

EXTRACT FROM

GENERAL TEACHING COUNCIL FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND (GTCNI)
FINANCE MANUAL

01 June 2011

HOSPITALITY SECTION

16. Hospitality

16.1 Acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality

GTCNI recognises that contractors and other suppliers may extend from time to time offers of gifts and hospitality to staff. GTCNI also recognises that its employees have a responsibility to exhibit high standards of propriety, and carry out their role with dedication and a commitment to the organisation and its core values: integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

Staff members of GTCNI should conduct themselves with honesty and impartiality in the exercise of their duties. As a consequence, they should never receive benefits of any kind from a third party which might reasonably be thought to compromise their personal judgement or integrity. In this field, perception is as important as reality.

The fundamental principle is that no member of staff should do anything which might give rise to the impression that he or she has been or might be influenced by a gift or hospitality or other consideration to show bias for or against any person or organisation while carrying out official duties.

Under the Prevention of Corruption Acts of 1906 and 1916 it is an offence for an officer in his/her official capacity:

- To corruptly accept any gift or consideration as an inducement or reward for doing, or refraining from doing, anything in that capacity; or
- To show favour or disfavour to any person; or
- To receive money, gifts or consideration from a person or organisation holding or seeking to obtain a Government contract.

All of these are deemed by the Courts to have been received corruptly unless it is proven otherwise.

16.1.1 Records of Gifts, Hospitality, Invitations etc

The Finance Officer updates and maintains the Registers of Gifts, Hospitality and Awards which is periodically reviewed. The purpose of the Registers is to counter any possible accusations or suspicions of breach of the rules of conduct by staff. The registers are subject to Freedom of Information (FOI) queries and staff should bear this in mind when deciding on the acceptance of any gift or hospitality.

The general principle is that all gifts offered should be refused. However seasonal, promotional or trivial gifts (such as calendars, diaries, pens etc), which bear Company names and/or logos of the provider of the gift and have a value of less than £50, may be accepted by individuals without the need for these to be reported or approved in advance. Acceptance of any other gift must have been approved by the Registrar in advance and must be declared by the member of staff in the register.

More expensive or substantial items, valued at £50 or more and gifts of lottery tickets, cash, gift vouchers or gift cheques, cannot on any account be accepted. All gifts offered (apart from those which are trivial or inexpensive); even if they are declined/returned need to be recorded in the register.

16.1.2 Procurement or Monitoring of a contract

Apart from trivial / inexpensive seasonal gifts, such as diaries, no gifts or hospitality of ANY kind from any source directly or indirectly associated with a contract should be accepted by anyone involved in the procurement or monitoring of that contract. This will ensure that no criticism can be made regarding bias to a particular company or supplier.

16.1.3 Gifts Received

On no account should a gift or gratuity be solicited or requested. Where gifts by way of gratuities, vouchers or book tokens etc. for lectures, broadcasts or similar occurrences are offered, then acceptance should be based on how much of the preparatory work for the event was done in the officer's own time, how much in official time and the extent to which GTCNI resources, other than, for example, use of an officially issued lap-top at home, were used in the preparation.

The following guidelines should be applied:

- A If the preparation was carried out entirely in the individual's own time and the event took place outside normal working hours at no expense to GTCNI, it would be acceptable for the individual officer to retain the whole fee, token or other gift;
- B If, however, the preparation was done wholly in GTCNI time with use of GTCNI resources, no gifts or fee should be accepted unless the event is carried out outside of normal working hours when a gift or token to the value of up to £50 is acceptable; and
- C If the preparation was carried out and the lecture etc, delivered in a staff members own time but GTCNI facilities were used for typing, preparation of PowerPoint / overheads etc, then a gift or token to the value of not more than £75 is acceptable.

In the case of either "B", or "C", GTCNI can, if they so choose charge the organisation or body a fee based on the salary costs of the individual and/or the use of resources. If a series of gifts from the same source exceed the monetary limits set out above the same rules apply.

16.1.4 Reporting Gifts and Approval Process

If gifts (apart from those trivial or inexpensive gifts for which approval is not required) are received, the approval of the Registrar should be sought using the 'Reporting Gifts' form, which can be obtained from Corporate Services.

