



nipsa
Protecting Public Services
Supporting Public Servants

Conference Guide

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Foreword

This Conference Guide is produced to help members better understand the workings of Conferences. This means not only the Conferences themselves, but also the input required of Branches into the work prior to and after the actual Conferences.

The Guide should prove especially helpful to **Branch Secretaries** who have the job of preparing for Conferences by convening meetings of the Branch and submitting various Conference forms within the deadlines laid down.

The Guide is not intended as an authoritative statement of the Rules relating to Conference procedures. These Rules are contained in Section 5 of the NIPSA Rule Book which you will find useful to have at hand whilst reading this Guide.

The dates of constitutional deadlines vary from year to year as they are dependant upon the actual dates selected for Annual Conferences and the latest date for distribution of the NIPSA Annual Report.

A circular is issued each year giving the actual dates by which documentation such as nomination forms and motion forms must reach NIPSA Headquarters. The circular also gives the dates of the forthcoming year's Conferences.

It is essential that instructions on circulars, forms and other conference documents are followed.

Information is also posted on the NIPSA website.

[*https://nipsa.org.uk/conferences*](https://nipsa.org.uk/conferences)



About Conference

Introduction

The NIPSA General Conference is the supreme policy making body of the union. It is held each year, normally in late May/early June. Each Branch will be involved in two Conferences - the NIPSA Conference and either the Civil Service Group Conference or the Public Officers' Group Conference. The Group Conferences will be held in November. NIPSA Headquarters will issue separate circulars with the details for the main NIPSA Conference and the two Group Conferences.

Motions and the Agenda

Annual Conferences deal with motions submitted by Branches, the General Council (General Conference) and the Group Executive Committees (Group Conferences). Branch motions must be passed by a properly constituted Branch meeting.

These various motions are referred to the Standing Orders Committees, whose job it is to arrange the order of business at Conferences. This arrangement of business in its printed form is the **Agenda**.

Conference Elections

Although the election for the General Council is conducted prior to Conference by an individual membership ballot, a number of other elections are conducted at Conference, examples being those for the Officers of the General Council, Group Executive Committees, the Standing Orders Committees, the Equal Opportunities Committee, NIPSA News Editorial Committee, Global Solidarity Committee and Delegates to the ICTU all-Ireland Conference (alternate years).

Examples of other NIPSA Conference business include the adoption of the NIPSA Annual Report and the adoption of the NIPSA Financial Statement.

Those Attending Conference

Conferences consist of the Officers and other members of the General Council or Group Executive Committees, Delegates appointed by Branches in accordance with NIPSA Rules, Standing Orders Committees and Headquarters Staff. The General Council or a Group Executive Committee may also invite guest speakers to address Conferences on specific issues.

In addition, specially invited guests and members of the Press may attend to observe Conferences.

Annual Conferences are the most important meetings of our union. Delegates have the opportunity to express on behalf of members the views of Branches on the issues contained within the Agendas, make decisions based on these views, elect various bodies and committees of the union and when Conferences finish, return to their Branches in the knowledge that they have contributed to the democratic running of the union.

The success of Conferences rests not only on the quality of debate but also on the efficient organisation of the event. Branches, therefore, have a vital role to play in ensuring the background work is done quickly and smoothly.

This Guide will help Branches take the necessary action to enable the Conferences to run efficiently. It details the steps to be taken by branches and explains the background work involved in the organisation of Conferences.

Annual Report

Contents

One of the first items of business at the NIPSA General Conference is the adoption of the Annual Report.

The Annual Report details progress on issues during the preceding calendar year. The Report is divided into sections each dealing with specific matters. Section A deals with NIPSA issues, Section B with Civil Service issues and Section C with Public Officer's issues.

Details are given on progress of the previous year's Conference resolutions and remitted motions.

Also included are Branch Organisation details and Voting Strengths as at 31st December and lists of members of the General Council and Group Executive Committees including their attendance record at meetings.

