

OD/HR – Assistance to Study (Further Education) Draft Policy	15 August 2017
Corporate Policy and Resources Committee For Approval	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Transition and Transformation
Outcome	Successful delivery of Organisational Development and Human Resource Services across the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Lead Officer	Head of Organisational Development & Human Resources
Cost: (If applicable)	As detailed within the report

1. Purpose of Report

To present Council with “Assistance to Study (Further Education) Policy” for consideration and approval (copy attached).

2. Context and Background

The Assistance to Study (Further Education) Policy explains how the Council will support employees who wish to enhance their job performance by undertaking a formal course leading to a recognised academic/vocational qualification which is related to their role. The Council is keen to support personal development, which contributes towards the achievement of organisational objectives and to encourage a learning organisation.

This policy outlines how Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council provides financial assistance to employees to enable them to gain relevant qualifications which will assist them in their role and contribute to the provision of high quality, cost effective services for the rate payer as well as building capacity and enhancing the development of our workforce.

The policy has been approved both by the Senior Management Team and the Trade Unions through the Joint Consultative and Negotiating Committee (JCNC). In accordance with Council’s duty under Section 75 Equality

Legislation, the policy has been screened and the result is that this policy was screened “out”.

3. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee recommend to Council approval of the Assistance to Study (Further Education) Policy.



**Causeway
Coast & Glens
Borough Council**

Assistance to Study (Further Education) Policy

Policy Number	
Version Number	
Author	

Date of Screening of Policy	
EQIA Recommended?	YES/NO
Date Adopted by Council	
Date Policy Revised	

INDEX

Assistance to Study (Further Education) Policy

	<u>Page No</u>
1.	Introduction
2.	Policy Statement
3.	Definitions
4.	Accountability and Responsibilities
5.	Eligibility
6.	Selection Criteria for Assistance
7.	Procedures for Applying for Assistance
8.	Package of Assistance
9.	Conditions of Assistance
10.	Application Process
11.	Authorisation of Requests for Assistance
12.	Appeal Mechanism
13.	Other Conditions for Assistance to Study
14.	Evaluation and Review of the Policy
15.	Section 75 Equality and Good Relations
16.	Contact Details

Appendices:

I	Application for Assistance to Study
II	Agreement for Financial Assistance

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy explains how the Council will support employees who wish to enhance their job performance by undertaking a formal course leading to a recognised academic/vocational qualification which is related to their role. The Council is keen to support personal development, which contributes towards the achievement of organisational objectives and to encourage a learning organisation.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

- 2.1 Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is committed to providing financial assistance to employees to enable them to gain relevant qualifications which will assist them in their role and contribute to the provision of high quality, cost effective services for the rate payer. Build capacity and enhance the development of our workforce.
- 2.2 All such courses of study should relate to the aims, objectives and priorities of the Council and the Department in which the employee works.
- 2.3 Assistance will be dependent upon the amount of money identified for financial assistance from the overall Organisational Development/Human Resources (OD/HR) Learning and Development budget.
- 2.4 Assistance will be given to employees who are taking courses of study on a day release, part time or block basis to enable them to obtain relevant educational, technical and professional qualifications.
- 2.5 The assistance will be managed and organised by Council's Organisational Development/Human Resources Department and overseen by the Organisational Development/Human Resources (OD/HR) Manager.
- 2.6 In providing access to this policy, there is a requirement for Council to consider the need to balance protection of the public purse with equal opportunities for all employees.

(The policy statement should be signed and dated as follows by relevant Council representatives and Trade Union representatives)

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Mayor
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Chief Executive
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

3 DEFINITIONS

OD/HR	Organisational Development/Human Resources
SMT	Senior Management Team

4 ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This section outlines the role of Employees, Line Managers, Heads of Service and the OD/HR Department as appropriate, in relation to the policy:

4.1 Employee Responsibility:

- Provide accurate information to allow the Line Manager and Head of Service to make an informed decision regarding approval of an application;
- Complete application fully and ensure necessary approvals have been received before submission to OD/HR Department;
- If approval is granted, comply with all Conditions in relation to this policy;
- Be aware of the personal commitment and the extra time required for study in order to successfully complete your course;
- Ensure that deadlines for submissions are met;
- Provide regular progress reports to your line manager i.e. results of course work and examinations;
- Identify opportunities to transfer your learning to the workplace and share information with colleagues.

