Opportunity Policy](#)

The Arts Council has also signed an agreement with the trade union, NIPSA, for the protection of employees in line with best practice under fair employment.

Click to read the full text of the [Joint Declaration of Protection](#)

1.2 Employment Procedures

The Council has clear employment procedures which cover all aspects of the recruitment process including the advertising of vacancies, the composition of selection panels, shortlisting and interviewing of candidates, appointment and probationary periods.

The employment procedures also detail the Council's policy on internal promotions and transfers, the upgrading of posts, and the employment of temporary or casual staff.

Click to read the full text of the Council's [Employment Procedures](#)

All staff at the Council are appointed at NI Civil Service grades and paid accordingly. Performance pay on a rising scale is normally paid on 1 August following the satisfactory completion of the stated probationary period and on 1 April each year thereafter subject to satisfactory performance until the maximum of the range is reached.

Details of any changes to personal details (e.g. address, telephone number, contact information) must be notified to the Director of Corporate Services.

The Director of Corporate Services is available to discuss any personnel or confidential matters with staff on an individual or group basis.

1.3 Pay Arrangements

Salaries are paid directly by credit transfer into each employee's bank account. Each month's salary is equal to one-twelfth of the annual salary.

Substitution Pay

This is paid to an employee who has been required to carry out the full duties and responsibilities of an absent officer in a higher grade for a period of at least five consecutive working days provided that the higher grade officer is absent for reasons other than in the course of his/her duties.

It is for line managers to assess the needs of their department or section. Paid substitution is agreed in advance by the departmental director in consultation with the Chief Executive and arrangements for paying it are made by the Director of Corporate Services.

Overtime Payments

Excess hours worked must be authorised in advance by the Head of Department or other appropriate senior officer. Staff below Staff Officer grade are entitled to overtime payments or time off in lieu (TOIL). [Click to read more about Overtime Entitlement.](#)

Advances of Salary

Arts Council staff may apply for advances of salary for certain approved purposes. In all cases where an advance of salary is required the initial application must be made in writing to the Director of Corporate Services stating the purpose for which the advance is required.

Long Service Awards

On completing twenty years' service with the Council employees are presented with a long service award (currently £200 taxable).

Pay Queries

Any queries relating to an individual's pay or deductions should be directed to the Finance Department. More general enquiries should be made to the Director of Corporate Services/Human Resources Officer.

1.4 Pension Arrangements

The Arts Council's permanent staff are pensionable under the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) scheme and participants in that scheme are contracted out of the state pension scheme. The scheme applies to staff over the age of 18 and under 65, contracted to work fifteen hours or more per week. The scheme is operated on a non-contributory basis.

There is provision within the scheme for the purchase of added years or additional voluntary contributions. Further details of this provision and other information may be obtained from the Director of Corporate Services.

Staff not in the pension scheme, those under the statutory retirement age (60 for women and 65 for men) working less than fifteen hours per week and staff under the age of 18, pay the contracted-in rate of National Insurance contributions to participate in the state earnings related scheme.

Permanent staff who suffer injury or disease as a direct result of their employment with the Arts Council, such as to impair their earning capacity, are entitled to receive injury benefits in compensation within the provision of the pension scheme.

The Council's official retirement age is 65 years for both men and women though the Council reserves the right in any individual case to review the position at any time after age 60 having regard to the efficient interests of the Council's business.

The Arts Council can exercise certain discretions in pension arrangements for employees under the NILGOSC scheme. Click to read the full text of the Council's [Policy on Employer's Discretions](#)

1.5 Additional Benefits

Staff can benefit from Civil Service rates for full health care insurance through BUPA or can obtain restricted insurance through the Benenden Health Care Society.

Staff can also avail of a confidential counselling and support service through Staff Care Services. The 24-hour Careline is available on Freephone 0500 127079.

Staff also have access to the services of the Civil Service Benevolent Fund.

Staff can avail of a Childcare Vouchers scheme whereby you can sacrifice, (give up), part of your salary for childcare vouchers and the chosen provider is Employers for Childcare.

Further information on any of these services is available from the Director of Corporate Services/Human Resources Officer.

1.6 Resigning from the Arts Council

If a member of staff wishes to leave the Council's service, he/she should submit a resignation letter to the Director of Corporate Services. Appropriate notice, as specified on individual contracts of employment, must be given though consideration will be given to a reduced period of notice if possible.