Distribution

The Annual Report will be distributed to branches on the basis of one copy per Branch. A limited number of additional copies are available from NIPSA Headquarters. The Annual Report is also available from the NIPSA Website.

Issue of Report

The Report will be issued at least nine weeks prior to the date of the main NIPSA Conference. This date will, however, be close to the time when you should be holding your first Branch meeting and it is, therefore, important that this meeting is arranged to take place as soon as possible after the date of issue of the Report, whilst still giving time for the Report to be circulated throughout the Branch.

It is a good idea that there are at least two people within the Branch who are aware of these arrangements so that in the event of one being absent, the distribution of the report and the Branch Meeting can still take place.

Using the Report

Apart from its obvious use at Conference, the Annual Report is a valuable reference document. It can be used to answer member's queries and is particularly useful as a guide to NIPSA policies.

Branch and Conference process

General

To deal with Conference business, each Branch should hold at least three meetings for each Conference. These should be **General Meetings** unless your Branch has a constitution which has been approved by the General Council which makes other provisions.

Committee meetings are a relatively poor substitute for general meetings in that they mitigate against one of the main aims of Conference - **to speak for all members.**

Your First Branch Meeting

By the time the Annual Report is delivered, the date, time and venue of the Branch Meeting (for the main NIPSA Conference) should have been arranged and announced to members.

You need to publicise the meeting and posters are available from NIPSA Headquarters for this purpose. You can also post details of your Branch Meeting on the NIPSA website **<https://nipsa.org.uk/branch-meeting-request>**. As you will have a lot of Conference business to get through, try to avoid having other items on the Agenda. If you have notice of proposed motions, circulate them to the members in advance of the meeting, as this may save time at the meeting and arouse further interest.

Remember that original motion and nomination forms must be sent to arrive at NIPSA Headquarters by the constitutional deadline. Your first meeting must be scheduled to meet that deadline.

Items of Business

Your branch will have the following items of business to cover:

- Comments on the Annual Report (for the main NIPSA Conference);
- Motions;
- Nominations for Officerships, Executive Committee, Equal Opportunities Committee etc;
- Election of Delegates; and
- Nomination of Trainee Delegates.

Comments on the Annual Report

As the Annual Report will be up for adoption at the General Conference your Branch will need to consider the Report.

You must notify the General Secretary **in writing at least one week before Conference** if you want to ask any questions about the Annual Report at Conference.

Motions

Motions are the means of deciding on the future policy of NIPSA. They should, therefore, not be put forward lightly and must be submitted in proper format. The motion must be clear e.g. there is no point in a motion saying: **state specifically which promotion procedure, the areas of dissatisfaction and the remedial action required.**

Motions need not be too detailed: the General Council or the Executive Committees deal with the detail. Motions which go into unnecessary detail often lead to nit-picking debates. Remember also that one of your delegates will have to propose the motion, which can be difficult to do in a limited time if the motion is unnecessarily complicated.

Constitutional Amendments

Special attention needs to be given to motions which seek to amend the NIPSA Constitution which is the law as far as the union is concerned. These motions therefore need to be crystal clear. This importance is recognised by the requirement for such constitutional amendments to be supported with no dissent on a show of hands or supported by two-thirds of the total votes cast on a card vote. Special care is therefore needed in drafting such motions. Any motion which seeks to amend the constitution or which would need the constitution to be amended, must spell out the necessary changes eg:

Constitution of NIPSA, Rule 100 2nd sentence, 1st line: delete" 'the insert 'any'.

You must also ensure that you propose all the amendments necessary, and consider the consequences of each change. It will help you (and your Chairperson) to read the constitution which is contained in the NIPSA Rule Book (available from NIPSA HQ and online at the NIPSA website) before going to the meeting so that you can advise any members who put forward a constitutional amendment how such an amendment would read and whether it would achieve the objects of the proposer. (See also Standing Order No 11 at Annexe E in the Rule Book).