4.2 Line Manager / Head of Service Responsibility:

- Identify with the employee the further education course that will support their development needs and ensure that it is consistent with their role, service priorities and corporate priorities.
- Ensure the course is relevant to the employee's job role, and is part of an agreed development plan;
- Make a decision on whether to support the application for assistance. In supporting the application form, Line Managers/Heads of Service are confirming, to the best of their knowledge, that the content is correct and that they are willing to support the application (e.g. investment in course, granting time off, meeting travel expenses, etc);
- Ensure the Director is aware of commitment to study leave, travel expenses and the benefits to the department;
- Monitor employee attendance and progress at regular intervals;
- Monitor employee adherence to the conditions of the Policy for Assistance to Study;
- Monitor and recommend the payment of claims for reimbursement of approved expenses in line with Councils procedures;
- Provide the necessary support so that employees gain the maximum benefits from their course of study, for example a work based projects to apply and consolidate knowledge and skills gained from a course.
- Consult with employees regarding relevant projects/assignments so they can be used within the Department/Council. Liaise with OD/HR regarding projects as required.

- Notify OD/HR of any issues e.g. performance, lack of attendance that may affect the completion of the course of study.
- Notify OD/HR of staff resignation within the payback period to ensure that the appropriate costs can be reclaimed.

4.3 OD/HR Manager Responsibility:

- Review all applications received;
- Make recommendations to the SMT;
- Communicate with employees regarding approval/rejection/deferral of an application;
- Evaluate the quality of the courses by seeking feedback from attendees.

5 ELIGIBILITY

5.1 To apply for funding, an employee must have been employed by Council for a minimum of 6 months and must have satisfactorily completed their probationary period. There should be no outstanding issues with their performance. Requests from employees who are on temporary contracts will be reviewed in light of how long the course is for and how long their contract is likely to last.

5.2 New employees to the Council, who are continuing a course of study will be eligible to apply for assistance in accordance with the Policy. The probationary rule does not apply in this instance. The Head of Service and OD/HR Manager will ensure that the course is appropriate for their new position and that sufficient funds are available from the central training budget to cover the remaining fees.

5.3 Each application for assistance under the Policy will be considered individually. Applicants should ensure that all the information required is included in their submission before forwarding an application to their Line Manager and Head of Service for approval.

5.4 The course must lead to a recognised qualification.

5.5 The contents of the course must be relevant to the employee's job role and be part of an agreed development plan.

5.6 There must be a direct benefit to the Council and to the employee's career development.

5.7 The suitability of the course should be relevant to the employee's work experience and level of responsibility.

5.8 The level of course and method of study should be appropriate to the applicant's existing qualifications and previous attainments, and there should be good reason to believe that the applicant will successfully complete the course.

5.9 Assistance will only be considered for one course per year, per employee. It will not normally be available for employees that have been in receipt of Council support for

previous qualifications within the last two years; or have been awarded funding for a course in the last four years which they failed to complete.

- 5.10 Assistance will be granted for the duration of the course subject to satisfactory performance and conduct. An employee's record will not be deemed to be satisfactory where there is a live warning on their file at the closing date for applications.
- 5.11 An employee may apply for assistance as long as their Line Manager and Head of Service agree that the proposed course of study is appropriate and they are currently able to manage their current workload.
- 5.12 Courses which require attendance during normal working hours are always agreed subject to the needs of the service.
- 5.13 Preference will be given to a course required for a current role over a future role.
- 5.14 Even when an employee meets all these criteria, there is no guarantee of sponsorship, as the final decision rests with the SMT and sufficient funds being available.