In each case submitted, the Registrar will decide in writing or email, whether to:

- Allow the recipient to keep the gift;
- Return the gift to the donor with a suitably worded letter explaining why the gift cannot be accepted;
- Use or dispose of it, if possible, in or by GTCNI; or
- Donate the gift to a nominated Charity.

The Registrar will ensure that the details of the case and his decision are recorded in the Gifts and Hospitality register.

The handling of offers of hospitality is recognised as being much more difficult to regulate but it is an area in which staff must exercise careful judgement. In exercising this judgement it is acknowledged that there can be difficulty in distinguishing between a "gift" and "hospitality". It is also recognised that it can be as embarrassing to refuse hospitality, as it can be to refuse a gift.

The acceptance of what would be accepted as conventional hospitality, for example working lunches, should, in the main, cause no problem especially if there is some official means of reciprocity and provided that it is limited to isolated occasions and its acceptance is in the interests of GTCNI. Hospitality, which would not be acceptable, would include invitations to frequent or more expensive social functions where there is no direct link to official business (sporting events, the theatre, opera or ballet etc), particularly where these come from the same source, and those which involve travel, hotel or other subsistence expenses.

It can be argued that if staff members are to achieve the best value for money in dealings with suppliers or consultants then they need to build up contacts and that it is quite legitimate for them to have a close working relationship with organisations or individuals, which may involve a degree of hospitality.

There may also be instances where staff receive invitations to events run by voluntary organisations such as Annual Conferences or Dinners. Attendance at such events is considered an integral element in building and maintaining relationships with these sectors and any hospitality received is likely to be reasonable and proportionate, and therefore acceptable. Additionally, very occasional acceptance of meals or tickets to public sporting, cultural or social events may be accepted if attendance is justified as being in GTCNI business interest. But it will be for the staff member to demonstrate clearly that acceptance was in GTCNI interest.

The main point is that in accepting hospitality staff need to be aware of and guard against, the dangers of misrepresentation or perception of favouritism by a competitor of the host.

To sum up, in deciding whether hospitality can be accepted, staff should consider if it:

- Is likely to help business effectiveness;
- Places no obligation or perceived obligation on the recipient;
- Is not frequent, lavish or prolonged;
- Is unconnected with any decision affecting the organisation or the individual offering it;
- Can be justified; and
- Provides benefits to GTCNI, which outweigh the risk of possible misrepresentation of the hospitality.

When in doubt about accepting hospitality or an invitation the Registrar should be consulted. In all instances where other than conventional hospitality (infrequent working lunches) is offered, the approval of the Registrar should be sought. It is particularly important to ensure that GTCNI is not over-represented at an event or function and care should be taken to ensure that this does not happen, for example, by enquiring from the host as to other staff who have received similar invitations. To guard against the multiple acceptance of invitations to the same event, GTCNI should make arrangements to ensure that corporate consideration is given to all invitations.

16.1.5 Awards

Staff should consult with the Registrar if they are offered an award or prize in connection with their official duties. They will normally be allowed to keep it provided:

- There is no risk of public criticism;
- It is offered strictly in accordance with personal achievement;
- It is not in the nature of a gift nor can be construed as a gift, inducement or payment for a publication or invention to which other rules apply.

16.2 Provision of Gifts and Hospitality

The purpose of these guidelines is to outline for staff the principles and requirements governing the provision of hospitality, official gifts and entertainment and to provide advice and guidance on the procedures to be followed by all staff in GTCNI where such expenditure is likely to be incurred.

As the expenditure of taxpayers' money on official hospitality is a sensitive matter which can lead to public criticism, care must be taken to avoid exposing the individual or GTCNI to allegations of extravagance or impropriety. Staff must not use public resources for personal benefit.

Expenditure on official hospitality should only be incurred where it can be shown to be in direct support of GTCNI's business. To this end, and bearing in mind the varied nature of GTCNI's activities and working patterns, it is recognised that such expenditure may arise more frequently in some areas of GTCNI than in others. The scale of hospitality should be appropriate to the needs of the occasion and the status of the guests.