Group Conferences

Motions will be discussed at either the General Conference or that of your Group. This depends upon whether the issue affects only the members of your Group or other NIPSA members as well.

Motions for the **Public Officers Group Conference** should relate to the pay and conditions of broad sections of the Group. If they deal solely with members of one public body or one specific section, such as District Councils, they will not normally be included in the primary agenda.

Motions for the **Civil Service Group Conference** should be on aspects of Civil Service pay and conditions, which apply across Departments, Agencies and occupations.

For detailed guidance see Appendix 1 - Guidelines on the Submission of Motions.

Finally, remember that motions are directives from Conference to the General Council or the Executive Committees. They should, therefore, authorise action rather than simply state an opinion; they should be set out so as to speak for **Conference** rather than for the branch; they must be clear; and they need not necessarily support something which is already policy. While the Standing Orders Committees may make minor grammatical changes to correct motions to put them into “proper motion form”, they must deal with the copy you submit and that is the issue which Conference will decide upon.

Return of Forms

Motions must be submitted on pre-prepared motion forms which will be issued by Headquarters or submitted in such a manner as to clearly indicate on one side of each separate sheet the branch number, the location and date of the branch meeting which approved the motions, and the conference for which they are intended. The motions shall also be numbered in sequence. The sheets containing motions shall also be signed and dated, on one side of each separate sheet, by two officers of the branch concerned: they must be returned to reach Headquarters by the constitutional deadline date. **Motions will only be valid if the motion forms are signed by two branch officers.**

Late motions cannot be accepted.

Elections

Your branch may wish to consider nominations for any of the following posts:

General Conference

President	Must be nominated from among those who have previously been elected to the General Council by direct ballot vote.
Vice President	
Honorary Treasurer	

Standing Orders Committee
ICTU Delegates (biennial)
Equal Opportunities Committee
NIPSA News Editorial Committee
Global Solidarity Committee

Group Conference

Chairperson
2 Vice Chairpersons
22 Executive Committee members
Standing Orders Committee

Detailed rules for all elections are set out in the NIPSA Rule Book which should be consulted in advance. Nomination forms will be issued by NIPSA Headquarters showing the number of posts due to be filled. They must also be returned to reach Headquarters before the Constitutional deadline date and to be valid, must carry the signature of **two branch officers** and the **nominees** (indicating their acceptance of nomination).

Late nominations cannot be accepted.

Delegates

The NIPSA Annual Report will show how many delegates you can send to each Conference.

You may only nominate fully paid up members of your branch as delegates to Conference and they must be paying members on the dates during which Conference is held.

Members of the Group Executive Committee or the Standing Orders Committee of a Group cannot be delegates to that Conference but they may go to the NIPSA General Conference.

Similarly members of the General Council or the General Standing Orders Committee may be delegates to their Group Conference but not to NIPSA General Conference.

Only the nominated Delegate of the branch **and no other person is entitled to collect ballot papers. Ballot papers must be signed by a branch delegate and placed in the ballot box.**

Late Delegates

Delegates may be changed if those elected cannot attend but this may be disruptive. You should therefore take care that those appointed can attend but if changes are absolutely necessary, you must notify Headquarters, at once **in writing**, of any late or substitute delegate.

No accommodation can be guaranteed for late or substitute delegates.

Childminding

Members attending NIPSA Conference who wish to use the NIPSA childminding or babysitting service must submit the appropriate application form, duly signed and completed, by the specified deadline date. (This is the same date as is set for the notification of delegates to Headquarters). The provision of childminding and babysitting services cannot be guaranteed for anyone who does not meet this deadline. Separate guidance is provided in the pre Conference documentation.

Expenses

To ensure payment of expenses after Conference and booking of accommodation, where appropriate, names of delegates on the appropriate forms, **must** arrive at Headquarters **by the specified deadline date**. (The date will be published in the circular issued to Branches).