The member of staff will be offered an optional confidential 'Leaver's Interview' with the Director of Corporate Services. This is to help identify any issues which may have led to the person's resignation and to see what steps can be taken to address such issues in the future.

If the member of staff has any annual leave or TOIL outstanding, this may either be taken during the period of notice (with the agreement of the Head of Department) or payment may be made in lieu of annual leave and/or TOIL in the final pay.

If the member of staff has been with the NILGOSC Pension Scheme, he/she will receive the relevant forms regarding his/her pension arrangements.

The member of staff will normally receive their final pay, together with their P45 form, at the end of the pay month closest to their last working day with the Council. Any outstanding advances of salary or other debts due to the Arts Council must be repaid or deducted from final pay.

Before leaving, the member of staff must return any equipment they have been issued with such as keys, mobile phone or IT equipment.

Section 2: Staff Development

2.1 Introduction

The Arts Council aims to be a learning organisation where people, systems and processes are continually improving to enhance the service the Council delivers to its clients. The Council is committed to developing its staff in line with the key principles of the Investors in People standard.

To achieve and maintain this standard, the Council operates a Performance Management System which is supported by a Training and Development Policy. Effective communication contributes to a learning organisation and this is achieved through monthly departmental meetings, cross departmental team meetings, biannual staff conferences, the Council's IT systems, and regular meetings between line management and staff.

2.2 Performance Management System

The objective of the Performance Management System is to ensure that top-level strategic plans are cascaded down to an individual level so that staff can readily see how their job contributes to the work of the Council. The main components of the system are:

- Personal Performance Agreement (PPA)
- Personal Development Plan (PDP)
- Interim Review(s)
- Annual Performance Review Report

The Personal Performance Agreement sets out a programme of work for the year ahead against which an individual will be assessed. The PPA also links individual performance to the Council's annual Business Plan. The PPA is drawn up and agreed between the line manager and the jobholder in March/April. A Personal Development Plan (PDP) is also agreed at this stage. This identifies any training or development activities needed and a plan to carry out those activities.

An Interim Review, held around September/October gives both the jobholder and his/her manager an opportunity to assess performance to date, review any development undertaken and to plan any further actions required to meet the individual's objectives.

The system comes full circle the following March/April when an Annual Performance Review is undertaken and a new PPA and PDP drawn up for the year ahead.

Click to read full details of the Council's [Performance Management System](#)

2.3 Training and Development

The Council recognises that the staff within the Council are the key to its success. The Council will help to realise the full potential of all staff and increase job satisfaction by providing opportunities and resources to undertake staff development activities consistent with meeting personal, professional and organisational objectives.

The primary mechanism for identifying training and development needs is through the Performance Management System and the drawing up of Personal Development Plans. There is also the facility to satisfy ad hoc developmental needs as and when they arise throughout the year.

The Council will also consider providing assistance with relevant further and higher education programmes.

Click to read full details of the Council's [Staff Development and Training Policy](#).

2.4 Sabbatical Leave, Career Breaks and Study Visits

Staff can avail of opportunities to develop themselves through short term study visits of up to three weeks duration; sabbatical leave of up to six months; or a career break of between one and three years maximum.

Click to read full details of the Council's policy on [Sabbatical Leave, Career Breaks & Study Visits](#).

Section 3: Attendance and Leave Arrangements

3.1 Introduction

The aim of Arts Council's policies and procedures for managing attendance is to provide a flexible working environment to meet, as far as reasonably possible, the personal and business needs of staff and the Council. A high level of attendance at work makes a significant contribution to the provision of an effective service to clients and is a major factor in maintaining staff morale.

Staff have a responsibility to inform the Council if they are absent from the office. Absence can be due to sickness, holiday leave, flexi-leave, time off in lieu (TOIL) or client visits.

For planned absences, staff should keep their electronic schedules and leave cards up to date. Members of staff absent on business must notify their department where they are and if possible give a contact number.

For unplanned absences, such as sickness, staff should inform the Director of Corporate Services, their line manager or the Corporate Services Departmental Support Officer as soon as possible.

For a variety of reasons, including the health and safety of all staff, the attendance sheet and name board at Reception should be kept up to date.

It is the responsibility of individual departments, not Reception, to deal with callers for absent members of staff.