Staff should always consider the justification for (and the form and extent of) any hospitality to be offered and should exercise economy in incurring expenditure for this purpose. It is important to note that approval must be obtained at the appropriate level prior to hospitality being offered or provided. Final decisions will lie with the Registrar.

Hospitality should be in the form of food and refreshments appropriate to the occasion. There should normally only be a charge on public funds where two or more persons present are not GTCNI officials.

However, where the provision of tea/coffee/bottled water and biscuits/scones enables the business of large meetings to continue, there may be a charge on public funds where the alternative would be an interruption of business.

Full details specifying the purpose of each function, the number of guests and GTCNI officials attending, together with the itemised costs of food, refreshments, room hire, etc should be shown on the hospitality approval form, which is available on the staff 'M' Drive and from the Corporate Services Department. Approval must normally be obtained on this form prior to the event taking place and the names of all attendees must be listed on the form or an attached sheet. This information must be held with the original invoice in Finance.

Official hospitality should be limited within approved budgets.

The following guidelines cover the range of circumstances in which expenditure on hospitality might be expected to arise within GTCNI.

16.2.1 Hospitality Offered to Visitors from outside GTCNI

GTCNI will not normally meet expenditure for the provision of lunch/dinner to visitors, or for a working lunch, unless an occasion allows for the conduct of urgent business. In such circumstances, expenditure may be incurred without prior approval if kept within the following guidelines:

- The number of people invited should be kept to a minimum;
- Any hotels or restaurants used should be appropriate to the purpose.
- Any meal should be on a modest scale, with the total cost per head not exceeding £30 and the element for refreshments must not exceed one third of the total bill; prior approval should be obtained for any parties of five or more.
- Where no service charge is included, a tip of 10% is considered reasonable;
- No spouses or guests of GTCNI staff are eligible to receive official hospitality other than in exceptional circumstances and with the specific agreement of the Registrar; and
- Except where such hospitality constitutes GTCNI business, GTCNI funds are not available for visits to theatres or to other forms of public entertainment.

16.2.2 Hospitality for Official Committees and other meetings

The provision of lunch at public expense will be acceptable only where it is impossible to accommodate urgent meetings other than at lunch time and:

- It is necessary for participants to remain together during lunch; or
- Pressure of work is likely to be such as to make it impractical to allow a break long enough to give participants reasonable time to obtain lunch elsewhere.
- The nature of the lunch should be appropriate to the purpose, with costs kept to a minimum.

If morning or afternoon breaks are warranted, light refreshments (tea/coffee/bottled water/biscuits/scones) may be provided, at public expense, at the discretion of Registrar.

Hospitality Offered During Training Courses, Conferences, Workshops Etc

A measure of hospitality at public expense may be offered to those participating in training courses. This facility may also be extended to cover conferences, seminars, approved team building sessions, workshops, etc. The following guidelines apply:

Residential

(Where at least one night's accommodation is being provided and paid for as an integral part of the course.)

Whilst it is normal practice to meet the cost of meals and light refreshments, i.e. bottled water/biscuits/scones, this facility should not be extended to include payments for alcoholic refreshments.

Expensive hotels should be avoided.

The total cost of food and refreshment per person should be appropriate to the purpose and costs should be kept to a minimum.

Non-residential

Depending on the duration of the course/event, hospitality should be restricted to the provision of morning and afternoon tea/coffee (or bottled water) with biscuits/scones. The provision of snacks or a buffet-type meal at lunch time will be at the discretion of the Registrar who should take into account factors such as the background and number of attendees, the availability of alternative facilities and the benefits (if any) which such provision might offer in terms of the running of the course/event. Where lunch and light refreshments are provided, subsistence expenses will not be payable.

16.2.3 Drinking and Driving

Staff will recognise the need to set an example in terms of preventing drinking and driving. To this end, and bearing in mind the possibility that GTCNI might be perceived as being at fault if an attendee at an event was found to be driving with an alcohol level in excess of the legal limit, the following guidelines should be followed at relevant functions/events:

- Consideration should be given to providing alcohol free or low alcohol alternatives to alcoholic drinks; and
- An adequate selection and supply of soft drinks should always be made available.