

 <p>HUMAN RESOURCES</p> <p>POLICY STATEMENT</p>
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Application for Further Education

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY?

This policy explains how the Council will support employees who wish to enhance their job performance by undertaking a course of further education or a professional qualification. A further education course is defined as one that lasts for 6 months or more and leads to a recognised qualification.

WHAT IS THE SCOPE OF THIS POLICY?

This policy is applicable to all permanent employees.

WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS POLICY?

This policy outlines the criteria that will be used to consider applications to study for courses of further education. The Council is keen to support personal development, which contributes towards the achievement of organisational objectives and to encourage a learning organisation. It is also keen to support the professional development of staff in areas where there are skills shortages. However, the annual training budget needs to be managed in a way that ensures it is distributed fairly and in a way that will bring benefits to the authority.

ELIGIBILITY

To apply for funding, an employee must have been employed by Harlow Council for a minimum of 6 months and must have satisfactorily completed their probationary period. There should be no outstanding issues with their performance or attendance.

The course of study should be relevant to the employee's job role, be part of an agreed development plan and there should be evidence that the employee is likely to successfully complete the programme. Examples of this include:

- The employee meets all eligibility criteria for the course of study e.g. minimum qualifications and / or experience.
- They understand that the course is likely to require a high degree of commitment of their own time.
- They have access to any equipment / resources stipulated for the course.
- They have a satisfactory attendance record.
- They are currently able to manage their workload.

SPECIAL AGREEMENT

Where an individual is offered a position in the organisation and is already part way through a course of accredited development, an application can be made for sponsorship to complete the course. The Head of Service, and then Human Resources, should approve the application before being included as part of the offer letter. This is to ensure that the course is appropriate for their new position within Harlow Council and that sufficient funds are available from the central training budget to cover the remaining fees. Where the current Further Education budget allocation is exhausted then attendance on the course will be dependant on the employing department being able to fund it.

CRITERIA FOR FUNDING

The following criteria will be used to assess whether sponsorship for the course of further education will be approved:

- The employee has worked for the Harlow Council for at least 6 months.
- They have satisfactorily completed their probationary period.
- There are no outstanding performance issues.
- They have a good attendance record. This is judged by whether they fall within the triggers of the Sickness Absence Management system.
- They are able to manage their current workload.
- The course of study is relevant to their current or future role.
- For requests for management courses, the employee should either be in a management position or have the potential to successfully move into one in the near future.
- They meet the eligibility criteria for the course.
- Attendance at the course or other periods of study leave will have minimal operational impact, which can be accommodated within the section concerned.
- Continuation with further years or modules will be subject to satisfactory completion of modules or assignments, attendance and

passing exams from previous years. This will be judged according to the pass criteria of the educational institute.

- There is significant opportunity to apply their learning in their current role and share their learning with their colleagues.
- They have the potential for further progression within the Council that ensures we will gain a return on our investment.
- Preference will be given to employees applying for their first professional qualification.
- Preference will be given to courses that develop staff in professions where there is a known national or local skills shortage.
- Preference will be given to a course required for a current role, over that for a future role.

Even when an employee meets all these criteria, there is no guarantee of sponsorship, as the final decision rests with the HR Manager (or equivalent) and sufficient funds being available.

CONDITIONS OF FUNDING

Payment from the central training budget will be made for course registration, books, examination fees and travel costs. Any residential costs will be met from the departmental budget.

Where payment has been made for course books these must be forwarded, in good condition, to Human Resources once the course is finished. It may be possible to pass these books onto other employees who subsequently undertake the same course.

Payment will be made for one examination re-sit. Any future re-sits will be the responsibility of the employee.

Should the employee leave local government within 2 years of completing the course, then the financial assistance provided will be treated as a loan. The repayment required would reduce over the 2-year period, by 1/24th for each month after completion that the employee remains with the Council. The amount outstanding will be deducted from their final salary, or a monthly repayment will be required, depending on the amount outstanding.

Repayment is also required if the employee discontinues the course before completion or without good reason fails to take an examination within a reasonable time.

Acceptance by the employee of the financial assistance provided will be taken as acceptance of the terms of this policy.

SPONSORSHIP PROCEDURE

The following procedure should be followed:

The employee should discuss the course with his / her line manager to ensure it is relevant to his / her role and development plan.

The employee should complete a Course Nomination Form and pass it to his / her line manager. The line manager completes the Application for Further Education Form and has that signed by the Head of Service. The forms should then be sent to Human Resources to establish whether there are sufficient funds. Forms need to arrive by 1st June for September start dates, or by 1st November for a course starting early in the following year. All requests will then be given to the HR Manager (or equivalent) for final approval.

The employee will then be contacted by HR to confirm whether their request has been approved or not. Enrolment cannot take place with any organisation without this confirmation.

WHAT IS MY RESPONSIBILITY AS A MANAGER?

As a manager, you are responsible for:

- Identifying with the employee the further education course that will support their development needs and ensure it is in line with service and corporate plans.
- Reviewing progress on a regular basis and ensure that the knowledge and skills acquired are having a positive impact on the authority.
- Provide as much notice as possible to HR to ensure budgetary provision can be made and that the deadline for submission is met.
- Notifying HR of any issues e.g. performance, lack of attendance that may affect the completion of the course of study.
- Notifying HR of staff resignation within the payback period to ensure that the appropriate costs can be reclaimed.

WHAT IS MY RESPONSIBILITY AS AN EMPLOYEE?

As an employee, you are responsible for:

- Complying with the sponsorship procedure by completing all sections of the nomination form in full and on time.
- Providing regular progress reports to your line manager i.e. results of course-work and examinations.
- Identifying opportunities to transfer your learning to the workplace and sharing information with colleagues.
- Planning your study time in the most effective way to minimise operational impact, whilst ensuring individual success.
- Complying with the conditions of the course i.e. attend on the days required, submit course-work by the deadlines set.

WHAT IS HUMAN RESOURCE'S RESPONSIBILITY?

HR is responsible for:

- Dealing with the applications promptly.
- Auditing the quality of courses by seeking feedback from delegates.

CONCLUSION

This policy will ensure the substantial investment that is placed in employees undertaking further education courses is fairly allocated and that the Council maximises the investment placed in the successful applicants.