



The Highland  
Council  
Comhairle na  
Gàidhealtachd

Human Resources  
Goireasan Daonna

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# Qualifications Guidance



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# Introduction

The Council is committed to invest in all employees to meet The Council's objectives and values which supports excellent service delivery for our customers. Qualifications and training are one part of this approach as they embrace and reflect workplace competence and business needs. Applications are open to all staff and will be considered on an individual basis.

## Guidance

### Types of Qualifications

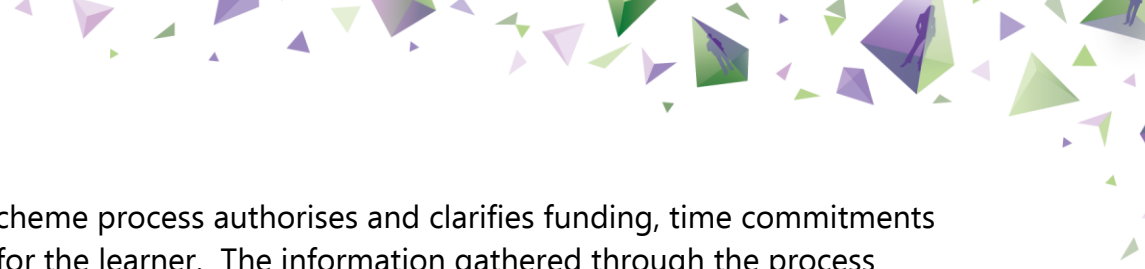
Qualifications are certificated and recognised awards (certificated by national awarding bodies and recognised by the Council) which are appropriate to our needs and which enable all employees to perform their current and potential future job roles within the Council.

There are two main types of qualifications:

- **Traditional/knowledge-based** qualifications normally require formal attendance (in person/digital/on-line/blended) at a college or with a training provider and are most often assessed by way of examination e.g. Higher National Certificates, Graduate Apprenticeship courses, driving licences etc.
- **Vocational/knowledge and application-based** qualifications are normally assessed in the workplace by way of producing a competence-based portfolio of evidence, e.g. Scottish Vocational Qualification etc.

### The Application Process

Qualifications may be pursued as a mandatory requirement of the job, to enhance the quality of the service or for personal development agreed as part of recruitment, induction, Employee Review and Development (ERD) or succession planning.



The Qualification Scheme process authorises and clarifies funding, time commitments and other support for the learner. The information gathered through the process enables accurate records to be maintained and sufficient information for Equal Opportunities monitoring.

**Line managers must ensure that:**

- protected time during work hours is provided for an applicant undertaking a qualification that has been approved through the scheme
- the applicant is aware that there is likely to be a commitment to study in their own time which will be agreed in the learning agreements
- the applicant understands that costs will be recouped if they leave or cease their qualification within the repayment period - please [see below](#) for further details.

Please follow the process below or contact [People Development](#) for advice.

## Step 1

Please allow adequate time for the approval process to be completed before accepting offers from training providers.

### [QA1: Approval and Financial Assistance Application Form](#)

Following an initial discussion between the applicant and line manager:

- the applicant and line manager complete the **QA1**
- the line manager submits the **QA1** to their Chief Officer for authorisation (Recommend this is approved within 2 weeks)

## Step 2

Once approved, the signed QA1 form should be:

- returned to the line manager
- retained in the employee file by the manager
- copy provided to the applicant.

The signed form can be used as proof of funding for an external training provider.

## Step 3

### [QA2: Qualifications/Training Learning Contract](#)

After the QA1 form is returned:

- the line manager and applicant complete and sign **QA2** (please see [guidance](#) below)
- the manager retains the original in the employee file
- a copy of the **QA2** should be provided to the applicant.

#### Step 4

Line managers should conduct progress reviews at regular periods with all employees who are undertaking a qualification.

Additional reviews will be required as per the training provider contract and these will be carried out between people development advisers, line managers/head teachers etc. and learners on MA/GA funded places. This will be outlined at induction.

#### Step 5

Once the qualification has been completed, a copy of the certificate should be retained in the employee file and a copy can be added to the employee's training record in the Council's learning management system, contact [People Development](#).

#### Step 6

If an employee leaves their employment with the Council within 3 years of completing a qualification, **or withdraws before** completing a qualification, they will be required to repay the cost of the qualification, see [Repayment of Costs](#).

