
Political Activities

Introduction

1. Unlike some civil servants that are politically restricted, there is no restriction on Council staff engaging in political activity since we are employees of a Non Departmental Public Body (NBDP). However, as employees of a public body that is responsible to Government Ministers all staff must be aware of the need to be politically impartial whilst at work or in their capacity as an employee of the Council. Staff must also be sensitive about how others interpret their political activities outwith work or associate them with the Council particularly if the subjects being discussed/dealt with relate to further and higher education. The Council has, for these reasons, prepared this guidance to help ensure staff are aware of what actions to take and of the need to be aware of how their activity may be interpreted.

General principles

2. Employees of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council can take part in national or local political activities under the following conditions:
 - you need to inform the Council (your line manager and Human Resources) that you are actively engaged in political activity (for example standing as a candidate in local, national (Scottish or UK parliament) or European elections, campaigning, speaking or canvassing for a political party or group) and advise us of its nature;
 - you must not engage in any political activity while at work or in your capacity as the Council's employee or use the Council's facilities to actively promote political views;
 - at all times while engaging in political activity staff should make it clear they are acting as individuals and not in an official capacity;
 - you should act with discretion when criticising the policy of other parties, especially in relation to higher and further education funding and any related matters;
 - while engaging in political activity you should act with discretion in all matters regarding higher and further education funding; and
 - you must comply with the rules of confidentiality as outlined in the Council's Code of Conduct.
3. The more senior the employee the greater the need to exercise discretion. If you are in doubt whether you can engage in a particular activity please first check with Human Resources.

Trade Union Activity

4. This policy refers to party political activity and not involvement in activities organised by recognised trade unions. Elected trade union representatives may comment on Government policy when representing the legitimate interests of their members, but in doing so they must make it clear that they are expressing views as representatives of the union and not as employees of the Council. Campaigns organised by recognised trade unions that are not aligned to a political party and are not connected to Colleges, Universities or the funding of further and higher education are deemed to be non-political activities. These include, but are not limited to, campaigns on social justice and improving terms and conditions for workers generally.

Additional guidance

5. Prior to key political events elections, referendums and the political party season additional guidance may be published on the Council's intranet to draw any specific circumstances to the attention of staff as well as reminding them of the general points outlined in this guidance.

Alleged breaches of political activity guidelines

6. A failure to follow these guidelines may result in the disciplinary procedure being used to investigate any alleged cases that are deemed to breach these guidelines, and, if found necessary, an appropriate disciplinary sanction being applied.

Further information

7. For further information please contact Human Resources or refer to the Code of Conduct.

Additional information

8. It is difficult to define all actions that constitute political activity but we have outlined below some examples of what is deemed to be political activity and what is not with the aim of helping staff decide what action to take. If in doubt ask Human Resources.

Examples of what is not deemed to be political activity

- Casually discussing politics during a lunch break where staff are not seeking to lobby or canvass support for their political agenda.
- Outside work running a petition to stop building on green space or to seek better provision for cyclists
- Participation in community councils (providing the matters are not related to further and higher education)

Examples of what is deemed to be political activity

- standing for election in local, national or European elections
- canvassing for support during elections or referenda
- distributing leaflets for a political party or group during elections or national referenda
- putting up posters at work which express political views or agendas (particularly during times of elections or referenda)
- speaking at political meetings expressing views on matters relating to Further or Higher education (other than when expressly doing so in an official capacity as a representative of the Council and the views are Council policy and this has been sanctioned by senior management (the Chief Executive) or, if necessary the Council's board).

Document History

This Policy and Procedure does not form part of SFC's terms and conditions of employment.

Owner: Human Resources

Version number	Changes	Date approved
1.0		10/07/2014 Ratified by JNCF
1.1	Job Titles Amended 24/04/2017.	

Review cycle: where there is a change in elements of the policy or periodically every two years.