3.2 Flexible Working Hours (FWH)

The main purpose of FWH is to provide a more flexible system of attendance for staff i.e. to provide a 'work-life balance'. Individuals on FWH have considerable scope to vary their times of arrival and departure from work, to vary the length and timing of their lunch break and to take time off if they work extra hours. There is, however, a guiding and over-riding principle that this flexibility should be achieved without adverse effect on the overall efficiency of the Arts Council or on its service to the public.

For a small number of posts at the Arts Council, FWH does not apply. The number of hours which people work on FWH is the same overall as the time put in by their non-FWH colleagues.

The Arts Council's standard hours of business are:

- **Monday to Thursday** **0900 to 1300 and 1400 to 1730**
- **Friday** **0900 to 1300 and 1400 to 1700**

This 37-hour week can serve as a useful comparison with hours actually worked, so that people on FWH can calculate at any time whether they have time in hand or time to make up. Where staff are required to work outside these hours overtime and TOIL arrangements apply.

The daily 'core times' during which staff must be present are:

- **Monday to Friday** **1000 to 1200 and 1400 to 1600**

A half hour lunch break must be taken each day.

The times when the Arts Council premises are open for work are:

- **Monday to Thursday** **0800 to 1830**
- **Friday** **0800 to 1800**

Staff on FWH may choose to work their 37-hour week within these opening hours.

FWH is accounted for in four-weekly periods. Staff may take up to three days flexi leave during any one period in full or half day breaks; and may carry forward a credit of three working days (22½ hours) or a debit of two days (15 hours) to the next period. Staff must keep their FWH records up to date at all times.

Click to read full details of the Council's policy on [Flexible Working Hours](#).

3.3 Overtime and Time Off In Lieu (TOIL)

There is a clear distinction between extra hours which individuals personally **choose** to work as part of their flexi-time arrangements and additional time which **must** be worked outside the Council's normal hours of business (Monday-Thursday 0900-1730; Friday 0900-1700).

Such additional time may attract time off in lieu (TOIL) or, for staff below Staff Officer grade only, overtime payments and/or TOIL. All such overtime must be authorised in advance.

All TOIL must be taken before the end of the holiday year (February each year) except for TOIL worked during February which can be carried forward into the new Annual Leave year.

Click to read more about [Overtime Entitlement](#).

3.4 Annual Leave

Staff are entitled to paid leave which varies with grade and length of service. The Arts Council's annual leave year is 1 March to 28/29 February. Requests for leave will not be refused unreasonably, but Heads of Department have to take into account the overall needs of the Council when approving leave. Staff should therefore apply for leave as far in advance as possible of the requested dates using the Arts Council's official leave card.

The Arts Council's premises are closed over the Christmas/New Year period. Staff are therefore requested to reserve 2-3 days of their annual leave, flexi leave or TOIL to be taken over this period. In compensation for this, two ex-gratia half days are granted on Good Friday and the last day before the Christmas break each year.

Up to nine days may be carried forward into the following leave year.

Click to read full details of the Council's [Annual Leave Arrangements](#).

3.5 Sickness Absence

An employee who cannot attend because of sickness should inform the Director of Corporate Services (or, if they cannot be contacted, their Head of Department or the Corporate Services Departmental Support Officer) as soon as possible after 9.00am on the first day of sickness indicating the likely duration of the absence.

If none of these three members of staff can be contacted the absence should be reported to the Departmental Support Officer in Corporate Services. In exceptional circumstances if the member of staff is incapable of making contact, a relative or friend may do so on their behalf.

For all absences of seven days or less (including weekends) the member of staff must complete one of the Arts Council's self-certification forms. The self-certification form must be completed immediately on return to work.

If the absence is for more than seven days, a doctor's medical certificate must be obtained and sent immediately to the Departmental Support Officer in Corporate Services.

For absences of one day or less due to an appointment with a dentist, doctor, hospital or other medical practitioner, the employee should endeavour to find the most convenient time. The Director of Corporate Services should be informed of the absence before it occurs.

Heads of Department, with assistance from the Director of Corporate Services, monitor staff attendance records. Where an individual's level of attendance is showing cause for concern, the Head of Department may request a meeting to identify any ongoing difficulties which the staff member is experiencing and to agree with him/her what action may be necessary.

Sickness will be monitored each month and action will be taken at the following trigger points:

- 3 days or 2 occasions within 3 months
- 5 days or 3 occasions within 6 months
- 10 days or 4 occasions within 12 months

Click to read full details of the Council's [Management of Sickness Policy \(based on DCAL guidelines\)](#).

