
Relationship between the British Council and its Employees

Employee Relations

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Overview

This section defines, in general, the relationship between the British Council and its employees (for the interaction between the British Council and staff representatives, see *Industrial Relations*).

Audience

This guidance applies to all British Council staff worldwide.

Responsibilities

All members of staff are responsible for adhering to the policy and guidance defined in this section, and all British Council staff are expected to act reasonably in all circumstances.

Managers play a crucial role in fostering good employee relations, as defined below.

Managers

Managers and management teams must understand their level of responsibility and accountability. This requires clear levels of delegated authority at the level of the Senior Management Team (SMT) and, in turn, from SMT to managers in the line.

Managers have primary responsibility and accountability in the following areas relating to managing staff:

- recruitment and selection
- performance management
- motivation and morale
- standards and discipline
- job design and work organisation
- health, safety and staff welfare
- training and development
- recognition and reward.

The way in which these processes are handled and decisions are reached is the foundation of the employer/employee relationship.

Policy

Standards

The following standards define the British Council policy:

- all employment relationships must be governed by equality of opportunity
- mechanisms for encouraging two-way communication between staff and management exist and must be understood
- operational and financial plans and proposals for change must be properly communicated
- managers must receive appropriate training
- managers must be guided by the British Council's staff and corporate values in the absence of any specified policy or procedure
- any departure from British Council policy, procedure, standards or values must be clearly justified.

Guidance

Principles and practice

A number of factors can influence the employment relationship:

- social norms and trends
- internal values, standards and expectations
- internal policy and procedures
- contractual agreements
- employment legislation.

With the exception of employment legislation, all these are open to change and interpretation by both parties. They are likely to affect you as a manager.

You must follow procedures closely where they exist, but procedures do not determine the employment relationship. It is the spirit in which managers and staff interact with each other which determines the effectiveness of relations in the workplace: the expectation that all British Council staff act reasonably in all circumstances is fundamental.

Nothing can replace effective communication with staff as the best way to manage the employment relationship. This allows managers to know the expectations, needs and concerns of their staff and to respond to these in an appropriate way. Similarly, effective communication is a way in which staff can be kept informed of the position of management on all relevant topics.

Most management actions can have an impact on staff. It might be useful for management teams to establish routine checks to test proposals and plans for their impact.

Role of the manager

As a manager, you must:

- Judge the impact of your actions in contributing to healthy employment relations.
- Unless specifically instructed, seek professional advice when you deem it necessary.
- Seek professional advice (such as from a local law expert) and the agreement of Human Resources (HR) when specifically required to do so by, for example, a disciplinary procedure. You must check with Human Resources Pay and Employment Relations section (HR PER), that any professional advice you receive is in line with British Council policy.
- Report back to your staff on meetings of the British Council's management (that is, the Board, SMT and so on).
- Report staff views and concerns to management meetings, as appropriate.
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Communicating change

Managers responsible for initiating change (for example, in connection with projects involving restructuring, employment policy and so on) must plan and implement direct communications with staff to:

- foster a common understanding of business needs and objectives
- take staff views into account in making decisions that are likely to affect their interests.

Equal opportunity

The British Council has an equal opportunities policy (see Equal Opportunities and Diversity), but it may not be possible to implement the policy in full in some countries because of local restrictions. Where this is the case, the equal opportunities policy must nevertheless inform and guide management action.

Disabilities

The British Council policy is to treat staff with disabilities exactly as it treats all other members of staff (see *Equal Opportunities and Diversity*). In some countries, such as the UK and other EU countries, the British Council's policy is actually law.

Assistance to staff

As a manager, you must offer appropriate advice, whenever possible, when members of staff raise personal or domestic problems. You must also consider referring staff to the British Council Benevolent Fund, described below.

British Council Benevolent Fund

- The Benevolent Fund ('the Fund') is for emergency relief and helps serving and retired staff in the UK and overseas who are facing immediate and acute financial need. Help is available to all categories of British Council staff, and in some cases the Fund also assists the immediate families of staff.
- Help is given in the form of a grant or a loan.
- Requests are treated confidentially and each is considered on the basis of distress, hardship and need.
- The Fund is not financed by the British Council and relies on donations from British Council staff and fund raising events.
- The Fund is administered by a Committee of Management. Requests for help from the Fund must be addressed to the Secretary, British Council Benevolent Fund. Information about making contributions can also be obtained from the Secretary.
- The Fund can also advise on setting up a local staff benevolent fund.

Health and safety

In the UK, the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act makes it a legal requirement for the British Council to ensure the health and safety at work of its entire staff, including those working at home. Overseas, the British Council provides a 'duty of care' in respect of all staff visitors and contractors using its premises, in accordance with the principles of the 1974 Act.

As a manager, you must ensure that:

- fire and incident control officers, and their deputies, are appointed and replaced as necessary
- emergency procedures are in place for the safe evacuation of disabled members of staff
- a trained VDU assessor is appointed
- all VDU assessments are current, and that action is taken and appropriate records kept in the office
- all new members of staff receive a VDU assessment within six weeks of starting.

For further information, consult the Health and Safety Adviser, Global Estates.