When completing an Employee Leavers Form, the line manager should enter the detail into the comments box for payroll to action the repayment.

## Schedule of Allowances

Advice and guidance for line managers and employees regarding travel and subsistence arrangements when attending study away from their normal place of work is available in the [Travel and Subsistence Policy](#).

## Post Qualifying Support and Maintenance

It is vital that the skills and knowledge acquired through a course of study are maintained. A mentor or coach should be provided by the Service, where appropriate, to support the employee. Line managers can contact [People Development](#) for advice.

It is recognised that this will also relate to the approach to continuing professional development and line managers are required to complete an [Employee Review and Development \(ERD\)](#) plan annually with their staff and conduct regular reviews.

## Modern Apprentice (MA) / Graduate Apprentice (GA)

Employees may be employed as a new MA or may be following a framework to upskill. The qualifications are delivered by an approved training provider. The frameworks available include social care which have regulatory requirements (for example SSSC registration) or development frameworks (for example management). Only the cost of the qualification is funded. Services provide the budget for salary, on-costs, travel, subsistence or external learning resources.

Apprentices are required to follow the MA framework for their vocational area. Before commencing managers should discuss options with the employee, seek advice from the MA team and seek approval using the QA1: Approval and Financial Assistance Application.

The Council has an in-house SVQ centre who deliver several qualifications; only some are funded by the MA contract, those that are out with the funded frameworks will incur a nominal charge. External training providers may apply additional charges.

If an employee fails to achieve a milestone or target or withdraws from the qualification, the service will be charged for loss of funding.

Graduate Apprentices follow an academic qualification in their vocational work area with an approved university. Time is allowed during work hours for study. The cost of the qualification is funded by Skills Development Scotland.

Before proceeding with MA framework qualification please contact the [Council's MA Centre](#) for advice.

## Repayment of Costs

As a fair and equitable employer, we must consider the impact of recouping costs from employees who leave employment in the Council within the repayment period.

It is the responsibility of the manager to arrange for payment options or for an invoice to be raised directly to the employee using the leavers form. Please inform Payroll\* if there are costs to be recouped to avoid overpayments being made or employees being placed in financial hardship.

The repayment periods to recoup the cost of the qualification are:

Employee leaves within:	Cost to be recouped:
One year of date of course completion	100%
2 years of date of course completion	50%
3 years of date of course completion	25%

Services cannot recoup any costs where an employee's employment is ended by the Council (for example because of a fixed term contract). Line managers must ensure that there is sufficient time on the applicant's contract for the qualification to be completed and that the required number of years of post-qualifying work commitment can be achieved.

If an employee remains in the Council but moves to a new post within the repayment period, they would not be re-charged costs.

Financial impact may have a detrimental effect on families and children. Every effort should be made by line managers to minimise these impacts and can include agreeing an affordable repayment plan and identifying extenuating circumstances, such as illness. These may result in costs being waived.

Modern and Graduate apprentices are exempt from repaying any costs as per Skills Development Scotland training provider conditions. To ensure maximum funds are drawn down from the training provider contract, line managers are responsible for ensuring that this group of learners achieve the required targets and milestones of their agreed learning plan.

If funding is lost from the training contract, services will be re-charged by the MA Centre.

Where available, contracted suppliers who are approved on the procurement framework or qualifications delivered by the Council's in-house SQA centre should be used.

Where possible, local or digital providers should be used to minimise travel and subsistence costs.

# Guidance for Completion of Forms

It is important that these forms are filled out as accurately as possible. The process of completing these forms enables those concerned to consider all aspects of the requirements of the qualification. Additionally, the forms will provide qualitative information for training records and equal opportunities purposes.

If you require help to complete the forms, please ask your line manager or contact [People Development](#).

## QA1: Approval and Financial Assistance Application

Applicant / line manager to complete estimated start and completion dates.

### Methods of Study

(please note the relevant number on the form):

1. Short Courses – 'x' number of days
2. Day release to Training Provider
3. Block release to Training Provider
4. Vocational Qualification – Workplace Assessment
5. Open Learning
6. Open Learning with Workshops
7. Computer Based Training

### Place of Study

Enter the name of the training provider and their location.

Sign and date the form. Ensure any requirement for a line manager to have sight of the request is actioned prior to sending the request to your Chief Officer.

