Training & Development Policy

Document Control

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1. Purpose

The Highland & Western Isles Valuation Joint Board (the Board) is committed to developing and maintaining a skilled, knowledgeable and adaptable workforce capable of delivering high-quality services and meeting its statutory responsibilities.

This policy establishes a framework for training and development activities, ensuring that learning opportunities align with:

- The objectives of the Board Service Plan 2025-2028.
- Statutory, professional and regulatory requirements.
- Workforce planning priorities.
- Individual learning and development needs.
- The efficient and effective delivery of services.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees of the Board.

3. Policy Statement

The Board recognises that investment in employee development contributes to:

- Improved service delivery.
- Compliance with legislative and professional obligations.
- Enhanced employee skills, knowledge and competence.
- Succession planning and organisational resilience.
- Employee engagement and retention.

The Board will support reasonable and relevant development opportunities, subject to operational requirements and available resources.

4. Responsibilities

The Board

- Approve the policy and significant revisions.
- Receive periodic reports on training and development outcomes.

Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer / Senior Management Team

- Ensure implementation of the policy.
- Allocate resources for training activities.
- Monitor effectiveness of learning and development activity.

Line Managers

- Identify training needs through supervision and appraisal processes.

- Support employees in accessing relevant development opportunities.
- Monitor completion of mandatory training.

Employees

- Actively participate in agreed learning activities.
- Apply learning within the workplace.
- Maintain professional qualifications where applicable.

5. Identification of Training Needs

Training and development needs will be identified through:

- Annual appraisal and performance review processes.
- One-to-one meetings.
- Service planning requirements.
- Legislative or regulatory changes.
- Professional body requirements.
- Audit recommendations.
- Workforce and succession planning activities.

6. Types of Learning and Development

Learning opportunities may include:

- Mandatory training.
- Professional qualifications and CPD.
- Internal workshops and briefings.
- External courses and conferences.
- E-learning programmes.
- Coaching and mentoring.
- Job shadowing and knowledge-sharing activities.

See Appendix: Courses Leading to a Qualification – Support For Employees

7. Monitoring and Reporting

Training activity and outcomes will be monitored and reported periodically to Senior Management and the Board as appropriate.

8. Training and Development Plan

A Training and Development Plan will be implemented, including measurable objectives and performance indicators, in order to ensure that all staff possess the skills, knowledge and competencies necessary to support delivery of the Service Plan 2025-2028 and fulfil the statutory duties.

9. Review and Governance Process

9.1 Review Frequency

9.1.1 Training and Development Policy

Reviewed every three years, or sooner if legislation, organisational priorities or operational requirements change.

9.1.2 Training and Development Plan

Reviewed annually as part of service planning arrangements.

9.2 Approval Process

The following governance arrangements will apply:

Document	Review Frequency	Approval
Training & Development Policy	Every 3 years	The Board
Training & Development Plan	Annually	Senior Management Team
Progress Report	Annually	The Board

10. Annual Reporting

An annual report should be prepared containing:

- Training undertaken during the year.
- Mandatory training compliance rates.
- Expenditure against budget.
- Achievement of development objectives.
- Identified skills gaps.
- Planned priorities for the following year.

Appendix

Courses Leading to a Qualification – Support For Employees

This statement details the criteria and conditions applying to employees undertaking a course or programme which leads to a qualification, with support from The Highland & Western Isles Valuation Joint Board as their employer.

In common with other forms of training and development activity, any assessed course or programme should be relevant to the service objectives and service plans of the Board as well as to the career development needs of the individual. In other words, the activity should be of benefit to both parties, and so any agreement regarding support from the Board should be regarded as a form of partnership, with rights and responsibility attaching to both parties.

A core principle is that employees have a responsibility to maintain up to date skills and knowledge for their existing functions, and also have a right to take account of, and to seek support for, their longer-term career objectives and aspirations.

Fundamental to this concept is that Board employees have the right of access to information about training and development opportunities and options; and the Board has the right to prioritise, according to service needs, the use of its resources in determining the nature and level of assistance in any individual case.

