

Acceptable Usage Policy - governing the use of CAO Services including CAO websites, CAO telephony & CAO premises*

It is the intention of CAO to provide fair and equal treatment for all applicants and to minimise expense for the applicant body as a whole. Sometimes, a small number of clients may behave in a way which is unreasonable and unacceptable. This policy is in place to enable CAO to handle such cases in a fair and proportional manner, while continuing to provide an excellent service to the large majority of clients who avail of the services of the office. Certain behaviours and activities may interfere with the operational integrity of the office and continued provision of services to clients (see points 1 & 2 below), these are thus prohibited:

1. Unreasonable Communications

Unreasonable communication may include one or more isolated incidents or may be the accumulation of incidents or contacts over a period of time. Some of the types of communication which are considered to be unreasonable and which may cause the implementation of this policy are set out below:

- Aggressive or intimidating communication, for example, threats, rude behaviour or untrue allegations against staff (delivered or uttered in any manner, including on social media)
- Obstructive communication, for example, hindering the business by overloading CAO with excessive or voluminous correspondence; trolling; or requesting alternative members of staff to deal with a query
- Unreasonable persistence, demands and arguments, for example, seeking a solution which is not realistic or proportionate or is outside the control or responsibility of CAO; exaggerating issues; reframing a previously closed query to present it as a new issue; requesting personal information on staff members
- Unreasonable level of cooperation, for example failing to comply with procedures set out by CAO.

2. Disruption to the CAO System/Networks

Attempts to disrupt the CAO System/networks include the following examples (please note this is not an exhaustive list):

- Intentionally disrupting or altering the use of electronic networks or information systems by whatever means, for example, worms, viruses, chain mail, scanning for security vulnerabilities, altering CAO computing or networking components without authorisation, unauthorised wiring or attempts to create unauthorised network connections
- Failure to comply with requests from CAO and other officials to cease activities which are disrupting CAO systems
- Activities which may result in a GDPR breach, for example, revealing passwords or allowing use by others (by intent or negligence) of personal accounts for computer and network access
- Intentionally or negligently damaging or destroying CAO electronic information, computing/networking equipment and resources
- Altering or attempting to alter files or systems without authorisation
- Intentionally wasting human or electronic resources, for example by obstruction or excessive use of resources or planning/conspiring/encouraging others into acts of excessive use or obstruction.

Communication with a member of the public will not normally be restricted unless this is deemed necessary, proportionate and in the interest of the CAO applicant body and/or participating Higher Education Institutions. Where it is considered that the communication is unreasonable, the client will be notified of this and asked to cease. This may range from politely terminating a conversation to asking a member of the public to leave the CAO building or facility. A member of staff who experiences unreasonable behaviour should report the matter to their line manager without delay. Excessive use or obstruction may be dealt with by any reasonable means available to CAO including but not limited to withdrawing certain services and/or blocking access to services for those identified as participating in disruption activities.

If the unreasonable behaviour continues, action may be taken to restrict a client's contact with CAO. The decision to restrict contact with the client will only be taken after the service provided to the client concerned has been reviewed. The decision will normally be taken by a Supervisor. Any restrictions put in place will be appropriate and proportionate and the client will have the option of appealing the restriction. The appeals process will also enjoy the protection of this policy.

**Some of this policy is informed by the policy of the Office of the Ombudsman.*