

**CODE OF BUSINESS CONDUCT  
FOR  
RTÉ BOARD MEMBERS**

**Revised June 2010**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Code of Business Conduct are to promote:

- the establishment of an agreed set of ethical principles;
- the promotion and maintenance of confidence and trust in RTÉ including the protection of the good name of RTÉ; and
- the prevention of the development or acceptance of unethical practices

### 1.2 Guiding Principles

- (i) This Code of Business Conduct is intended to steer the conduct of Board members as they carry out their duties as Board members, both internally and externally to RTÉ. This code, along with the RTÉ Code of Business Conduct for staff, will be instrumental in promoting the organisation's reputation and inspiring public confidence in how RTÉ conducts its affairs, whilst also helping to create a culture of excellence through a continuous demonstration by RTÉ of its commitment to ethical behaviour.
- (ii) Board members should always act fairly, in good faith and in an impartial way to meet the objectives of RTÉ. Board members will ensure that nothing they do or say should ever weaken RTÉ and its Board members. Board members will avoid publicly criticising the Board. A Board member will not take any action (directly or indirectly) against RTÉ.
- (iii) RTÉ's ability to live up to its commitments and ethical standards is directly dependent on the day-to-day choices and actions of each individual, be they Board members or staff members. These choices should be based on a belief in the principles of integrity, honesty and fairness in the conduct of RTÉ business.
- (iv) This code describes the conduct expected of Board members in the performance of their activities on behalf of RTÉ. It is incumbent on each Board member, both individually and collectively, to do his or her best to live by the standard of business outlined in this Code of Business Conduct. Each Board member must also strive to support all commitments that RTÉ has made to conduct business in an honest and ethical manner.

### 1.3 Policy Approach

- (i) The RTÉ Board and subsidiaries of RTÉ fully subscribe to the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies adopted by Government in June 2009.
- (ii) Board members are expected to be conversant with this Code of Conduct and the various policies and procedures governing RTÉ's activities, business and financial transactions etc.

## 1.4 Board Members and Duty of Care to the Organisation

- (i) Board members have a general duty of care to RTÉ and its subsidiaries. This duty of care encompasses the exercise of their powers in good faith and in the interest of RTÉ as a whole, the diligent performance of duties, the use of RTÉ facilities and services, and dealings with third parties on RTÉ's behalf.
- (ii) Board members are obliged to comply with all laws and regulations applicable to RTÉ's activities and its places of business.
- (iii) Board members should act with integrity at all times and must never engage in fraudulent activity of any kind.
- (iv) Board members are entitled to reimbursement for reasonable expenses, but only if these expenses are actually incurred. The submission of claims for expenses not incurred, or expenses reimbursed separately by another organisation, is prohibited.
- (v) RTÉ is committed to ensuring that cost effective controls and procedures are operated to prevent, detect, deter and deal with fraud and Board members are required to fully co-operate with such procedures at all times.

## 2. **PROTECTING CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

### 2.1 RTÉ Proprietary and Copyright Information

RTÉ's propriety information is any information owned by the organisation, much of which is confidential. This information may be subject to patent, copyright or other intellectual property rights and includes (but not limited to) technical information, creative information, scheduling information, business plans and projections, marketing plans, financial data and personnel information. Therefore, Board members who have, or gain access to, RTÉ proprietary and confidential information must take every precaution to keep this information is not given out without prior permission being sought and approved by the Board or its Chairperson.

In the event that Board members cease being members of the Board for any reason, all property, including documents and media which contain RTÉ propriety information must be returned to the RTÉ Group Secretary. If not returned, the former Board member is required to confirm to the RTÉ Group Secretary that all property, including documents and media which contain RTÉ propriety information, have been disposed of in an appropriate manner. Any requests by former Board members for access to previous Board papers should be directed to the RTÉ Group Secretary. After membership of the Board ceases, a strict duty of confidentiality remains.

## 2.2 Acquiring Information about others

- (i) The receipt of sensitive business, creative, financial, schedule, production or technical information from competitors or other industry organisations carries significant risks.
- (ii) If Board members receive, in the course of their duties as members of the Board, another party's propriety information, they must proceed with caution to prevent any accusations that RTÉ misappropriated or misused the information. The use of any such information for personal advantage is prohibited.

## 2.3 Communicating Information to the Public

- (i) It is essential that where circumstances dictate, certain information must remain confidential. This will be necessary in the context of protecting RTÉ's competitive position and to comply with applicable agreements and laws.