The trend away from the familiar structure of "further education" courses towards a variety of different course structures, modes of attendance and assessment processes needs to be recognised by all parties involved in the learning process. While many employees will continue to study for qualification by traditional means, an increasing proportion will be working towards qualifications in ways that are unfamiliar. This means that individual employees, their immediate managers and senior managers must all be aware of the range of commitments involved in working towards a qualification by whatever means.

This trend also entails a requirement to adopt new administrative procedures which are sufficiently flexible to accommodate alternative models of provision and assessment, and which also recognise the increased requirement for clearer integration between work and training/development activities.

- **Access to Support**

  The Board is responsible for its own budget; this includes deciding on the priority of resources for employee training and development.

  All staff are employees of the Board and there is therefore a need to ensure consistency both within and across area offices in dealing with access to training and development, and in determining levels of assistance to individuals. Under the terms of the Board's Equal Opportunities Policy, the take-up of training opportunities will be monitored by the Assessor.

  Employees who consider that they have been unfairly denied access to

information about training and development opportunities, reasonable access to opportunities, or who consider that they are being unreasonably required to undertake a course of training are entitled to invoke the Board's grievance procedure. However, it is recommended that attempts should be made to resolve any problems informally in the first instance, through consultation with the Departmental Training Co-ordinator (Depute Assessor & ERO).

- **Selecting a Course and Agreeing Assistance**

  Agreements to support employees to undertake a course leading to a qualification should normally be derived from a systematic analysis of training and development needs within the Department. To be selected, a course should be clearly agreed as being the most appropriate way to meet an identified need which relates to both the service objectives of the department and to the individual's career development. Simply selecting a convenient course with a notion of becoming "better qualified" is neither sufficient nor cost effective.

  Similarly, the question should be asked as to whether a qualifying course is itself the best way to meet a need. A short course, project work, SVQ assessment etc may be more appropriate.

  General information on courses is available from the Departmental Training Co-ordinator.

  Having agreed that a qualifying course is the most appropriate way to meet the need, both the individual and the department (particularly the individual's line manager and the Departmental Training Co-ordinator) should have a clear understanding of the benefits expected and commitments required as a result of undertaking the course, especially as they relate to the individual's duties and the operations of the Department.

  In agreeing the principle of assistance and in determining the level of financial support, account should also be taken of any previous assistance for qualifying courses the individual may have received.

  Reaching agreement on the nature of assistance, including the level of financial support, is an integral part of the process and it must be done before an individual enrols on, or makes any commitment to, a course for which assistance is sought.

- **Administrative Procedure**

  Once agreement is reached in principle, the following documents should be used:

  - ❖ Qualifying Course Application: Completed by the individual employee, immediate manager and the Departmental Training Co-ordinator. This includes details of the course, of the level of financial support agreed, and a signed agreement on Repayment of Financial Support. The

original application is retained by the Board.

- ❖ Letter of Authority: To college/provider, etc, confirming that an individual's fees (or a percentage of them) will be met by the Board, and nominating the person to whom reports of attendance, progress, etc should be sent (normally the Departmental Training Co-ordinator).

- ❖ Qualifying Course Claim: To be used by the employee when claiming for a refund of fees, travel expenses, etc.

- **Financial Support**

The elements of financial support are:

- ❖ Fees;
- ❖ Travel;
- ❖ Subsistence;
- ❖ Agreed additional costs.

The level of financial support is variable at the discretion of the Board, regardless of the salary/grade of the individual, except where studying for a particular qualification is a requirement for a post (e.g. a designated Trainee post), in which case the employee will be entitled to 100% financial support. All financial support should be within the following guidelines:

- ❖ **Fees**: College/provider/awarding body registration and enrolment fees, tuition fees, examination fees, assessment fees will be paid at the agreed percentage level. NB: If membership of a professional body is a precondition of undertaking a course, it is at the Assessor's discretion whether fees are payable. Furthermore, all annual subscriptions are the individual's responsibility with the exception of the Association of Electoral Administrators.

- ❖ **Travel**: Additional travel costs, beyond the employee's normal daily travel to work costs, will be reimbursed in accordance with the appropriate national conditions of service.

- ❖ **Subsistence**: In principle subsistence is payable where an employee is necessarily out of pocket as a result of attending a college or other centre. Routine attendance will not normally entitle an individual to subsistence allowance unless attendance is required on an evening, residential or block release basis. In these cases, subsistence will be paid on the basis contained in the appropriate national conditions of service.