3.6 Special Leave

Public Duties

An employee, who fulfils certain public duties agreed with the Chief Executive, is entitled to reasonable time off with pay to fulfil these duties.

Union Duties and Activities

Reasonable time off with pay will be given to officials of trade unions recognised by the Arts Council to carry out union duties or undergo training relevant to their union activities.

Additionally unpaid special leave may be allowed in line with NICS Terms and Conditions of Service Code paragraph 665(ii) to members of unions recognised by the Arts Council to take part in union activities.

Special Circumstances

Examples of these are set out below together with the maximum amount of paid special leave which may be granted:

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) | death of a close relative | Up to 5 days |
| | (Defined in NICS Handbook as partner, child, parent, brother or sister) | |
| (b) | serious illness of a close relative | Up to 5 days |
| (c) | urgent domestic crises | Up to 5 days |
| (d) | reserve or cadet forces training/ service | As provided in NICS Code |

Special leave in the above circumstances may be granted at the discretion of the Head of Department after consulting the Director of Corporate Services.

Marriage/Civil Partnership leave: members of staff who joined the Arts Council prior to 1st September 1990 may be entitled to special leave in accordance with NICS regulations.

Jury Service

Members of staff who are summoned for jury service must notify their Head of Department and the Director of Corporate Services accordingly. Payment for basic contracted hours will be made during jury service. Employees should claim for loss of earnings incurred on the form they will be given when they attend for service. When they have received this payment they should notify the Director of Corporate Services who will arrange for the appropriate deductions to be made.

Applying for Special Leave

All requests for special leave should be submitted to the Director of Corporate Services who will consult with the Head of Department or, if the request is from a Head of Department, with the Chief Executive.

3.7 Maternity, Paternity and Adoptive Leave

The Arts Council follows the maternity, paternity and adoptive leave arrangements of the NI Civil Service. Publications giving full details of the statutory responsibilities of both employers and staff are held by the Director of Corporate Services and may be consulted on request or downloaded from [here](#).

Click here for full details of the current [NICS Maternity, Paternity and Adoptive Leave Arrangements](#).

3.8 Working Time Regulations

The Arts Council adheres to the requirements of the Working Time Regulations legislation. This covers the maximum number of hours to be worked each week, daily and weekly rest periods, and in-work rest breaks.

Click here for full details of the Council's policy on [Working Time Regulations](#).

3.9 Work Breaks

All members of staff are granted work breaks amounting to 15 minutes each morning and afternoon. Staff may take these breaks at times to suit themselves - either as one continuous break or a number short breaks. All staff are expected to ensure that these breaks fit in with work needs.

Section 4: Health and Safety

4.1 Introduction

The Council aims to maintain a safe, healthy and secure working environment for all staff and those who visit the premises.

To achieve this a number of policies, procedures and practices are in place which apply to all Council members, Council employees, contractors, and other persons visiting Council premises on business.

These measures are monitored and reported upon regularly by the Arts Council's Safety Committee.

Click here to read the Council's [Health & Safety at Work Policy](#).

The Director of Corporate Services has overall responsibility for health and safety measures.

4.2 MacNeice House

The building is open from 8.00am to 6.30pm on Monday to Thursday, and to 6.00pm on Friday. The building must be vacated by these times unless prior arrangements are in place e.g. for Council meetings.

The front door security code is confidential to Arts Council staff and Council members and should not be disclosed to anyone else. For security reasons the code will be changed from time to time.

Members of staff must sign in and out on both the attendance register and the in/out board at reception every time they enter or leave the building.

All visitors must be met at and returned to Reception. Visitors must sign in and out. Visitors must not be allowed to wander round the building unaccompanied.

The Council is not liable for the loss of personal property from its premises. Any loss of personal belongings should be reported immediately to the Director of Corporate Services. All staff should ensure they have access to a lockable drawer or cabinet.

The Council requests staff to co-operate in the conservation of energy. Office and corridor lights and electrical appliances, including fires, should always be switched off when not required.

4.3 Car Parking

There are 40 car parking spaces in all: 39 in the three parking lanes showing Arts Council parking signs and one additional space at the far end of the fourth parking lane. The Arts Council also has right of use of the remaining parking spaces outside normal business hours having regard to the requirement of other tenants. Parking is not permitted on the drive at any time.

