

FACT SHEET FOR PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES

GIFTS AND BENEFITS MYTHS

The offer and acceptance of gifts and benefits is an area of high misconduct risk. Good policies and procedures are an important part of managing this risk. Unfortunately, there are other established practices in workplaces that can and do exist. These may include unwritten practices that do not align with what policies say or written policies that are simply not good practice. *Either way, they are often based on myths.*

These myths are not just wrong, they are dangerous. They increase your risk of misconduct as an employee. Debunking these myths will help you to protect yourself from the risk.

THE MYTH	THE REALITY
“Accepting any gift is okay as long as I declare it.”	Accepting a gift that is contrary to your workplace policy or code of conduct is wrong. Accepting a gift that could influence you or build favour with you is wrong and high risk. Declaring a gift does not override this and make it ‘right’ to accept.
“Accepting gifts and benefits is part of how public sector employees work with the private sector.”	The public sector is not the private sector. As a public sector employee, your salary is paid from public funds and you should never expect to get anything extra for doing your job. You also need to avoid the perception of getting anything extra for doing your job.
“Gifts and benefits are all part of how I’m rewarded for my work.”	No, they’re not. As a public sector employee you are paid for your work and legitimate work-related expenses are reimbursed. Benefits beyond this are outside the scope of your employment.
“The person offering will be offended if I refuse to take the gift.”	No, they won’t – you can just explain that, as public sector employee, you are not allowed to accept gifts. Tell them ‘thanks is enough’ and if they want to show their appreciation for your work an email or letter of thanks to your workplace is sufficient.
“I’m okay – my personal sense of right and wrong will keep me out of trouble.”	Your confidence in your own integrity and ethics is not all that matters. Ethical guides – such as a gifts and benefits policy – are there to guide your decisions and ensure that everyone in your workplace deals with these kinds of decisions consistently. There are other things to consider that are less obvious. It is human nature to feel like you should give something in return for a gift or favour. The way it looks to others when you take a gift is also important for your reputation and the reputation of your public authority.



“I can’t handle a policy that says that I must decline gifts by default.”

Yes, you can. This is accepted as good practice in many public sector workplaces. Your workplace may have some defined exceptions to this, i.e. things you can safely accept, and that’s okay. But beyond that, politely declining a gift is professional and not offensive.

“Christmas is a special time so I can accept more gifts from suppliers and the public then.”

If it is not acceptable to accept a gift in July it is not acceptable to accept it in December. Gifts given by suppliers and stakeholders give rise to the same misconduct risk no matter what time of year it is.

“It’s okay to meet at a café or restaurant and accept hospitality from a supplier.”

Ask yourself: how do suppliers justify their representatives spending money on food and drink for clients? Suppliers do this because they anticipate the benefits that come from the expense.

“Golf days, cinema tickets etc. are all part of building relationships.”

Yes – but the relationship is a buyer and seller relationship – not a personal relationship. The purpose of the gift is to improve their business outcomes. Suppliers have a business to run and profits to make.

“My managers get lots of gifts and benefits, so why can’t I?”

Good question. Please redirect this question to your managers and ask for their response in writing. If you’re still concerned, please speak up about it.

“Others get gifts and benefits – it’s just part of the way things are here.”

Don’t put yourself at risk because others in your workplace are willing to put themselves at risk. It is not worth the potential loss of reputation (or even your job).

“I’m not a ‘government buyer’ so accepting a gift is not really a risk.”

Yes it is. The building of favour can occur across all levels of a workplace. Even if you don’t have the delegation to make a decision on contract or purchase, you might still have influence with the decision maker. Public perception is also a factor here.

“I know there’s nothing wrong with taking this gift and that’s what matters.”

The perception of a ‘person on the street’ about this gift may be very different to yours. Their perception is their reality, regardless of what you might think or say. Remember, perception can be very damaging to reputations and careers.

“They bought me a cup of coffee. No harm in that.”

Maybe, but what if the same person bought you a cup of coffee every few months? Or every few weeks? Or twice a week? There’s a point where a reasonable person would say ‘that crosses the line’. And this begs a further question – if 10 cups of coffee is not okay, then why is one cup okay?

WATCH FOR THE MYTHS. REMEMBER THE RISKS.