6 PROCEDURES FOR APPLYING FOR ASSISTANCE

- 6.1 Employees should complete the application form (Appendix 1), discuss it with their Line Manager and Head of Service and seek approval. Once the employee has completed the Application Form they should submit it to OD/HR Department by the closing date. Employees should ensure that all necessary signatories have been received before submission to OD/HR. Applications will not be accepted without the necessary approvals.
- 6.2 On receipt of applications, consideration will be given to comments received from the Line Manager/Head of Service regarding the employees ability to complete the course of study without detriment to job performance.
- 6.3 Once the signed and completed application is received and approved by the OD/HR Department it will be taken to Senior Management Team (SMT) for final consideration and approval.
- 6.4 An application for assistance signed off by the Line Manager and Head of Service is not a guarantee of approval.
- 6.5 Each application will be considered on its own merit, regardless of refusal of any previous applications.
- 6.6 Applications must be received by the closing date set by the OD/HR Department, usually 30 June, unless otherwise advised. Late applications will only be accepted, subject to available funding.
- 6.7 The Council will take account of continuing commitments in determining available budget for new applications. It should be noted that ability to fund continuing

applications will be dependent on availability of funding; every endeavour will be made to support continuing applications if possible.

6.8 At the end of the course of study you must forward evidence of your successful completion.

6.9 Employees will be required to repay the course fees if they discontinue the course before completion or without good reason fail to take an examination within a reasonable time.

7 ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

7.1 General

Council offer the following assistance for approved studies under the Policy for Assistance to Study:

- Fees, for the most economical method of study (including examination fees) up to a maximum of £1,000 per academic year will be paid
- In determining the available budget, account will be taken of prior commitments
- Council may identify an alternative viable option to meet the identified need.

7.2 Request for assistance will be circulated at least once each year usually issued on 1st June and closing on 30 June (subject to operational requirements).

7.3 Special Leave and Time Off

- A maximum of four days special leave with pay may be granted per academic year of course, this will be in accordance with the number of examinations to be completed. This can be made up of study leave, examination leave or combination of both. In addition, time off will be granted to undertake compulsory residential's (provision detailed below).
- Days taken as special leave and time off for study should be selected in consultation with your line manager to cause the minimum possible interference to the employees work and the service delivery for the relevant department.
- Day Release is defined as a standard working day, i.e. 9am to 5pm. No additional time will be accrued. If the course is a Half day employees will receive a standard half day to attend. If classes are in the evening employees will not accrue Flexi or Lieu time.

Requirement	Assistance
Course Attendance	There is provision for day release under the Policy for Assistance to Study. See details above.
Study Leave	Study leave, to facilitate preparation for examinations will be granted.
Project Leave/Assignments	There is no provision to award time off for written assessment through projects or assignments.

Examinations	Time off to take examinations, (including travelling time), if held during normal working hours will be granted.
Requirement	Assistance
Travel Expenses	Travel to an approved course of study and any compulsory residentials will be paid at public transport rate, in accordance with Council provision. Reimbursement will only be considered for those costs identified on the application form. Such expenses are met from the Department budget where the employee works.
Books	Assistance to buy essential text books up to a maximum of £50.00 per year will be granted. Payment will be provided upon receipt. Upon completion of the course please return the books to a central location within your department so that they can continue to be used a resource for your team.
Graduation	There is no provision for assistance to attend or fund Graduations under the Policy for Assistance to Study. All time and costs associated with graduation are the employee's responsibility.
Residentials	Time off will be granted to attend residential's that are a compulsory course requirement. A maximum of two days per academic year will be approved for this purpose, in addition to special leave for study or examinations. It is important that you forward the relevant details from the university or college confirming these details.
Professional Fees	Where courses require employees to be members of professional bodies, employees have responsibility to meet these expenses.

7.4 Part-time / Job-Sharing / Career Break

7.4.1 Part time employees will be afforded the same equality of access to learning and development opportunities and provisions as full time employees. If learning and development courses are outside his/her contracted hours, part time employees will be paid on the same basis as full time employees to attend, the course of study.

7.4.2 Employees who are on a Career Break will not be eligible for assistance under this Policy.

7.5 Examination Results

7.5.1 Employees must forward a copy of their examination results to the OD/HR Department as soon as these become available.