If a member of staff needs to leave their car in the car park overnight, they should inform (by email) the Director of Corporate Services and whoever is locking up that night. This is to avoid any unnecessary searching, as there is a presumption that if a car is in the car park then someone is still in the building.

The Arts Council is not liable for any loss or damage to individuals' cars.

4.4 Smoking in MacNeice House

Smoking is only permitted outside the building, but not at the front door or around the porch and steps.

Smokers are expected to adhere to the overall 15 minutes break which is granted each morning and afternoon to all staff and which can be taken as one continuous break or a number of short breaks. All staff, both smokers and non-smokers, are expected to ensure that these breaks fit in with work needs.

Visitors to the Arts Council wishing to smoke must comply with these arrangements.

4.5 Fire and Emergency Evacuation

Fire extinguishers are located at strategic positions throughout the building. Members of staff should familiarise themselves with their locations.

Should it be necessary to evacuate the building a **continuous siren** will sound. When this is heard, you should leave the building immediately by the nearest exit.

- Do **NOT** use the lift.
- Go immediately to the **corner of the Malone Road and Adelaide Park** where a roll call will be taken from the daily attendance registers.
- Any visitors in the building at the time of an alert are the responsibility of the person they are visiting.
- Do not return to the building until the all clear has been given.
- Follow any instructions given by the Fire Brigade or Police.
- The First Aid officer(s) will be around to attend to any injuries.

It has been found in real life emergency situations that people waste precious time questioning whether the alert is genuine - NEVER ASK - EVACUATE.

A test of the fire alarm (an intermittent siren) is carried out every Tuesday morning between 0900 and 0930.

An unannounced fire drill is held twice per annum.

Click here for full details of the [Fire and Emergency Evacuation Procedures](#).

4.6 Accident Reporting

All accidents, however minor, and 'near misses', must be reported to Corporate Services and recorded in the Accident Book. The Director of Corporate Services is responsible for maintaining the Accident Book and for ensuring that all accidents are properly recorded and acted upon.

The accident reporting procedure applies to any incident involving staff or visitors to Council premises.

In the case of accidents at work where it appears that medical treatment may be necessary, the First Aider should be called. The First Aider will decide whether or not hospital treatment is required and, if it is, make the necessary arrangements. If a First Aider is not available, a senior member of staff should make what arrangements are necessary.

In the case of serious accidents, the emergency services should be called to send an ambulance. Reception and the Director of Corporate Services should be informed.

4.7 First Aid

The Council's First Aider(s) are identified in the internal telephone directory and should be contacted in the event of an employee having an accident or becoming ill at work.

First Aid Boxes are located in the offices of the First Aiders.

The Director of Corporate Services should be informed at once of any case of serious illness or illness involving a member of staff requiring an ambulance during working hours.

4.8 Hazard Reporting

Hazards are situations or conditions which may lead to accidents. Staff should report all hazards immediately to the Director of Corporate Services. The member of staff should then record the hazard in the Hazard Record Book which is kept with the Accident Book.

The Director of Corporate Services is responsible for ensuring that all reported hazards are acted upon.

4.9 Lone Workers Policy

The Arts Council has set down a number of procedures to protect staff who may be working away from the Council's premises. In most cases this means ensuring that colleagues and management are aware of one's whereabouts; being accompanied where necessary and taking immediate action to minimise any risk.

Click here to read the Council's [Lone Workers Policy](#).

4.10 Medical Adviser

The Arts Council has a Medical Adviser who may be consulted on matters relating to health at work. Such consultations may be arranged only through the Director of Corporate Services who will treat such arrangements as entirely confidential (staff do not need to inform their Heads of Department of such arrangements).

In addition, in cases where:

- a) the employee's health is giving cause for concern;
- b) serious accidents have occurred at work;
- c) it is felt that an employee's work is being adversely affected by ill-health

the Council retains the right to have the employee medically assessed by the Medical Adviser.

The Medical Adviser is not available for staff to consult where they would normally see their own GP.

Section 5: Staff Protection

5.1 Introduction

The Council aims to protect all staff from difficult or adverse situations which may arise in the workplace. To address any such potential problems the Council has in place a number of policies covering areas such as harassment in the workplace; allegations of improper conduct; indiscipline; grievances, whistleblowing and redundancy.