Expenses will be paid by BACS after Conference. This will necessitate claims being prepared in advance and submitted with the delegate's nomination form. (Further details on this procedure are contained within the Conference documents and in Appendix 3). Accommodation will only be arranged for those delegates who indicate on their delegate nomination form that accommodation is required and who meet the deadline.

Preparing the Agenda

When NIPSA Headquarters receive your motions and nominations these are passed to the appropriate Standing Orders Committees.

The Standing Orders Committee take all the motions and arrange them into an Agenda which will produce an orderly debate. They make identical or very similar motions into **composite** or **comprehensive** motions, identify motions which may be ruled out of order by the President or Chairperson, or are existing policy, set the timetable (in consultation with the President or Chairperson) and draw up the standing orders for debates. This has to be done within about a week to allow time for printing and distribution of the Agendas.

Headquarters staff, will draw up lists of nominees for election and prepare other material as required. It is at this time that they will have their first firm indication of the numbers who will be attending Conference and they will start to allocate accommodation for the main NIPSA Conference.

Your Second Branch Meeting

This meeting falls within a very narrow time band between the time when the Agendas are issued and the start of Conferences.

It helps if you allow a long enough time for members to see the Agendas before your second meeting. The Agendas and related Conference papers are posted on the NIPSA website. You have to consider the following items and advise your delegates about:

- The Agendas;
- Nominations for Elections;
- The Financial Statement (for the main NIPSA Conference).

It may not be possible to look in detail at every motion contained in

the agendas. In that case you Branch Committee should read them well in advance and point out motions of particular interest to your members.

Determining Branch Policy

It is necessary for your Branch's Delegates to Conferences to be instructed on how to vote on motions of major concern to your members and in the various elections held at Conference. Exceptionally if it is not possible to give precise instructions on particular motions likely to come before Conference, your Branch Delegates should however be made aware of the general views of your branch's members in order for them to listen to the debate and vote accordingly, based on their assessment of the wishes of the members of your Branch. This means that the Delegate's job is a difficult one and your Branch needs to elect Delegates who it is confident will reflect accurately the views of its members.

You may also want your delegates to comment on other points in the Agendas, particularly if one of your motions has not been listed for debate. If the reason for this is not clear from the Agendas your delegates may approach the Standing Orders Committee and if they are not satisfied they may be given the opportunity to ask Conference to change the Committee's recommendation by moving reference back. (This is a mechanism for securing Conference approval to alter the agenda).

Again you will have to guide your Delegates on whom the Branch wishes to vote for. Conference allows Delegates the chance to get to know many of the candidates standing for election.

Financial Statement

The Statement is issued along with the Agenda for the main NIPSA Conference for adoption at Conference and your Branch may wish to ask a question on it. If so, you have to advise the General Secretary in writing at least one week before Conference so that the relevant information may be obtained.

Emergency Motions

An emergency motion shall deal only with urgent business which has arisen since the final date for the submission of motions to conference and shall require a decision by conference. The Standing Orders Committee shall include in Report No 1 the procedure for dealing with emergency motions.

The Standing Orders Committee shall have the sole authority to decide whether or not a motion is competent for consideration as a matter of urgency. It shall publish those motions which it considers to be emergency motions in a report which shall also include provisions for their discussion.

Your Third Branch Meeting

NIPSA Headquarters publishes lists of the decisions taken at Conferences. This will help you and your Delegates to report back to members at the third general meeting of your Branch. More detailed comment will, of course, be required on the Branch's own motions and any motions specifically discussed at the second meeting where the Branch decided a policy.

It is important the meeting is held in order that members can see the results of their decisions; if there is no feed-back it may be difficult to build enthusiasm for the next year's Conferences.

That brings to an end the busiest time of the year for everyone in NIPSA. It also starts another year with a new General Council and new Executive Committees pursuing new or changed policies. This guide, while in itself useful, can be further aided by consulting the detailed papers issued by NIPSA at each stage. If you have other difficulties, NIPSA HQ will be able to help.