# 3. **PERSONAL AND PUBLIC ACTIVITIES OF BOARD MEMBERS**

It is entirely appropriate that Board members will become involved in personal and public activities outside of work. RTÉ is supportive of Board members becoming involved in these activities in a private capacity, whenever it is consistent with the organisation's public service obligations.

## 3.1 Impartiality

- (i) Whilst RTÉ respects the rights of individual Board members to participate in personal and public activities outside RTÉ, these activities must be consistent with RTÉ's obligation of impartiality. Personal and public activities which are likely to compromise RTÉ's impartiality as a public service broadcaster organisation, or undermine public confidence in the organisation, are inconsistent with a continuing role as a Board member.
- (ii) It is incumbent on Board members to ensure that unfair advantage is not taken, and could not reasonably be implied to be taken, of their connection with RTÉ, and to ensure that no undesirable publicity is drawn to RTÉ resulting from their engagement in such outside activities. This is particularly relevant where the individual is involved in high profile, political or controversial activities and has access to sensitive broadcasting areas within RTÉ. Board members involved in such activities must ensure that this does not lead to a situation in which the public confidence in the impartiality of RTÉ is undermined.

## 3.2 Access to Media

- (i) RTÉ Board members are also citizens of this democracy and have the normal civic rights vis-à-vis expressing their views in public. There are occasions, however, when these rights have to be tempered by duties imposed by membership of a statutory body such as RTÉ.

- (ii) In matters relating to broadcasting, the goal of all Board members must be to facilitate, never hinder, the ability of the Board to fulfil its mission. Clearly, there can be occasions when engagement with the media in public debate is not only inappropriate, but possibly damaging to the credibility of the Board and therefore to its effectiveness as advocate of public service broadcasting.
- (iii) This Board must control, carefully and thoughtfully, how it communicates to the different groups in Irish society which are affected by its deliberations: radio, television and online audiences; RTÉ employees; politicians and civil servants; other media groupings, including newspapers and advertising agencies; trade unions etc. What, how and when the Board communicates with them should be regulated where possible by the Board and co-ordinated by the Chairperson.
- (iv) Some interpretation is needed as to what topics are consistent with the need to speak with one voice and therefore avoid carrying Board internal debates into the public media. Clearly, some issues related to broadcasting could not be described as at all “live” at this point in time (e.g. matters of broadcasting history, broadcasting in other parts of the world) but many issues are “live”, either in the sense that they are actively on the Board rolling agenda or could arrive on its agenda very quickly or have industrial relations implications within the organisation.
- (v) A judgement has to be made as to what is a “live” issue and the Chairperson must be responsible for this. The Chairperson should normally be the conduit between the Board and the media, but may want to delegate this duty at times to another member. Full co-operation with this procedure is needed so that the Board can properly utilise the power vested in it to act in the public interest in developing broadcasting in Ireland.

## **4. GIFTS AND ENTERTAINMENT**

### **4.1 Definition**

- (i) In this context gift is broadly defined as anything that is given to a Board member, either as a result of a relationship with a particular party or because the Board member is a public figure, and for which the Board member does not pay fair market value.

### **4.2 Receiving Gifts**

- (i) Board members are responsible for ensuring that they maintain the highest standards when involved in dealings with outside agencies, whether or not they are acting on behalf of RTÉ in this capacity. As such, members should never solicit or accept personal advantages or gifts of material value from firms or persons.
- (ii) Business gifts and entertainment may be accepted by Board members as courtesies where such are designed to build understanding and goodwill among business partners. In this context, during the traditional gift giving seasons,

gifts of modest value may also be accepted, where refusal to accept might give offence.

- (iii) When a Board member is a guest in another country and if the gift is being offered as part of a public occasion, it is best to accept the gift on behalf of RTÉ. In such situations, the Board member should report the gift to the Chairperson who will decide whether it is of such significance as to warrant handing over to RTÉ.
- (iv) Board members can accept promotional items of limited value, such as inexpensive pens, calendars, mugs that bear the company name.

## **5. STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOUR**

### **5.1 Leadership and Public Service**

- (i) The Board is responsible for determining the specific values and standards for RTÉ, building on the core values and standards contained in this Code of Business Conduct. These values are re-enforced for RTÉ staff in the *mission, vision and values* document. Individual Board members are expected to show leadership by promoting these values and standards. They will act as a role model.