The Council currently recognises the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) as the Trade Union to represent staff.

5.2 Harassment in the Workplace

The Arts Council is committed to creating a harmonious environment in which all staff do not feel apprehensive because of their religious belief, political opinion, gender, marital status, ethnic origins, sexual orientation, age or disability and where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

Employees have a right not to be harassed at work and the Arts Council fully recognises the right of employees to complain about harassment should it occur. Harassment is an offence covered under the Council's disciplinary procedures and will always be treated seriously.

Similarly, all employees have a responsibility to help ensure a working environment in which the dignity of their colleagues is respected. They should be aware of the serious and genuine problems which harassment can cause. They should ensure that their own behaviour is beyond question and could not be considered in any way to be harassment. They should also provide support to colleagues who are being harassed, by encouraging them to follow the agreed harassment complaints procedure.

Harassment is defined as any verbal or physical abuse, derogatory statements, displays or emblems, or discriminating or disparaging remarks made by one or more persons in the workplace, which are any of the following:

- unwanted, unreciprocated
- cause humiliation, offence and/or distress
- interfere with job performance or create an unpleasant working environment
- trivialise people as a group and emphasise their sexuality/marital status/religious beliefs/political opinions/disability/age over their role as workers.
- Harassment may take many forms. It can range from extreme forms such as violence and bullying to less obvious actions like ignoring someone at work.

Employees can raise complaints relating to harassment in complete confidentiality.

Click [here](#) to read full details of the Council's policy and procedure for dealing with [Harassment in the Workplace](#).

5.3 Code of Conduct

In serving its clients and the public, everyone at the Arts Council must adhere to public service values. This means that at all times staff must:

- Observe the highest standard of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to stewardship of public funds.
- In accordance with Government policy on openness, comply with all reasonable requests for information from Parliament, users of services and individual citizens.
- Maximise value for money through ensuring that services are delivered in the most efficient and economical way, within available resources and with independent validation of performance achieved wherever practical.

The Arts Council is committed to preventing situations in which reasonable suspicion of bias might be aroused in the minds of the public or any section of the public. Staff members must therefore declare to the Chief Executive anything which might reasonably be construed as a possible conflict of interest.

Members of staff should also familiarise themselves with the Council's policies on gifts and hospitality; engagement in external activities and engagement in political activity.

A procedure is also in place for staff who have particular concerns on these issues to raise, in confidence, allegations of improper conduct.

For further details on all of the above click on the Council's [Code of Conduct](#)

5.4 Disciplinary Procedure

The Disciplinary Procedure has been devised for dealing with cases in which disciplinary action is contemplated involving officers employed directly by the Arts Council (excluding the Chief Executive). The Employment Act 2002 sets out new statutory disciplinary procedures, the provisions of which will take precedence over the current policy until it is amended accordingly. The new provisions came into effect on 1st October 2004.

The aim of the Disciplinary Procedure is to ensure propriety in the management and investigation of cases of alleged misconduct and to ensure that the employee is protected against arbitrary, unjustified or inconsistent disciplinary action.

It is the responsibility of all members of staff to attempt to resolve any disputes without recourse to the Disciplinary Procedure. Nevertheless, it remains an individual's right to invoke the procedure if he/she so wishes.

Examples of what the Council recognises as misconduct under each category include:

- a) Minor misconduct - absenteeism, lateness, careless work, poor effort at work, ignoring security/safety rules, extending tea and meal breaks, insubordination, loud and unruly behaviour or language.
- b) Major misconduct - unauthorised absence away from workplace/duties, physical horseplay, refusal to carry out a reasonable instruction, damage to premises and equipment, gambling on the premises, bringing intoxicating liquor into the premises, serious neglect of safety/security rules, leaving the premises without permission, breach of confidentiality.
- c) Gross misconduct - theft, physically violent behaviour, obscene behaviour, drunkenness, falsification of records, fraud, deliberately ignoring safety/security rules.

Management reserves the right to decide how other examples of misconduct shall be categorised.

Following an investigation of misconduct, disciplinary warnings may be issued or penalties imposed. The member of staff involved has the right to appeal against any disciplinary decisions.

Click to read full details of the Council's [Disciplinary Procedure](#) (to be amended in accordance with current legislation).

5.5 Grievance Procedure

The Council has established a procedure for dealing with issues which constitute, or are liable to constitute, a source of grievance to an individual officer or group of officers employed directly by the Arts Council.

