

Gift and hospitality policy

Purpose

1. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the business conduct of all Competition Commission (CC) employees and contractors is appropriate to the nature of the CC and the environment in which we operate, and to avoid the potential for any perceived or real conflict of interest or allegation of bribery or compromise.

Scope

2. This policy applies to all permanent and fixed-term staff employed by the CC, and any other contractors, consultants or other persons acting under the CC's name. Members will have their own policy statement to refer to.

Responsibility

3. HR has ownership of the policy and the 'Gift and Hospitality register'. Individual staff are personally responsible for reporting any gifts or hospitality offered and whether these have been accepted or declined. HR will record this information on the register.

Gifts and hospitality

4. A 'gift' is defined here as any item, cash or goods, or any service which is offered for personal benefit at a cost, or no cost, that is less than its commercial value.
5. 'Hospitality' is defined here as any generous or material welcome or reception that is more than an incidental kind, such as a beverage or light refreshment.

Policy statement

6. In general, the nature of the CC's work makes offers of gifts or hospitality unusual and their acceptance inappropriate. The main exception is likely to be the presentation of a memento by foreign guests in the course of an educational visit to the CC. The CC maintains a register of gifts and hospitality with a value of £25 or more and of all material hospitality accepted in the course of official duties. Site visits are an exception to this and each case will be considered on its merits by the Inquiry Director.

Recording gifts and hospitality offered

7. HR maintains a register of all gifts and hospitality, both accepted and declined. HR will be responsible for reporting on the register to the Operations Board once a year in order to facilitate regular review of the policy. The register could also be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act.
8. It is each individual's responsibility to inform HR by email of any gifts received or hospitality that is offered but subsequently declined. In brief, the individual should:
 - consider carefully whether it is appropriate to accept a gift or hospitality;
 - decline gifts or hospitality unless to do so would cause serious embarrassment; and

- discuss the position with your line manager or other suitable manager if the gift is accepted and clearly has a value in excess of £25 (or £75 for gifts from foreign governments or international organizations).
9. It is encouraged that any gifts that are accepted be donated to the Annual Christmas Raffle. If you wish to donate a gift, contact HR.
 10. Staff involved in procurement are subject to the same rules as other CC staff, but with an additional obligation to report any offers also to the Procurement Manager.

Receiving hospitality

11. It is generally acceptable to receive light refreshments, or a light lunch (eg on a site visit) or a lunch or dinner if attending, or speaking at, a conference. Apart from this, however, we may not accept hospitality from:
 - parties to past, current or future known inquiries;
 - their advisers;
 - existing contractors; or
 - any other business or individual who might be reasonably expect to seek consultancy or other work from the CC.
12. These guidelines extend to events such as conferences sponsored by firms with which we deal. First, consider whether attendance, or speaking, at the conference will result in a benefit to the individual and/or the CC. An individual's benefit may be that attendance at the conference contributes towards their continuing professional education and development. We should only attend and speak at such conferences if it is in the interests of the individual and/or the CC that we do so. It follows that the cost of the place on the conference, travelling to and staying at conference venues must be met by the CC.
13. The only exception to the above rules is that senior staff (usually those at Band A and above) should be encouraged to attend receptions where the primary purpose of the event is networking rather than some other non-work-related event. A reception at which effective networking can take place with the wider competition community (or equivalent professional community for other staff) is likely to be more acceptable than, for example, a private viewing at a gallery, attending the theatre, or other similar events even though the event may be hosted by, for example, economics consultancies or law firms, and even though the event might take place in prestigious surroundings.

Partners

14. If you are invited to a reception as a partner or spouse, then this should still be disclosed in the same way although more leniency might be shown over gaining permission to attend the event. In effect, the rules would apply as they do to members attending functions in their own right.

Borderline cases

15. Borderline cases which cannot be decided by agreement of the line manager or Inquiry Director should be decided by the Chief Executive.