Appendices

Now have a quick look at the following pages:

Appendix 1

Guidelines on the Submission of Motions

Appendix 2

A Checklist for Delegates

Appendix 3

Conference Arrangements

Appendix 4

Sexual Harassment - No Laughing Matter

Appendix 5

Guidance on Conduct at NIPSA Conferences and Meetings

Appendix 1

Guidelines on the Submission of Motions

General Conference

Motions for the General Conference should be on broad policy issues. They would include motions on matters of broad principle or policy relating to such subjects as:

- Public Service Pay and matters relating to the pay and conditions of service for all NIPSA members;
- PPP/PFI;
- National Minimum Wage;
- Regional Pay;
- Public Expenditure Cuts;
- Unified Public Service;
- Public Service Pensions;
- Privatisation;
- Social Security Policy;
- Information Technology;
- International Issues;
- Equal Opportunities;
- Social Issues;
- Law and Order matters;
- Industrial Relations Law;
- NIPSA HQ Staff;
- NIPSA Finance;
- NIPSA Premises;
- NIPSA Membership;
- Branch Organisation;
- 'NIPSA News';
- NIPSA Training Programme;
- Services for members (ie Legal Services, Financial Services, Insurance, etc);
- Relationships with other unions and organisations;
- Constitutional matters.

Public Officers Conference

The business of the Public Officers Group Conference will relate to matters of sole concern to members of the Group. Motions for this conference should therefore deal with details of pay and conditions. If however a motion is framed in such a way as to relate solely to a section of members for whom there is a panel, it will not normally be included in the primary agenda for the PO Group Conference. That arises because Standing Order No 7(d) stipulates that motions which can be dealt with by a body such as a panel, set up under Rule 6.9(a) NIPSA constitution, will be included in the secondary agenda. Consequently motions for the PO Group Conference must be framed in such a way as to relate to broad sections of the Group and not deal solely with members of one public body or one specific section such as District Councils. They should not relate to detailed aspects of the following matters:

- Pay;
- Job Evaluation;
- Grading;
- Hours;
- Leave;
- Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT);
- Travelling, subsistence and other allowances;
- Staffing;
- Personnel management;
- Recruitment;
- Promotion;
- Retirement;
- Superannuation;
- Disciplinary and grievance procedures;
- Conduct;
- Welfare;
- Health and Safety;
- Accommodation;
- Industrial Relations systems and procedures;
- Staff suggestion schemes.

Civil Service Conference

The business of the Civil Service Conference will relate to matters of sole concern to members of the Group. Motions should therefore deal with details of Civil Service conditions which apply across Departments and Agencies.

The range of topics would include:

- Pay;
- Job Evaluation;
- Grading;
- Hours;
- Leave;
- Contracting Out;
- Travelling, Subsistence and other allowances;
- Staffing;
- Personnel management;
- Recruitment;
- Promotion;
- Retirement;
- Superannuation;
- Disciplinary and grievance procedures;
- Conduct;
- Welfare;
- Health and Safety;
- Accommodation;
- Industrial relations systems and procedures;
- Staff suggestion schemes.

Political Motions

Branches can submit motions on matters of public policy, provided they do not contain any matter of a party political nature. **For example** motions dealing with matters relating to human rights, peace, unemployment, public expenditure, education, social security, health, etc would be in order. However motions would be out of order if they dealt with party political issues **such as** the organisation of political parties or groups, elections to Parliament or other public bodies, the constitutional status of Northern Ireland or campaigns, meetings etc run by a political organisation or a group of political organisations. Motions which express support for or opposition to particular forms of government or social systems are likely to be ruled out of order. If a motion, which would otherwise be in order, contains any matter of a party political nature, it would be ruled out of order even if the party political element is only an incidental statement or comment, etc. Branches should not therefore import any party political elements into their motions.