The procedure details a three stage approach for addressing any possible grievances. Where a grievance has not been resolved by Stage 3, the officer(s) may, through NIPSA, refer the disputed issue to the Labour Relations Agency for conciliation and resolution.

The Council will also, on consideration of the circumstances of the grievance, have the option to call upon external mediation services.

Click to read full details of the Council's [Grievance Procedure](#).

5.6 Whistleblowing Policy

The Council has established a policy to guide staff as to how to disclose information on wrongdoing/malpractice when this is in the public interest. It also offers guidance on how to complain to an industrial tribunal if an employee is dismissed, or suffers any other form of detriment, for doing so.

Click to read full details of the Council's [Whistleblowing Policy](#).

5.7 Redundancy Agreement

The Council has agreed with NIPSA procedures which are to be followed when an officer is to be prematurely retired on redundancy grounds.

While it is recognised that different situations may require different methods the arrangements have been established as a basic framework within which the Council and NIPSA will consult and settle any future redundancy problems.

The Council accepts that consultation with staff interests should be commenced at the earliest possible stage and then be a continuing feature for resolution by agreement of a situation of staff surplus or redundancy.

NIPSA accepts that any arrangements to settle future redundancy should take account of the efficiency of the service provided by the Council.

Redundancy benefits are payable to the permanent staff of the Council who are in the NILGOSC Pension Scheme in accordance with the Redundancy Agreement. Other staff who are made redundant, or staff for whom no special compensation is due under the terms of the Agreement, will be entitled to receive redundancy payments in accordance with relevant legislation.

Click to read full details of the Council's [Redundancy Agreement](#) with NIPSA.

Section 6: Financial Matters

6.1 Introduction

The Director of Corporate Services maintains a range of financial instructions and guidelines on the Council's internal website. These detail the procedures for the procurement of products and services; for claiming expenses; for dealing with payments made by the Council; and for cash handling and all other receipts made to the Arts Council. They also contain the Council's Business Ethics, Fraud and Irregularity Policy.

All staff and particularly budget holders should familiarise themselves with these procedures. They can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

6.2 Expenses

Staff are reimbursed for certain expenses incurred during the course of Council business in accordance with current rates and conditions which are determined by NICS. Expenses should be claimed by completing an expenses form which should be passed for payment by the Head of Department. All expenditure must be supported by receipts.

Travel outside Ireland must have prior written authorisation from the Chief Executive (or the Chairman in respect of the Chief Executive). A copy of this authorisation must be attached to both the expenses claim and any travel invoices involved.

Staff are expected at all times to exercise economy and adhere to the highest principles of integrity in claiming for expenses.

Members of staff may claim reimbursement for one ticket at any arts event in which they have direct artform assessment responsibility. The Chief Executive may claim reimbursement for one ticket at any arts event.

Official travel for which an Officer may claim reimbursement means any additional travel on Arts Council business over and above travel between an Officer's home and place of work.

In exceptional circumstances, staff may request an advance on their salary. In all cases where an advance of salary is required the initial application must be made in writing to the Director of Corporate Services stating the purpose for which the advance is required.

6.3 Use of Private Cars on Official Business

Anyone claiming mileage allowance in respect of official travel is required to give a Declaration and Undertaking regarding the insurance cover and road worthiness of their vehicle.

The requirements covering the use of privately owned motor vehicles for official travelling are set out in paragraphs 6732 to 6744 of the NICS Code. Details of these paragraphs and the Declaration and Undertaking form are available from the Director of Corporate Services.

The Council cannot accept liability in respect of loss or damage to individuals' own cars, or death of or injury to passengers or any third party liability.

6.4 Personal Telephone Calls

Staff may make brief, local, personal telephone calls of an essential nature. The cost of non-local personal calls can be obtained from the Accounts Department where payment should be made. Visitors may only make a telephone call with the permission of the member of staff they are visiting.

Mobile phone holders must identify and pay for all personal calls and text messages on their monthly telephone bills.

6.5 Internet and Email Usage

Staff may use the internet and email facilities for limited personal use in accordance with the Arts Council's policy which is based on the NICS Internet and Email Usage Policy.

Click to read the Council's [Internet and Email Policy](#).

6.6 Personal Letters

Personal letters may be posted through Registry provided that they are already stamped.