

Extended Learning within The Highland Council

Version 1
1 July 1998

1.

Introduction

Both through our statement of goals and values and our Employee Development Strategy we have acknowledged the critical role of staff in our Council's pursuit of successful service delivery.

Previous papers have addressed:

- Qualifications within Highland Council
- Training Needs Identification - A Corporate Approach
- Funding Principles for Corporate Training

This paper addresses Extended Learning and embraces secondments, study tours and special project work including inter-agency collaboration.

It will systematically explore:

- a. What is extended learning?
- b. Why do it?
- c. For whom is it applicable?
- d. Who should be involved?
- e. How will it operate?
- f. How will it be monitored and evaluated?
- g. The role of the Employee Development Group

2.

What is Extended Learning?

Extended learning is a planned, structured activity which enables an individual and an organisation to experience different ways of working, thereby expanding their knowledge and skill base.

Consequently the individual will be able to contribute effectively to planning and implementing change strategies, resulting in higher productivity, better value for money and a more effective organisation.

The assumptions are that extended learning:

- takes place outwith one's normal workplace role
- requires planning and stating of clear objectives before participating
- lasts for not less than one week (35 hours), nor more than 6 months (960 hours), the anticipated average time commitment being 160 hours (one month)
- has clearly identified support -
 - pre - participation (briefing)
 - during - involvement (coaching)
 - post - participation (debriefing)
- will be evaluated on completion for its outcomes against pre-defined objectives and benefits by the Service and Training and Development Team.

3.

Why do it?

Extended learning creates the opportunity to network, learn from best practice, develop skills, knowledge and an experience base ahead of the implementation of change related method improvement. It visibly demonstrates our Council's commitment to becoming a learning organisation, willing to use a variety of approaches to ensure its long term effectiveness and maximise its learning capability.

Project planning and research, inter agency liaison and planned placements, carefully targeted, will be to the organisations and individual's advantage.

This approach, properly managed, saves money, helps target resources and maximises organisational effectiveness. Badly managed it is cosmetic and adds little of value to the organisation other than the veneer of extended development. It can fuel organisational frustration if not seen and managed as an integral part of the organisation's method improvement, benchmarking and developmental process.

4.

For Whom is it Applicable?

It is proposed that the "driver" for all organisation learning, including the extended learning programme, is the business needs of our Council. These needs are defined by assessing the current capability against organisation requirements and current capability against anticipated future requirements.

Given that scenario, the extended learning approach could be applicable to all. However, for many staff, the most appropriate learning support is likely to be workplace coaching/mentoring. A subsequent paper will address workplace learning and coaching.

The extended learning programme is focused on those likely to lead and implement change, those likely to be receptive to an exposure to different organisational practice and able and willing to translate this into appropriate strategies for the Highland Council. It is likely to be an ideal developmental approach for those committed to career advancement within our Council.

Selection will need to be ruthless and against clear criteria:

- What 'experience' is the learner proposing?
- Over what period of time?
- At what direct and indirect cost?
- To bring back what benefit?
- How will this aid the achievement of Service plans and Service improvement?
- What 'Value' will the experience add to the individual, the Service and the Council?

The initial responsibility lies with the individual to identify/anticipate gaps in Human Resource capability (their own and the organisation's) and propose a range of extended learning solutions.

5.

Who Would Be Involved?

As mentioned above one of the key players would be the individual. However for the potential of extended learning to be realised by our Council there will need to be:

- a willingness by Services and Areas to participate by releasing staff and accepting placement staff and direct line Management and Directorate support
- a portfolio of supported developmental projects which would benefit from multi-Service working
- a pool of credible employers willing to participate in such a programme to mutual benefit
- our Council creating supported placements for colleagues from other organisations - public, private and voluntary
- funding partners - we may seek to attract external funding for our programme where we can demonstrate pursuit of best practice and creation of learning innovations. The Local Enterprise Companies, European funded programmes and other sources may be sought

- an arbitrating body - most likely the Employee Development Group to:
 - monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the extended learning approach
 - monitor and evaluate the opportunities we are prepared to create for external agencies to work with us to mutual benefit.
 - hear appeals when staff feel that they are being discriminated against and denied relevant, cost proven opportunities for appropriate, service relevant learning

6.

How Will It Operate?

As implied above, the prime responsibility lies with the individual and their line manager to identify relevant learning gaps that could best be met in this way. The regular performance appraisal meetings and Service planning session would be the mechanism by which needs are articulated, options discussed and proposals mooted.

Proposals, identifying the objectives, the criteria for success, the costs and the benefits be presented for directorate approval.

Once approval is gained an abridged proforma (TR1) would be completed and lodged with the Training and Development Team. The extended learning programme should mirror the administrative and evaluative arrangements in operation for the more traditional qualification pathways.

A learning contract would then be entered into as per the other learning arrangements.

7.

How Will it be Monitored and Evaluated?

The Training and Development Team advisors and nominated coach/mentors would be involved in monitoring the outcomes against the programme's stated objectives.

So also would be the individual, the participating Services/organisation and/or the project partners.

Regular reports would be raised for consideration at Service and Area Senior Management Teams, the Employee Development Group, Senior Management Team and Personnel Services Committee (as appropriate).

8.

The Role of the Employee Development Group

The Employee Development Group is tasked with promoting innovative, cost effective, value adding employee and organisational development initiatives within the Highland Council.

Not only is its role to promote, but also to monitor, evaluate, review, revise and anticipate future relevant practices.

It is the arbitrating body for appeals and the adjudication body when limited, authority wide, opportunities are available. It is also the review body for evaluating the effectiveness and organisational learning of multi Service project work and is the conduit to the Council's Senior Management Team.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The Highland Council Senior Management Team accepts the approach outlined in this paper for the creation of extended learning opportunities within the Council
- The Highland Council integrates extended learning opportunities into its Human Resource capacity building approach to ensure best business results and management and implementation of change
- The Highland Council integrates its employee development approach within the performance management culture and aids the achievement of best value through the efforts of its employees

FOOTNOTE

LEARNING - the creation of meaning from past or current events that serves as a guide for future behaviour. (Marilyn Wood Dandelion - Organisation Dynamics)