- ❖ **Agreed additional costs**: Some courses require the production of dissertations, attendance at residential periods, field trips, etc, which may involve expenditure over and above normal course fees. These are normally refundable at the agreed percentage level of support, but must be approved in advance by the department.

- ❖ **Books**: It is recommended that employees buy their own text books

and other study material. Increasingly books tend to be revised more frequently, so it is not recommended that area offices invest large sums of money in establishing libraries of texts unless it is known that they will have a long lifespan.

Financial support will normally be given for the first attempt at any stage of a qualification. Unless there are agreed extenuating circumstances, the individual is wholly responsible for meeting the costs of resits, repeat tuition fees, etc. Following a successful second or subsequent attempt, entitlement at the previously agreed level will resume.

- **Time Off**

Employees undertaking courses of study with assistance from the Board should have the following entitlement, regardless of salary/grade:

- ❖ paid time off to attend classes;
- ❖ paid time off to sit each examination;
- ❖ special leave (with pay) to prepare for examinations.

Once an agreement has been reached involving any form of time off to attend classes during working hours, it is expected that the employee will attend for the whole course, and will not be required by their manager/supervisor to miss classes to cover for other staff, etc, except in cases of operational emergency.

It is accepted that these guidelines may not cater for every eventuality. If there are situations which these guidelines cannot accommodate, then the individual, his/her immediate manager and the Departmental Training Co-ordinator should try to agree reasonable provision having regard to the needs of the service and of the individual, and to principles of consistency and equity. If it is not possible to reach agreement, the Assessor will be consulted.

- **Support, Progress, Attendance**

Recognising the “partnership” aspect of entering into an agreement on following a course leading to a qualification, it is essential that all parties involved maintain regular communication regarding attendance and progress.

Area offices should make their own arrangements on recording mechanisms, which should include attendance/absence monitoring, and monitoring progress – not only formally assessed progress but also ensuring that the individual’s week to week learning is followed and supported in whatever way practicable in the department.

Any problems regarding employees’ attendance or course progress should be addressed as soon as they come to light so that they can be dealt with at as early a stage as possible.

If an employee has a complaint about any aspect of the quality or organisation of a course, they should raise it with the college/provider immediately and also inform the Departmental Training Co-ordinator. If the problem is not resolved quickly, the Departmental Training Co-ordinator should take the matter up on behalf of the Board.

The Assessor is available to give advice and guidance in any cases of difficulty.

- **Repayment of Financial Support**

  Undertaking a course leading to a qualification represents a considerable investment in time, money and effort for both the individual employee and the Board. This investment tends to be significantly greater and extend over a longer period than other forms of training and development. Accordingly, the Board may require employees to repay to the Board all or a proportion of financial support paid to them or by the Board on their behalf if they fail to complete a course or leave the Board in certain circumstances. Recommendations in respect of repayment are as follows:

  ❖ When an employee withdraws from a course, fails to attend for examinations or in any other way discontinues, and:

    - if there are no extenuating circumstances, then the Board will reclaim all costs paid by the Board.
    - if it is agreed that there are extenuating circumstances (whether individual, department or provider centred), then the Board may reclaim any proportion, having regard to the reasons for the withdrawal and the proportion of the course or programme successfully completed.

  ❖ When an employee leaves the Board before completing an agreed course, and:

    - immediately takes up an appointment with another Local Authority, then no costs will be reclaimed.
    - takes up any other employment, then the Board will reclaim all costs paid by the Board for that qualification.

  ❖ When an employee completes a course for which assistance has been given, and then leaves the Board and:

    - immediately takes up an appointment with another Local Authority, then no costs will be reclaimed.
    - retires from the Board before or at the normal retirement age, then no costs will be reclaimed, regardless of destination.
    - takes up any other employment, the Board may reclaim all costs

on a reducing sliding scale over a period of two years from the date of qualification as undernoted:-

During Year 1 up to 100%
During Year 2 up to 50%

- leaves the Board due to the expiry of a fixed term or temporary contract and no other suitable post is available, then regardless of destination, no costs will be reclaimed.

2 November 2026