Appendix 2

A Checklist for Delegates

Before Conference

It will help if delegates prepare as follows:

Read and check all necessary papers for Conference including Conference circulars, Conference papers, etc.

Be clear on the attitudes to and decisions on motions and elections given by branch members at pre-Conference meetings.

Be familiar with motions on the Primary Agenda and have an idea of motions on the Secondary Agenda which might have a bearing on these.

Mark up your Agenda with your Branch attitudes, ie support, oppose, listen and decide and any changes given in Standing Orders Committee reports or Conference circulars.

Prepare your speeches ensure that they are properly timed.

Get the facts and any useful examples to include in your speech(es); useful sources for this can be the original mover of the motion at your general meeting, experienced Branch Officers, other Conference Delegates or NIPSA literature such as previous Conference reports, Branch records, circulars, NIPSA News, agreements, Annual Reports, NIPSA website etc.

Consult where appropriate, the seconder (or mover if you are seconder) of any of your Branch motions on the Primary Agenda to ensure that your speeches do not duplicate each other.

Ensure that your expenses claim form is sent on time with your Delegate form.

At Conference

Represent your members's interests as well as you can, whether it is in your speeches or in voting on issues.

Sit in the seats allocated to your Branch. Your seat number is on your credential card. You are expected to attend all debates until the close of business.

Ensure that one of the Branch Delegates is nominated for the collection of ballot papers from the election desk in the Conference Hall. Produce your credential card to enable ready identification.

Carry your credential card at all times since stewards control the entrance to the Conference hall by checking these cards.

Be punctual. Conference time is limited and delays costly so try to ensure that you are in your seat when Conference begins.

Check when the Standing Orders Committee is receiving representation if you need to see them.

Check that you have got all further Standing Orders Committee reports; these are issued at regular intervals and are usually available in the hall or lobby outside the Conference hall.

Continue to mark up your agenda with any changes shown on Standing Orders Committee reports since you will find this necessary in following the order of motions on the agenda.

Listen carefully to debates, especially when you are to make a contribution to them.

Be ready to go to the location allocated for speakers and when called move to the rostrum quickly.

Be yourself when speaking to the motion and ensure you do not go over the time allocated, ie stop speaking when the red light shows.

Ensure that your Branch delegation try to vote together - conflicts can arise over some motions, eg emergency motions where you may not have any mandate or where information in a debate is differently interpreted, but these need to be resolved between you since voting differently will effectively cancel out your Branch's vote.

Ensure that ballot papers for elections are put in the correct boxes by the closing time - instructions are given on this and the President or Chairperson will remind you of these from time to time.

Mark up your agenda with decisions on motions and with the names of those elected to various offices. This will help you follow Conference more clearly and you will need this information when you report back to your Branch.

Conference Hall

Conference Halls are controlled by a system of admission using credential cards. No person will be admitted to these halls without production of a valid card. It is in the Delegate's own interest that credential cards are retained in a safe place for use at each conference session.

No person will be permitted to distribute or display any material in the Conference Hall Complex or within the Hotels contracted for use by NIPSA during the Conference period.

After Conference

Report back to your Branch about decisions made at Conference; in particular, draw attention to decisions made on your own Branch's motions and on the ones to which your Branch is particularly interested. Good practice in reporting back is to prepare a written report for circulation and also give a verbal report both at a Branch Committee meeting and at a Branch members meeting.

Keep a record. Your written report and the minutes of both your Branch Committee meeting and members will form an important record about current NIPSA policy.

Pursue policies. It is important that, once passed at Conference, policies should be pursued and implemented in your Branch. This is the job of your Branch Committee but Conference Delegates have an important role to play in ensuring this is done as they will have experienced the mood of Conference.

It should be remembered by Delegates that the decision to send them to Conference on behalf of their members implies an expectation of their arrival at Conference on time and of their participation in all Conference sessions.

