



Northern Ireland Museums Council

Gifts and Hospitality Policy and Procedures

Introduction

In line with good practice, NIMC is required to adhere to high standards of propriety in respect of offering and receiving hospitality, bearing in mind that the Council operates within the public sector. These guidelines and procedures are set down to advise the staff and Board members on the provision of hospitality, and the acceptance of gifts and hospitality.

Policy

NIMC subscribes to the Northern Ireland Civil Service terms and conditions, and as such it is guided by the principles of the Service Code. In relation to gifts and hospitality it accepts the guiding principle that NIMC staff and Board members should not receive benefits of any kind from a third party, either directly or indirectly, which might reasonably be seen to compromise their personal judgement, integrity or impartiality, in line with set out in Section 6.01 *Standards of Conduct* of the NICS HR Handbook.

More specifically, it is an offence for a civil servant (and by extension a member of NIMC staff or Board) to accept corruptly any gift as an inducement or reward for doing (or refraining from doing) anything, or showing favour (or disfavour) to anyone, in his or her official capacity. The courts assume that any gift received by a civil servant from a third party which has been obtained (or is trying to obtain) a Government contract, has been received corruptly unless the gift's recipient can prove otherwise. (Prevention of Corruption Acts 1906 & 1916)

In addition, this policy should also be seen to apply to spouses, partners and other associates of NIMC staff and Board members, if it may be perceived that a gift or hospitality might be of benefit to staff or Board members. This extension also applies to third parties acting on behalf of NIMC.

NIMC staff and Board members need to be aware that the misuse of or personal benefit through gifts and hospitality may be perceived as being indicative of fraud through the abuse of position, and as such would fall under the Council's Fraud Prevention Policy.

Provision of Gifts and Hospitality

The guiding principle to justify extending hospitality or making a gift is that it must be in the direct interest of the Northern Ireland Museums Council.

Gifts and entertainment provided by NIMC should be, and be seen to be, unostentatious and on a modest scale. It should not be likely to provoke adverse public comment. The staff and Board members should not be perceived to benefit disproportionately from arrangements that exist primarily for the purpose of extending hospitality to others.

Hospitality may only be organised with the permission of the Director (as Accounting Officer) or, in his/her absence, the Chair. This includes hospitality proposed by the NIMC Board.

Such significant occasions requiring hospitality as proposed by the Director will be sanctioned by the NIMC Chair, or Board, as appropriate.

Hospitality should be organised primarily for guests of NIMC, and proportionate to the time of day when a meeting or event takes place. Where practicable, events and meetings should be organised at times of the day when a full meal is not expected.

Hospitality at the expense of NIMC should not be provided for internal executive meetings attended by NIMC staff alone. However, modest provision may be made to staff and Board members participating in collective training organised by the Council.

Hospitality should not normally be offered to individuals for whose time NIMC is paying, for example, consultants.

When organising entertainment and choosing venues for meals, expensive hotels and restaurants should be avoided, a set menu should be preferred to a la carte, and the cost of drinks must not exceed one third of the total cost.

The provision of gifts or hospitality shall be approved by the Director, or in his/her absence, the Chair. The form at Appendix I should be completed prior to the event where the estimate cost of the hospitality to be provided is estimated to be more than £25/head, and when any corporate gift is being considered.

In agreeing to provide hospitality the following guidelines should be borne in mind:

- The possibility of accommodating the meeting, training course, conference or the like, at a time when refreshment might not be expected
- The perceived benefits of offering hospitality in terms of the purpose of the event
- The number of people invited should be kept to a minimum
- The scale of hospitality will be commensurate with the needs of the occasion and the status of the guests
- Meals should be on a modest scale, with drinks not exceeding one third of the total cost, and at a venue which would be perceived as appropriate for the purpose.
- Hospitality, paid for by NIMC, should not include visits to places of public entertainment except when it may be demonstrated as associated with the Council's business.

In agreeing to provide a corporate gift the following guidelines should be borne in mind:

- The item should have an appropriate association with NIMC and/or its area of business
- It should not comprise alcohol
- It should not be perceived as extravagant, inappropriate or contentious
- The cultural context in which the gift is being offered and the cultural background of the recipient should inform the choice of gift

Acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality

In view of the general principle that NIMC staff and Board members should not do anything which might give rise to the perception that s/he has been influenced to show bias for or against an individual or organisation through the acceptance of a gift or the provision of hospitality, the following guidelines should be heeded:

- Discretion should be exercised when being offered a gift: being aware when a gift should be refused, when refusal may be likely to cause offence or embarrassment, and when its nature, value or origin may be perceived as contentious or potentially compromising.

- Circumstances may prevail where unacceptable gifts may need to be accepted, with such gifts being documented, returned or disposed of (for instance, donated to charity) after the event.
- Discretion is required regarding the acceptance of hospitality: a modest working meal to discuss official business or maintain business contacts may be acceptable, whereas lavish or expensive social hospitality is not.
- Care should be taken around perceptions that might arise from the level of NIMC representation at a particular event at which hospitality is provided.

Should any member of staff or Board member be in doubt concerning the acceptance of a gift or hospitality, s/he should seek the advice of the Director and/or Chair.

The form at Appendix II should be completed prior to the event where the estimate cost of the hospitality being provided is estimated to be more than £25/head, or to record the details relating to the receipt of any gift whose estimated value is more than £25.00.

Gifts

All gifts should be refused, with the following exceptions

- Modest seasonal or promotional gifts.
- Cases where refusal is likely to give offence or cause embarrassment

Staff and Board members may seek guidance from the Director, to whom acceptance of any gifts should be reported. If an offer, gift or irregular suggestion is made to an NIMC staff or Board member, either in connection with a contract or with the objective of obtaining preferential treatment, the facts must be reported to the Director. Should the Director receive such an offer, gift or irregular suggestion, s/he will report the matter to the Chair of the Board.

Hospitality

Where there is a risk that the acceptance of an offer of hospitality could be construed as influencing a NIMC staff member in exercising his or her duties, or of a Board member in the decisions he or she may take, it must be refused.

It is permissible to accept

- Modest working lunches
- Hospitality offered in association with an official meeting
- Hospitality offered at functions where NIMC staff attend in a clearly representational capacity

With the exception of these examples, no offer of hospitality should be accepted without the prior approval of the Director or NIMC Chair, as appropriate. Staff members should exercise discretion in cases where refusal is likely to give offence and, if appropriate, seek guidance from the Director, to whom acceptance of any such hospitality should be reported.

Reviewed by the NIMC Audit Committee
March 2016

Review Date
March 2018

Appendix I

NIMC - Provision of Gifts and Hospitality

Event	
Date/Time	
No Participants (NIMC + guests)	
Hospitality to be provided	
Estimated cost	
Approval	
Name	
Signature	
Date	

Gift (Description and est. value)	
Proposed Recipient	
Approval	
Name	
Signature	
Date	

Appendix II

NIMC - Acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality

Hospitality/Gift Offered	
Estimated value	
Name of Donor	
Name of Recipient	
Statement of circumstances	
Accepted/Rejected	
Approval	
Statement of Approving Officer	
Name	
Signature	
Date	