7.5.2 If an employee fails any examination they must advise their Line Manager and the OD/HR Department. Council will finance the examination fee for one additional resit only, which must be taken at the earliest opportunity.

7.5.3 If an employee fails a resit they will be required to:

- Inform both their Line Manager and the OD/HR Department

- Resit the examination in their own time and at their own expense

7.5.4 A meeting to review assistance will be arranged with the employee, line manager and OD/HR Department, should a second failure occur.

8 CONDITIONS OF ASSISTANCE

- 8.1 Employees accepted for assistance will be subject to the conditions of assistance as outlined below.
- 8.2 Payment from the Learning and Development budget will be made for course registration, books, examination fees and residential costs. Any travel costs will be met from the departmental budget.
- 8.3 Should the employee leave the Council 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.
- 8.4 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.
- 8.5 Acceptance by the employee of the financial assistance provided will be taken as acceptance of the terms of this policy.
- 8.6 The Council may withdraw financial assistance and require repayment of a proportion/all of the financial assistance received if any of the following occurs without good reason:
- Abuse of the Policy for Assistance to Study & related procedure
 - Abuse of travelling and reimbursement support
 - Failure to attend scheduled classes
 - Failure to attend work when scheduled classes are cancelled/completed
 - Failure to sit an examination within a reasonable period
 - Failure to show satisfactory progress during the course
 - Failure to submit essential course work
 - Discontinuing the course

(NB: Disciplinary action may be taken depending on the circumstances of the case.)

9 APPLICATION PROCESS

- 9.1 Employees who wish to be considered for assistance from Council must complete an application form (See Appendix 1).
- 9.2 Applications should be agreed and approved by the employees Line Manager and Head of Service before submission to the OD/HR Department. Applications should be submitted no later than 30 June each year (unless otherwise advised by OD/HR

Department). Applications will be considered by the SMT before final approval is given.

10 AUTHORISATION OF REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

- 10.1 In the first instance Line Managers will be required to assess and sign off applications for employees in their area/department. They should therefore satisfy themselves that:
- a) the application meets the criteria set out above in 'Eligibility' section.
 - b) the course represents the most appropriate and effective means of meeting the employees development needs
- 10.2 Authorised applications should then be forwarded to the Head of Service who will review all applications for their service area. If the Head of Service is satisfied that the application meets the criteria he/she should countersign and forward to the OD/HR Manager to arrange the necessary consideration and approval by SMT.
- 10.3 The OD/HR Department will notify employees in writing whether their application has been approved, deferred for support in future years or rejected. Employees offered support under the Policy will be required to sign and return an Agreement for Financial Assistance (Appendix 2), prior to any support being provided under the policy.
- 10.4 Where an employee who has received approval to undertake a course of study fails to take up the course in the academic year in which his /her application is approved, he/she will be required to make a fresh application at the point in time when he/she wishes to commence the course. The approval of a previous application will not automatically guarantee that a future application will be able to be supported.

11 APPEAL MECHANISM

- 11.1 Should an employee's application for assistance be rejected, the employee will have the right to appeal the decision. An appeal will be conducted by the Head of OD/HR and written confirmation will be provided to the employee detailing the outcome. No further appeals will be undertaken after this point. The decision of the Head of OD/HR is final.

12 OTHER CONDITIONS

- 12.1 The Council will not provide any incremental salary progression on the successful completion of an approved course of study.
- 12.2 If approval has been granted for assistance and the employee subsequently declines to pursue this course of study they should inform the OD/HR department directly. Failure to do so may prevent others from gaining assistance.
- 12.3 If an employee is unable to continue with an approved course of study for whatever reason they must inform their Line Manager and OD/HR Department directly. Each case will be reviewed by the OD/HR Department and monies may require to be repaid.

- 12.4 Membership and Subscription Fees to professional bodies will not be financed by Council and will be the employee's responsibility.

