

# Use of telephones, e-mail and internet by staff

## Introduction

The provisions of this policy apply to all members of staff, whether or not they have access to, or sole use of, a telephone or e-mail/the Internet on a personal computer. Although access to such facilities does not form part of the benefits provided to the employees, it is recognized that there are occasions when employees might legitimately make private use of these facilities. This policy is intended to make clear what constitutes legitimate use. It is intended not to place employees under unjustifiable scrutiny, but to give them a high measure of security and confidence about their use of e-mail, telephones and the Internet.

The sections of the policy covered by misconduct and misuse should be read in conjunction with the appropriate staff disciplinary procedure.

This policy has been designed to safeguard the legal rights of members of staff under the terms of both the Data Protection Act (IT Act 2000) and the Protection of Human Rights Act (1993).

## Telephones

There will be occasions when employees need to make short, personal telephone calls on Institute telephones in order to deal with occasional and urgent personal matters. Where possible, such calls should be made and received outside the employee's normal working hours or when they do not interfere with work requirements.

The use of Institute telephones for private purposes, which are unreasonably excessive or for Institute purposes which are defamatory, obscene or otherwise inappropriate, may be treated as misconduct under the appropriate disciplinary procedure.

Where the Institute has grounds to suspect possible misuse of its telephones, it reserves the right to audit the destination and length of out-going calls and the source and length of in-coming calls. This would not normally involve the surveillance of calls but in certain rare circumstances where there are reasonable grounds to suspect serious misconduct, the Institute reserves the right to record calls.

## E-mail

As with telephones it is recognized that employees can use e-mail for personal means in the same manner as that set out for telephones above. E-mail should be treated like any other form of written communication and, as such, what is normally regarded as unacceptable in a letter or memorandum is equally unacceptable in an e-mail communication.

Employees should be careful that before they open any attachment to a personal e-mail they receive, they are reasonably confident that the content is in no sense obscene or defamatory to avoid contravening the law. Equally, if an employee receives an obscene or defamatory e-mail, whether unwittingly or otherwise and from whatever source, he/she should not intentionally

forward the e-mail to any other address, unless specifically requested to do so by an investigator appointed by the Institute. Any other use of e-mail for either personal or Institute purposes to send or forward messages or attachments which are in any way defamatory, obscene or otherwise inappropriate will be treated as misconduct under the appropriate disciplinary procedure.

Where the Institute has reasonable grounds to suspect misuse of e-mail in either scale of use, content or nature of messages, it reserves the right to audit the destination, source and content of e-mail to and from a particular address.

The Institute also reserves the right to access an employee's e-mail account in her/his unexpected or prolonged absence (e.g. – due to sickness) in order to allow it to continue to undertake the employee's normal role. In normal circumstances the employee concerned will be contacted before this is done, in order to provide him/her with prior knowledge.

### **Use of the Internet**

The primary reason for the provision of Internet access is for the easy retrieval of information for research purposes in order to enhance the ability of its staff to undertake their Institute role. However, it is legitimate for employees to make use of the Internet in its various forms in the same way as email above as long as it is not used to view or distribute improper material such as text, messages or images which are derogatory, defamatory or obscene.

Unauthorized use of the Internet will be treated as misconduct under the appropriate disciplinary procedure. The Institute reserves the right to audit the use of the Internet from particular Personal Computers or accounts where it suspects misuse of the facility

### **Auditing use of telephone, e-mail and the Internet**

It is not the Institute's policy, as a matter of routine, to monitor a fellow employee's use of the Institute's telephone or e-mail service or of the Internet via the Institute's networks. However, as has been stated, where there are reasonable grounds to suspect an instance of misuse or abuse of any of these services, the Institute may grant permission for the auditing of an employee's telephone calls, e-mail or the Internet. Once approved, the monitoring process will be undertaken by designated staff in NITT/CSG acting, for operational purposes, under the direction of the Head of the CSG. These staff are required to observe the strictest confidentiality when undertaking these activities and they will monitor only to the extent necessary to establish the facts of the case. They will make their reports directly to the Director of the institute to advise the appropriate head of department the actions that may need to be taken in any particular case. When monitoring is approved, the case for continued monitoring shall be reviewed on a regular basis with a view to terminating monitoring in as short a period of time as possible.