



Parliamentary  
and Health Service  
Ombudsman

# Professional Learning Policy

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## Introduction

1. PHSO recognises that continuing professional development (CPD) through achieving professional qualifications and completing Professional Learning courses help to develop the capability and professionalism of employees. We are, therefore, committed to encouraging and assisting employees who wish to study further.
2. Employees can apply for financial assistance towards the costs of professional qualifications and professional learning courses and/or study leave. Agreement is subject to budget availability and the relevance to your role at PHSO.
3. This applies to all PHSO employees (see paragraph 24 for staff in their probation period).
4. Further information and advice is available from the Learning and Development team if required.
5. To find out more about how PHSO processes and shares data, including employee's rights; please refer to the Employee Privacy Notice (ISDL1801) on Ombudsnet.

## Criteria for supporting Professional Learning and CPD

6. Support (including financial assistance and study leave) for the employee to complete a professional learning course and professional qualification will be considered on the basis of:
  - a. The need within PHSO for the particular qualification, knowledge or skill being developed by the employee

- b. The relevance of the qualification/course to the employee's job role, objectives and personal development plan (PDP). There should be a clear demonstration of how the learning from the course will help in the achievement of PHSO's strategic objectives and the employee's personal (work-related) objectives

The employee's existing level of educational attainment, work history and performance, which must be rated as fully effective. Furthermore,

- c. these factors should support the view that they have the ability and commitment to successfully complete the course
  - d. The amount of assistance from PHSO already received by the employee to fulfill their learning and development (L&D) objectives
  - e. Availability of budgetary and other resources and whether the course represents good value in terms of the overall expenditure of resources (money, time away from work, impact on the team)
7. In all instances, decisions to provide financial assistance and/or study leave will be fair and transparent and take into account what is reasonable for both the employee and their team, in accordance with PHSO's Equality and Diversity policy.

## Financial assistance

8. Providing the above criteria are met, and subject to budget availability, PHSO will provide financial assistance as follows:
- a. **100%** of course and examination fees where the qualification is a *requirement* of the job i.e. explicitly stated in the job description or person specification
  - b. **up to a maximum of 75%** of course and examination fees (including, in certain circumstances, fees for one re-sit per examination paper), subject to the availability of funding, where the application is based on the individual personal development objectives and where the course of study is directly relevant to the employee's job
  - c. **up to £100** for books required for the course (i.e. required core texts)
  - d. Reimbursement for travel expenses (either public transport costs or PHSO standard mileage rate) for additional costs incurred in travelling from home and/or the office to the college or course venue over and above the cost of travelling from home to the office. Reasonable subsistence and accommodation can be claimed where this is an essential part of the course, e.g. needing to attend a 2 day workshop.

However this should be included in the course fees noted on the application form

9. It is very unlikely that we will provide any level of funding for applications that relate to 'personal interest' or 'broad' career development topics or 'career change' qualifications. The focus of the scheme is on qualifications and professional learning courses that will support the employee's work at PHSO in their current role.
10. When a course is part-funded by PHSO, an interest free loan may be made available to assist the employee in paying for the balance of the course or examination fees. Decisions about such loans are made on a discretionary basis by the Learning and Development Manager. The employee will be required to sign an agreement outlining the terms and conditions of the loan. The terms of the loan will depend on individual circumstances. However, other than in exceptional cases, the maximum term for a loan will be one calendar year. If the employee leaves PHSO before the loan is fully repaid the remaining amount will be deducted from their final salary or a mutually agreeable repayment plan will be put in place (e.g. if the amount of their final salary is less than the amount outstanding).
11. PHSO will provide study leave as well as, or instead of, financial assistance depending on the circumstances of each individual case. Employees can apply for study leave without applying for financial assistance. Course attendance will normally be in an individual's own time, although line managers have the discretion to vary patterns of attendance, within the limits of individuals' contracted hours (e.g. the use of the flexi-time system). Applications for full day release will be considered in exceptional circumstances where no other mode of study is available.
12. Study leave is usually granted with pay and usually does not count against annual leave. Permission to take study leave should be sought from the employee's line manager at the earliest opportunity and recorded locally by the line manager. Leave will always be subject to operational requirements. Study leave may take the following forms:
  - a. **Examination leave:** to attend an examination
  - b. **Revision leave:** as a guide, study leave for exam revision is usually permitted on the basis of one revision day's leave per exam
  - c. **Study leave:** in addition to examination and revision leave, a maximum of five days study leave may be taken for the completion of course work, dissertations and to attend study days etc. Study leave is granted for the academic year rather than the leave year
  - d. **Vocational Qualifications (VQs):** A maximum of 5 days (in total) may be taken for meetings with your assessor, portfolio building and workshop attendance

13. Certain courses of study may require additional study leave, over and above those details above. The relevant Director must discuss any application for additional study leave with the Learning and Development Manager and present a business case before the request can be considered.