### Estimated Completion Date

The anticipated timescale of the qualification from start to finish.

### Tuition and Other Costs

The cost of the qualification including any registration or examination fees. Any costs incurred for books or other materials should be noted. If the training will incur travel, subsistence or overnight stops, note if this type of support has been approved.



## QA2: Qualifications/Training Learning Contract

### Ethnic Origin

Please note the relevant number on the form, and if required please specify. These categories are aligned to census requirements:

1. White Scottish	6. Asian Indian	11. Black Caribbean
2. White other British	7. Asian Pakistani	12. Black African
3. White Irish	8. Asian Bangladeshi	13. Other Black background (please specify)
4. Other White background (please specify)	9. Asian Chinese	14. Other ethnic background (please specify)
5. Mixed background	10. Other Asian background (please specify)	15. Prefer not to say

### Do you consider that you have a disability?

A disability is a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

### Work-based Mentor or Coach

Identifying a manager, peer, or employee in the wider Council can give guidance and motivation to assist learning. If you require help to identify a mentor or coach, please contact our career hub advisers.

### Awarding Body Support Person

A qualified member of the SQA team will support staff pursuing a vocational qualification or other competence-based award, this may be their assessor or an adviser from within the in-house SQA accredited training centre, MA Centre or wider people development team.

### Time – non-work related

It is likely that an applicant will need to study in their own time. Discussion should take place between the manager and employee prior to approving the training in relation to the time commitment required from the applicant.

There will be a requirement for staff to undertake formal review meetings at set times as part of training provider processes. While every effort is made to avoid formal review meetings during school closure periods, this may be unavoidable and staff who work term time contracts will be required to use their own time/annual leave for meetings.



### **Time – work related**

Discuss and agree protected time to be made available during working hours for the employee to undertake the qualification and assessments (for example attendance at college, open learning, digital session, study time, review meetings etc). Employees are not required to work back time agreed for undertaking a qualification. If the learner wishes to take more time than has been agreed, this could be taken through flexi-time or annual leave.

### **Access to Support Workshops**

When a learner is undertaking an SVQ or using Open Learning there may be a requirement to attend workshops. A discussion should take place prior to agreement on how many days is this likely to be (for example all in work time or some/all in the individuals own time).

### **Access to Materials**

There may be appropriate books or other materials available within service teams. Where they need to be purchased a budget holder can authorise this appropriately. There are a variety of e-learning resources on our e-learning which may be of use.

### **Study Leave**

This is by negotiation with the line manager. Where a learner has a significant examination, the manager may permit study leave at their discretion. The same may apply where the learner must complete a significant project or assignment. For example, in the past where learners pursued an HNC or HND involving 2 years of term time day release and 2 end of year exams, managers allowed up to 2 days study leave. Where qualifications are achieved through continuous assessment there is less requirement for study leave.

## Quick Links

The Hyperlinks listed here will redirect you to the related guidance, letters, information, and relevant organisations mentioned in this policy.

<b>People Development Intranet Hub</b>	<a href="#"><u>Click Here</u></a>
<b>QA1 - Application for Approval and Financial Assistance for Qualifications / Training</b>	<a href="#"><u>Click Here</u></a>
<b>QA2 – Qualifications/Training Learning Contract</b>	<a href="#"><u>Click Here</u></a>
<b>The Highland Council Career Hub</b>	<b>To Follow</b>
<b>Traineasy e-learning platform</b>	<a href="#"><u>Click Here</u></a>
<b>Email for Traineasy issues and queries</b>	<a href="#"><u>Click Here</u></a>
<b>Email for Career Coach / mentoring queries</b>	<a href="#"><u>Click Here</u></a>
<b>Email Learning and Development for generic training information – People Development</b>	<a href="#"><u>Click Here</u></a>
<b>HR Microsite</b>	<a href="#"><u>Click Here</u></a>
<b>People Strategy</b>	<a href="#"><u>Click Here</u></a>
<b>Talent Strategy</b>	<a href="#"><u>Click Here</u></a>
<b>Travel and Subsistence</b>	<a href="#"><u>Click Here</u></a>
<b>Email Payroll Enquiries</b>	<a href="#"><u>Click Here</u></a>
<b>Employee Review and Development</b>	<a href="#"><u>Click Here</u></a>