

NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL SERVICE  
**CODE OF ETHICS**



# The Civil Service

1. The Civil Service is an integral and key part of government in Northern Ireland. Its role is to support Ministers and the Executive as a whole in developing and implementing their policies, and in delivering public services.
2. Individual civil servants are accountable to their Department's Minister, who in turn is accountable to the Assembly.<sup>1</sup> All civil servants have a shared responsibility to support the work of the Executive as a whole, including the contribution of their Minister to the Executive.
3. Civil servants, as holders of public office, are expected to uphold the seven principles of public life.<sup>2</sup>

## Civil Service Values

4. As a civil servant, you are appointed on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. You 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:
  - ▶ **'integrity'** is putting the obligations of public service above your own personal interests;
  - ▶ **'honesty'** is being truthful and open;
  - ▶ **'objectivity'** is basing your advice and decisions on rigorous analysis of the evidence; and
  - ▶ **'impartiality'** is acting solely according to the merits of the case and serving equally well Ministers of different political persuasions.
5. 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 Executive, the Assembly, the public and its customers.
6. This Code sets out the standards of behaviour expected of you and other civil servants. These are based on the core values set out in paragraph 4.
7. 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 and others.

<sup>1</sup>The Permanent Secretary, as Accounting Officer, is additionally accountable to the Public Accounts Committee of the Assembly. There may be occasions where a NI civil servant is accountable to a Minister in another administration, either on secondment or loan, or under the Windsor Framework Regulations 2023, and that Minister is accountable to another legislature; in all other aspects this Code still applies.

<sup>2</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life)



# Standards of Behaviour

## Integrity

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8. You must:

- ▶ fulfil your duties and obligations responsibly;
- ▶ always act in a way that is professional and collaborative and that deserves and retains the confidence of all those with whom you have dealings;
- ▶ make sure public money and other resources are used properly and efficiently;
- ▶ deal with the public and their affairs fairly, efficiently, promptly, effectively and sensitively, to the best of your ability;
- ▶ keep accurate official records, including minutes of ministerial meetings, and handle information as openly and transparently as possible within the legal framework; and
- ▶ comply with the law and uphold the administration of justice.

9. You must not:

- ▶ 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;
- ▶ accept gifts or hospitality or receive other benefits from anyone which might reasonably be seen to compromise your personal judgment or integrity; or
- ▶ disclose official information without authority. This duty continues to apply after you leave the Civil Service.

## Honesty

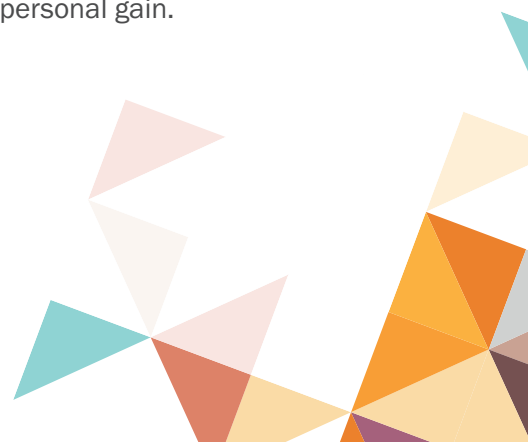
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10. You must:

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

11. You must not:

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



## Objectivity

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12. You must:

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

13. You must not:

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

## Impartiality

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14. You must:

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

15. You must not:

- ▶ act in a way that unjustifiably favours or discriminates against particular individuals or interests; or
- ▶ harass, bully or engage in any other inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour, or tolerate such behaviour in others.<sup>3</sup>

## Political Impartiality

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16. You must:

- ▶ 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;
- ▶ 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
- ▶ comply with any restrictions that have been laid down on your political activities.

17. You must not:

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

<sup>3</sup>Instances which ought properly to be addressed as grievances should be pursued through the normal channels within Departments. The Civil Service Commissioners will not investigate concerns which ought to be addressed through these primary channels.

# Rights and Responsibilities

18. Your department or agency has a duty to make you aware of this Code and its values.

## Being required to act against the Code

19. 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.
20. If you have such a concern, including if your concern is about a special adviser, 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 officer.<sup>4</sup>
21. Raising a concern of this kind may lead to an investigation of the actions of the person who has required you to breach the Code.
22. If you have a concern about a Minister requiring you to act in a way that conflicts with this Code, you should raise this matter with your Permanent Secretary. This may be a matter to be addressed under the Ministerial Code of Conduct (or the Ministerial Code in the UK Government).

## Others acting against the Code

23. If you become aware of actions by others which you believe conflict with this Code you should report this to your line manager or someone else in your line management chain; alternatively you may wish to seek advice from your nominated officer.
24. Any concerns under this Code can be raised at any time directly with your Permanent Secretary or, exceptionally, with the Head of the Civil Service if no other route is possible.
25. You should report evidence of criminal or unlawful activity to the police or other appropriate authorities.

## If your concerns are not addressed

26. If you have raised a matter covered in paragraphs 19 to 21, in accordance with the relevant procedures, and do not receive what you consider to be a reasonable response, you may report the matter to the [Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland](#) who may consider and determine appeals to them by a civil servant under the Code of Ethics. The Commissioners will also consider taking a concern directly regarding the actions of civil servants, including special advisers, under the Civil Service Code. The Commissioners will ordinarily expect that internal departmental procedures are exhausted before considering a case. Further information is available from the [Civil Service Commissioners' Guidance Document – Raising a Concern under the NICS Code of Ethics](#), including the time limit for raising a matter with the Commissioners.
27. If you raise a concern about a Minister requiring you to act in a way that conflicts with this Code (under paragraph 22) and believe that the way that your concern was handled within the Department did not meet the requirements of this Code of Ethics, you may report the matter to the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland. The Commissioners are able to investigate appeals about the actions of civil servants.

<sup>4</sup> The nominated officer may be the Department's Designated Officer under the Raising a Concern Policy Framework, or the NICSHR Senior Strategic HR Business Partner.

28. 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 may be in breach of contract.
29. Separate arrangements apply for people who are not civil servants wishing to raise matters of concern. You, as a civil servant, have a responsibility to give consideration to such concerns raised with you and ensure that they are properly addressed.
30. This Code is part of the contractual relationship 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.

## Department of Finance

This version of the NICS Code of Ethics was first published in February 2022 and revised following review in February 2026. It will be reviewed annually.

The lead official is the Director of People and Organisational Development in the Department of Finance.