## Application process and conditions

14. The employee seeking support (financial or study leave or both) for courses leading to formal professional or academic qualifications should first discuss this with their line manager in the personal development planning process and then complete the Professional Learning Application Form. Each application needs to be approved by the employee's line manager using the criteria detailed above. Please contact the Learning and Development team for help in completing the application form.
15. All applications will be considered by the 'L&D Funding Committee'. This committee is chaired by the Learning and Development Manager and has three further members - one manager from Operations & Investigations, one manager from External Affairs and Strategy and one manager from another directorate. Decisions will be reviewed by the Director of HR, People and Talent.
16. Applications for a course that is longer than one year must be reviewed annually, prior to commencing each year. Funding is only agreed for a single year. A new application must be made for each year and funding cannot be guaranteed.
17. The employee is required to agree that, if they fail to complete and/or attend the course, PHSO's contribution towards fees for the year not completed will be recovered from the employee's salary in full, where there are no exceptional circumstances that are beyond their control. Failure to make payment may lead to salary being withheld. Action may also be taken under the disciplinary procedure if an employee is allowed time off to attend lectures or other events during working hours but fails to do so for no good reason.
18. The employee is also required to agree that in the event that they receive financial support for professional learning and then leave PHSO employment or PHSO terminates their employment (for reasons other than redundancy) while the course is being undertaken, or within 12 months of that course being completed, the employee will be required to repay a proportion of the PHSO contribution towards the cost of course and examination fees up to the total amount, except in exceptional circumstances. PHSO will apply the following criteria in relation to seeking reimbursement:

| Time Frame   | % repayment by you |
|--|--------------------|
| Within 0-3 months of course completion and/or during course of study | 100%               |
| Within 3 - 6 months of course completion                             | 75%                |



|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Within 6 - 9 months of course completion | 50% |
| Within 9-12 months of course completion  | 25% |

Completion date is the date of the last examination, last taught session or date the final assignment or portfolio is submitted, whichever is the latest date.

19. Line managers should inform the Learning and Development team when a staff member leaves either during, or within 12 months of, receiving financial support to complete a professional qualification. This should be done as soon as it is known that the individual is leaving, in order to facilitate the process of arranging reimbursement of fees. The line manager is responsible for informing the individual of the level of reimbursement that will be sought, in accordance with the criteria set out above. The Learning and Development team will also monitor staff leavers, in relation to this scheme.
20. Recovery will be made from the employee's final salary where possible. If it is not possible to make a full recovery from final salary, a mutually agreeable repayment plan will be sought.
21. Professional institute fees (or their equivalent) will be reimbursed whenever membership is an *essential* requirement to undertake the programme of study or examinations.

In addition PHSO is keen to ensure that where employees are members of Professional bodies that this membership continues during employment, and will therefore generously pay the annual membership fee, where membership is relevant to your role within PHSO.

For **Clinical Advisers**, membership of a Professional body such as the GMC and NMC is a requirement for the role, alongside practicing in the NHS. Therefore, with effect from 30 November 2017, PHSO will pay a percentage pro-rated based on the number of contracted working days, towards the annual membership fee for this group of employees dependent upon the number of contracted days with PHSO.

22. In the event that the employee fails to pass the examinations required in their programme of study, they will be expected to evaluate their performance realistically. Support for the re-sitting of examinations will only be provided where the employee has a reasonable expectation of success at the second attempt. Also, support will normally be restricted to pre-examination revision courses and not for undertaking the full course of study again. If the employee fails to pass on a second attempt, PHSO will not provide support for any subsequent re-sits which will need to be self-funded. PHSO will, however refund you the cost of examination fees for any self-funded re-sits that the employee subsequently passes. Failure to pass one module, stage or 'year' makes it unlikely that PHSO would be able to agree funding for the next module, stage or year.

23. The employee and their line manager are expected to discuss course work and examinations and how learning can be applied at PHSO and share learning with their team e.g. during team meetings. The employee is expected to provide a brief evaluation at the end of each financial year on the quality of the education provider, the key lessons learnt and how they will put the learning into practice.
24. The employee has recourse to the PHSO Grievance Procedure if they feel a request for support has been unfairly denied or that all relevant factors have not been taken into account.
25. If the employee is in their probation period, they may submit an application for funding, however the employee and their line manager are encouraged to consider:
  - a. Whether undertaking a significant course of study is the most appropriate focus for attention when the employee is new to their role
  - b. How essential it is to the employee's work role in the immediate future
  - c. To what extent it is necessary for the employee to complete the qualification *now* to enable you to pass their probation period
  - d. The fact that the employee will need to repay any funding if they do not successfully complete their probation period or choose to leave during this time.



## Policy information

A formal review of this policy will be completed yearly.

**Author:** Ben Cork

**Related policies and guidance:**

[Professional Learning Application Form](#)

[Learning & Development Policy](#)

[Accreditation Help](#)

[Apprenticeship Policy](#)

## Version control

| Date       | Version | Content/changes made | Owner of changes |
|------------|---------|----------------------|------------------|
| 21/02/2019 | 1.0     |                      |                  |
|            |         |                      |                  |