13 EVALUATION AND REVIEW OF POLICY

- 13.1 This policy will be reviewed as required.
- 13.2 Every effort will be made to provide information in an alternative format if written format is not accessible to a member of staff

14 SECTION 75 EQUALITY AND GOOD RELATIONS

- 14.1 Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is fully committed to meeting its obligations in relation to Equality and Good Relations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. In this regard this policy will be screened using Section 75 guidelines and will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment if found necessary as a result of the screening process

15 CONTACT DETAILS

- 15.1 Any issues or queries relating to this policy should be addressed to the OD/HR Manager.

DRAFT

APPENDIX I

APPLICATION FOR ASSISTANCE TO STUDY

Available from the Staff Portal and OD/HR Department

DRAFT



This form should be completed in full and discussed with your immediate Line Manager before forwarding it to your Head of Service for approval. ALL SECTIONS MUST BE COMPLETED AND NO ALTERATIONS SHOULD BE MADE TO THIS FORM.

SECTION 1

EMPLOYEE DETAILS	
Full Name	
Job Title	
Directorate	
Department	

COURSE DETAILS	
Course Title	
Course Venue	
Total Duration of Course	
If this course is going to run for more than one year please state duration and cost (if applicable)	
Cost of Course 2017 / 2018	
Dates and Times of Attendance	
PATTERN OF ATTENDANCE (please tick appropriate box below)	
1 day per week	1 evening per week
½ day per week	Distance Learning
Other (Please provide details)	

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE REQUIRED			
Please insert total costs relevant to your course of study			
Course Fees		Examination Fees	
Books		Residential	
Other (Please provide details)			
Have you ever received financial assistance to study from the Council before		Yes	No
If yes, please provide details of the programme of study:			
Assistance provided	£	Legacy Council	



EMPLOYEE OBJECTIVES

Please state how this qualification is relevant to your existing post and level of responsibility?

What do you hope to achieve from this course?

How will the course help you to do your job more effectively?

Signed		
	Employee	Date
Signature		
	Line Manager	Date
Signature		
	Head of Service	Date



TO BE COMPLETED BY IMMEDIATE LINE MANAGER

Please state how this course is relevant to the employee's post and how it will improve performance/ develop the member of staff.

Please demonstrate how the learning gained from this course is transferrable to the workplace

Reasons for Not Recommending Course

Signed		
	POSITION:	Date



SECTION 2

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE HEAD OF SERVICE OF DEPARTMENT

PLEASE INSERT ✓ WHERE APPROPRIATE

I recommend the employee completes this course of study		I do not recommend the employee completes this course of study	
---	--	--	--

Reasons for Not Recommending Course

Signed		
	Head of Service	Date

SECTION 2

APPROVAL BY THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

Signed		
	CHIEF EXECUTIVE	Date

Reasons for Not Approving Course

OD/HR Department

Application Form Received: _____ Date _____

AGREEMENT FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE WITH STUDY

NAME: _____

DEPARTMENT: _____

JOB TITLE: _____

COURSE TITLE: _____

DURATION OF COURSE: _____

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council has agreed to provide Financial Assistance to the above named for a period of _____ months/years.

Financial assistance will consist of the following:

- (i) full pay for all periods of attendance at college during normal working hours;
- (ii) up to a maximum of £1000 of course/examination/exemption/registration etc;
- (iii) full tuition and accommodation fees for attendance on residential courses if a compulsory requirement of the course;
- (iv) up to £50.00 per year for essential text books;
- (v) travelling expenses where appropriate.

In return the employee will agree to abide by the following conditions:

- (a) continue to work for Causeway Coast and Glens Council for two years from the date on which the qualification is obtained;
- (b) Should you leave the Council 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 two year period, by 1/24th for each month after completion that the employee remains with the Council. The amount outstanding will be deducted from your final salary, or a monthly repayment will be required, depending on the amount outstanding;
- (c) in the event of having to take a second resit of examinations will cover the additional costs out of own resources;
- (d) repay an amount, decided by the Council, in the event of the course not being completed for whatever reason.

I have read and agree to the above conditions.

Signed: _____

Dated: _____

To be completed by the OD/HR Manager:

Assistance offered

Assistance not offered

Signed: _____

Dated: _____