Appendix 3

Conference Arrangements

The NIPSA Organisation and Services Section is responsible for all Conference arrangements. These arrangements are recommended by the NIPSA Conference Arrangements Committee and approved by the General Council.

Accommodation

Accommodation at the main NIPSA Conference is provided by NIPSA. A normal standard of Hotel accommodation will, as far as possible, be used. Delegates may have to share rooms at Conference because of the limited availability and to help defray costs.

Each person attending Conference must register at the special booking-in desk. Details of this arrangements will be given in pre-Conference documentation.

Late nominations of Delegates cannot be given a high priority and it may not be possible to provide such Delegates with accommodation.

Expenses

Special forms are issued enabling Branches to notify Headquarters, in advance, of the names, addresses, etc of their Delegates. It is essential that complete and accurate information is given on these forms and that they are returned to Headquarters by the specified closing date.

Travelling expense claims must be submitted prior to Conference. These should be returned with the Delegates's nominations forms.

Claims are only accepted in respect of travelling expenses to and from Conference(s) based on excess mileage incurred and paid at the approved NIPSA rate of mileage or the actual cost of travel by public transport. A daily allowance for lunch will also be paid.

Claims will be checked by NIPSA Organisation and Services Section.

Appendix 4

Sexual Harassment - No Laughing Matter

NIPSA is totally opposed to sexual harassment in the workplace or the union.

There have been few incidents of sexual harassment reported at NIPSA Conference but as it is extremely distressing for the people concerned we are issuing this guidance so that everyone is aware that sexual harassment is unacceptable to NIPSA and that anyone who is harassed knows how to get help to stop it.

What is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment is any action of a sexual nature which is not encouraged or welcomed by the person suffering it. It can include, but is not limited to:

- verbal abuse or threats;
- sexual teasing or suggestive remarks;
- sexual assault;
- demands for sexual favours;
- sexist jokes;
- patronising and derogatory remarks and behaviour;
- display of any material of a suggestive/sexual nature, which gives offence to either men or women (for example calendars, pin-ups, or explicit personal photographs).

What to do if you are sexually harassed

1. Make clear to the harasser that their behaviour is unacceptable and unwelcome and ask them to stop.
2. If the behaviour does not stop make a note of the incident and report it to the NIPSA Official appointed to deal with sexual harassment matters which arise during Conference.

All complaints will be treated sympathetically and in strict confidence.

Guidance on Conduct at NIPSA Conferences and Meetings

Introduction

1. This guidance on conduct at all NIPSA conferences and meetings has been approved by NIPSA's General Council. It draws on the provisions in the NIPSA constitution, in particular Rule 1.3(e) (promotion of equal opportunities), Rule 2.20(c) (duty of members to observe the rules of the union), Rule 4.14 and Annex B (model branch rules), Rule 11.2 (grounds for disciplinary action) and the policy goals set under these rules. The guidance sets out the principles and procedures on conduct to be observed at all NIPSA conferences and meetings.
2. The guidance applies to NIPSA members and NIPSA employees. Consequently all references in the guidance to members, persons, participants, etc includes NIPSA members, NIPSA HQ Officials, NIPSA Seconded Officers and NIPSA employees.

Principles

3. The purpose of NIPSA conferences and meetings is to further the interests of NIPSA members, in accordance with the NIPSA rules and NIPSA policies. As a key principle, every participant at a NIPSA meeting must have the right to speak and vote without fear of harassment, abuse, ridicule, hostility or any form of intimidation. To achieve this principle the aim at any NIPSA meeting must be to create a good and harmonious working environment where all members, employees and other persons present are treated with respect and dignity. In such an atmosphere all participants are encouraged to deploy their diverse talents to maximise the benefits for members.
4. At NIPSA Conferences and meetings members have the right to criticise the views, opinions, etc of others, and to question the position or decisions of others. This right has, however, to be balanced against the right of participants set out in paragraph 3 above, to participate free from any form of abuse or harassment. Any such behaviour at a NIPSA Conference or

meeting is unacceptable for the conduct of NIPSA business. A person engaging in such behaviour could become liable to disciplinary proceedings under NIPSA Rules 11.1 to 11.16 (members) and Rules 7.4(f) and 7.8 to 7.16 (employees) or legal proceedings for slander or for unlawful discrimination if it is motivated by consideration of religious belief, political opinion, sex, marital status, disability or race (as defined in law).