### **5.2 Integrity and Obligations**

Board members will be (and be seen to be) selfless and objective. They will adhere to the highest standards of personal and professional integrity. Specifically Board members will:

- demonstrate selflessness by taking decisions solely in terms of public interest. A Board member will not act in order to gain financial or other material benefit for himself/herself or family or friends;
- demonstrate integrity by not placing himself/herself under any financial or other obligation to any individual or organisation that might reasonably be thought to influence the performance of his/her duties;
- be objective – decisions on public business will be taken solely on their merit; and
- commit to participate vigorously and energetically, but also ethically and honestly at all times.

### **5.3 Register of Interests**

Board members will declare any private, voluntary, charitable or political interest that might be material or relevant to the business of RTÉ.

The Ethics in Public Office Act 1995 requires all Board members to furnish a statement in writing of

*'The interests of the director and the interests of his or her spouse, or a child of the director or his or her spouse, of which he has actual knowledge, which could materially influence the person in or in relation to the performance of the functions of the directorship. This statement is required for each year or part of a year he or she holds or held the directorship'*

Where necessary, each Board member will maintain an entry on a register of interests that will typically be a record of all relevant personal and business interests. If Board members are unsure as to the type of interests that they should declare, they will discuss this with the Chairperson and/or Director General or RTÉ Group Secretary.

In addition to the legal requirements under the Companies Acts in respect of subsidiaries and requirements under the Ethics in Public Office Act 1995 and the Standards in Public Office Act 2001, the following procedures should be observed:

- (i) On appointment to the Board, each member should furnish to the RTÉ Group Secretary details relating to his/her employment and all other business interests including shareholdings, professional relationships etc., which could involve a conflict of interest or could materially influence the member in relation to the performance of his/her functions as a member of the Board. Any interests of a member's family of which he/she could be expected to be reasonably aware or a person or body connected with the member which could involve a conflict of interest or could materially influence the member in the performance of his/her functions should also be disclosed. For this purpose, persons and bodies connected with a member should include:
  - (a) a spouse, parent, brother, sister, child or step-child;
  - (b) a body corporate with which the member is associated;
  - (c) a person acting as the trustee of any trust, the beneficiaries of which include the member or the persons at (a) above or the body corporate at (b) above; and
  - (d) a person acting as a partner of the member or of any person or body who, by virtue of (a) – (c) above, is connected with the member.

Each member should furnish to the RTÉ Group Secretary details of business interests on the lines above of which he/she becomes aware during the course of his/her directorship.

- (ii) Where it is relevant in any matter which arises, the member should be required to indicate to the RTÉ Group Secretary the employment and any other business interests of all persons connected with him/her, as defined at (i)
- (iii) The Board may exercise discretion regarding the disclosure by members of minor shareholdings. As a general guideline, shareholdings valued at more than €15,000 or of more than 5% of the issued capital of a company should be disclosed.

- (iv) If a member has a doubt as to whether this Code requires the disclosure of an interest of his/her own or of a connected person, that member should consult the Chairperson.
- (v) Details of the above interests should be kept by the RTÉ Group Secretary in a special confidential register and should be updated on an annual basis. Changes in the interim should be notified to the RTÉ Group Secretary as soon as possible. Only the Chairperson, RTÉ Group Secretary and Director General should have access to the register.

#### 5.4 Conflicts of Interests

- (i) Should a matter relating to the interest of the Chairperson arise, he/she should depute another Board member to chair the Board meeting and should absent himself/herself when the Board is deliberating or deciding on a matter in which the Chairperson or a person or body connected with the Chairperson has an interest.
- (ii) Board documents on any case which relate to any dealings with the above interests (i.e. as detailed in section 5.3 above) should not be made available to the Board member concerned prior to a decision being taken. (Such documents should be taken to include those relating to cases involving competitors to the above interest). Decisions once taken should be notified to the Board member.
- (iii) As it is recognised that the interests of a Board member and persons connected with him/her can change at short notice, a Board member, should in cases where he/she receives documents relating to his/her interests or of those connected with him/her, return the documents to the RTÉ Group Secretary at the earliest opportunity.
- (iv) A Board member should absent himself/herself when the Board is deliberating or deciding on matters in which that member (other than in his/her capacity as a member of the Board) or a person or body connected with the member has an interest. In such cases a separate record (to which the Board member would not have access) should be maintained.
- (v) A Board member connected to a Production Company tendering for independent commissioning contracts for Television and/or Radio programmes should absent himself/herself in the event of any Board (or sub-Committee) discussion of the tender and a separate record should be maintained.
- (iv) Where a question arises as to whether or not a case relates to the interests of a Board member or a person or body connected with that Board member, the Chairperson of the Board should determine the question.