5. Views and opinions can be expressed strongly, without being abusive, insulting or degrading to any person. Listen to other peoples views. Express disagreement without the use of language which would impugn the character or integrity of any person, or expose a person to hatred, ridicule or contempt whether s/he is present or not.
6. At Conferences or meetings harassment can include unwelcome verbal or physical conduct, which is unreasonable, offensive to the recipient and creates a hostile environment. Statements, remarks, jokes, gossip, etc should be avoided on the subject of colour, race, ethnic or national origins, political opinion, religious belief, sex, disability, age, marital status or sexual orientation.
7. This guidance also applies to conduct by NIPSA members in connection with NIPSA Conferences and meetings. In particular no person should be subjected to verbal, written or physical behaviour which intimidates or harasses any person in connection with any matter due to be considered at a NIPSA Conference or meeting. Similarly no person should be subject to such behaviour, non co-operation or isolation because of how s/he participated in or voted at a NIPSA Conference or meeting.

Role of Chairperson

8. For business to be conducted in a manner consistent with this guidance and all relevant Standing Orders, the role of the person chairing the Conference or meeting is most important. S/he must be impartial. Where there are differences of opinion,

the role of the Chairperson is to ensure that all parties have an equal and fair chance to express their views.

- 9.** The Chairperson of the Conference or meeting is responsible for ensuring that conduct at meetings does not subject any person to intimidation, harassment, bullying or any similar derogatory behaviour. In considering challenges about behaviour the Chairperson should bear in mind that it is the effect on the recipient which is paramount. If a person is behaving in a manner inconsistent with this guidance, the Chairperson must immediately call the person to order and ask him or her to desist from his or her behaviour.
- 10.** If any delegate at a NIPSA Conference or any member at a meeting considers that another person is behaving in a manner inconsistent with this guidance, s/he must immediately raise it with the Chairperson as a point of order. The Chairperson shall then make a ruling on the point of order. This ruling may be challenged in accordance with the NIPSA Rules or the Standing Orders for the body concerned.

Complaints Procedure

- 11.** In addition to the provisions in paragraphs 9 and 10 above on points of order, any person is entitled to lodge a complaint, if s/he considers that s/he has been the subject of behaviour inconsistent with this guidance at a NIPSA conference or meeting. This also applies to behaviour outside a NIPSA meeting, but in connection with a matter considered, or to be considered, at a NIPSA meeting. In the case of NIPSA employees complaints can be lodged by their union.
- 12.** In the first instance the complaint should preferably be made in writing to the Chairperson for the NIPSA Conference or meeting to which the allegedly unacceptable behaviour related. The Chairperson shall arrange for the complaint to be considered within an appropriate time scale and report back on the outcome to the person who made the complaint or to the HQ staff union.

- 13.** If the person who made the complaint is not satisfied with the outcome of the process described in paragraph 12 above and the person allegedly responsible for the unacceptable behaviour is a member of the same NIPSA branch as the complainant, s/he may ask his or her Branch Committee to consider instituting disciplinary proceedings against the alleged perpetrator. Alternatively s/he may write to the NIPSA General Secretary requesting that the General Council consider instituting disciplinary proceedings against the alleged perpetrator.
- 14.** In all cases, except those covered by paragraph 13 above, where there is dissatisfaction with the outcome of the process described in paragraph 12 above, the aggrieved person, or the HQ staff union in the case of a NIPSA employee, may write to the NIPSA General Secretary requesting that the General Council consider instituting disciplinary proceedings against the alleged perpetrator.



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