Where a conflict of interest exists and the Board member does not declare his/her interest and/or offer to withdraw, the Chairperson should take appropriate action to ensure that the Board (and the Board member concerned) is not compromised.

The fundamental principle is that Board members should not use, or give the appearance of using, their public position to further their private interests.

### 5.5 Access to Independent Advice

Board members have access to the advice and services of the RTÉ Group Secretary, who is responsible to the Board for ensuring Board procedures are followed and applicable rules and regulations are complied with.

In urgent or sensitive situations where concerns arise which cannot be appropriately addressed through normal channels, particularly regarding possible financial improprieties, these should be directed to the RTÉ Group Secretary.

Board members, in furtherance of their duties may take independent professional advice, if necessary, at the reasonable expense of RTÉ. Where a Board member deems it appropriate to seek such independent professional advice he/she will notify the Chairperson and RTÉ Group Secretary who will facilitate the engagement of such professional advice by the Board member.

### 5.6 Relationships with suppliers

Board members have a duty to maintain the reputation of RTÉ through fair, open and consistent dealing with suppliers. The rules governing this area are set out in the Public Procurement Guidelines published by the Department of Finance and the EU Directive 2004/18/EC: 'Procurement procedures of public bodies'. In general, Board members do not have a direct involvement in the Procurement process.

### 5.7 Information

The Board has a duty to be as open as possible about its decisions and actions, giving reasons for decisions and restricting information only when the wider public interest clearly demands. The Board should make an explicit commitment to openness. There are limited circumstances where full disclosure of information is not appropriate.

The Board will communicate to stakeholders (i.e Government Ministers, Civil Service and the public) in plain language, make information widely available and consult thoroughly and imaginatively.

RTÉ is required to comply with legislation on the release of information to the public, including where applicable the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection legislation. This means having a clear policy on:

- the standards for responding speedily to enquiries and requests for information, as provided for in the principles of quality customer service for customers and clients of the public service (see 5.12 below);
- the criteria for withholding information and a mechanism for appealing against any decision of this kind; and
- the criteria for charging for information to cover the costs of providing it.

It is important to have in place a procedure for dealing with complaints from the public. It is also important that the Board should review the procedures from time to time. Complaints should initially be dealt with by the officer responsible for the issue concerned; then, if the issue is not resolved, it should be considered by more senior staff.

## 5.8 Obligations

Board members should state in the Annual Report that they are responsible for preparing the accounts.

Board members should review annually the effectiveness of RTÉ's system of internal controls, including financial, operational and compliance controls and risk management.

Board members must ensure that the Chairperson keeps the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources advised of matters arising in respect of RTÉ.

Board members should report that RTÉ is a going concern with supporting assumptions or qualifications, as necessary.

The Board should be supplied, in a timely fashion, with information which is of a suitable quality, to enable Board members to satisfactorily discharge their duties.

The Board is responsible for compliance with all statutory obligations applicable to RTÉ. Where individual Board members become aware of non-compliance with any such obligation, they should immediately bring this to the attention of their fellow Board members with a view to having the matter rectified. In the event that the matter is not rectified, it should also be brought to the attention of the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. For this reason, a Board member should seek to make every reasonable effort to attend all Board meetings.

## 5.9 Loyalty

Board members have a responsibility to be loyal to RTÉ and be fully committed to all its business activities. A Board member should be aware of his/her duty to conform to the highest standards of business ethics.

Board members must respect their fellow Board members and employees of RTÉ and the role they play, treating them with courtesy at all times. A Board member, may also be called upon to represent the Board in dealing with the public and/or other external organisation. In these circumstances, it is a Board member's duty to maintain the reputation of the organisation by treating people in a helpful and courteous manner; on a timely, reliable and, where appropriate, confidential basis; and in an open and efficient way.

#### 5.10 Fairness

This code of business conduct places an onus on Board members to ensure compliance with employment equality and equal status legislation, commitment to fairness in all business dealings, and the valuing and treatment of all customers equally.

#### 5.11 Work Environment / External Environment

Board members will place the highest priority on promoting and preserving the health and safety of employees, ensure that community concerns are fully considered and provide arrangements to ensure minimal detrimental impact on the environment from the state body's operations.

#### 5.12 Customer Service

The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies sets out a list of principles of quality customer service for customers and clients of the public service. These principles are embodied in *RTÉ's Public Service Statement* and the Code of Fair Trading Practice.

### **6 Review of Code**

This Code and the corresponding Code for employees will be reviewed annually by the Board.