

## **Wiltshire Council Human Resources**

### **Professional qualification learning loans policy and procedure**

This policy can be made available in other languages and formats such as large print and audio on [request](#).

#### **What is it?**

This policy outlines the arrangements for employees to access an interest-free professional qualification learning loan in order to undertake a professional qualification.

The qualification must be relevant to your job or career development, team or Wiltshire Council and must be through an accredited programme leading to a recognised qualification.

#### **Go straight to the section:**

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#### **Who does it apply to?**

This policy applies to all Wiltshire Council employees unless a separate contractual policy applies to a transferred employee to whom separate TUPE terms and conditions of employment apply. This policy does not apply to teaching and non-teaching staff employed in maintained schools or academies.

#### **When does it apply?**

Professional qualification learning loans will apply where employees meet the eligibility criteria set out below and wish to make a request for a professional qualification learning loan arrangement in order to complete a professional qualification.

Any professional qualification learning loan must be made in relation to a study programme that is relevant to improving your effectiveness and performance in the organisation, now or in the future, and must be accredited by a professional body.

### **When does it not apply?**

Professional qualification learning loans will not apply to apprenticeships in line with the apprenticeship policy and procedure.

Professional qualification learning loans will not apply if you are being funded by Wiltshire Council to study for a qualification deemed mandatory in line with the learning and development policy and procedure.

Professional qualification learning loans will not apply if a service appoints a trainee and uses the difference in salary budget to fund the professional qualification.

Professional qualification learning loans will not apply for any training course or programme of study which do not meet the criteria as set out below.

### **What are the main points?**

Professional qualifications

1. In order to apply for a professional qualification learning loan you must be studying for a professional qualification. Professional qualifications are vocational qualifications and are usually linked with a profession and are designed to help you improve and develop relevant skills for a particular career path.
2. Examples of professional qualifications which are relevant to the council include (but are not limited to):
  - Accountant
  - Solicitor
  - Social Worker
  - Planner
  - Building Control Surveyor

3. There can be varying levels of professional qualification within a profession to include a certificate, diploma, degree and post graduate degree. You may apply for a professional qualification learning loan to access a course at any of these levels.

#### Prior to requesting a professional qualification learning loan

4. If you wish to undertake a professional qualification the following options will be considered prior to the agreement of the payment of a professional qualification learning loan:
  - Can the qualification be covered by an apprenticeship arrangement?
  - Can the qualification be funded by the service area? (Funding could be available if the service have appointed you in a trainee post and the difference in salary budget is then used to fund the cost of the qualification).
5. If neither of these options are possible then a professional qualification learning loan can be considered, subject to the loan criteria being met.

#### Criteria and eligibility for a professional qualification learning loan

6. To be eligible to make a request for a professional qualification learning loan, you must have:
  - a permanent contract with Wiltshire Council or a contract which outlasts the duration of the programme of study you wish to apply for.
  - at least 26 weeks continuous service with Wiltshire Council on the date the request is made
7. If you are on a temporary or fixed term contract, your professional qualification learning loan application will be assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure the monthly repayments can be met.
8. Your request for a professional qualification learning loan must be in relation to gaining a professional qualification that supports your career development within the organisation. It must have relevance to your area of work and improve upon your skills.
9. A professional qualification learning loan may also be applicable where you wish to gain a qualification which would aid changing career to another service within the organisation.

10. The minimum professional qualification learning loan is £100 and the maximum professional qualification learning loan must not be more than a quarter of your annual salary (net).
11. In line with HMRC requirements, a professional qualification learning loan can be up to £10,000 per year and you would need to make alternative arrangements for any fees above this amount.
12. If your programme of study lasts more than one year, and the accumulation of professional qualification learning loans in repayment equate to above £10,000 per year you will be subject to Benefit In Kind tax on this amount.
13. The minimum professional qualification learning loan repayment period is 6 months. If you wish, you may arrange to re-pay the loan in one lump sum by contacting HR payroll administration.
14. The maximum professional qualification learning loan repayment period is the duration of the programme of study.
15. Any professional qualification learning loan must be paid directly to the course provider and cannot be paid directly to you.

#### Application for a professional qualification learning loan

16. You should investigate appropriate providers of the professional qualification to ensure that you understand the options available. This should include the costs, course content, entry requirements and arrangements for enrolment.
17. You must discuss your intentions with your line manager as any loan arrangement will require their approval (and the approval of your head of service).
18. You should also discuss with your line manager any arrangements for time to study in line with the time to train policy and procedure and how this may be supported.
19. You must complete the professional qualification learning loan agreement form and send this to your manager.
20. Your manager will consider your request against the professional qualification learning loan criteria, confirm their approval and submit this to your head of service for approval within 14 days.
21. Your manager and head of service must complete the professional qualification learning loan agreement form to confirm their approval of

the professional qualification learning loan before any payment can be made.

22. You must submit the completed professional qualification learning loan agreement form including your manager and head of service approval, along with an invoice from the provider and confirmation of your acceptance on the course to [policyandreward@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:policyandreward@wiltshire.gov.uk) no later than 6 weeks before payment to the provider is required.
23. If acceptance to the programme of study is subject to payment of funds, you must submit your confirmation of acceptance on the course to HR policy and reward no later than 2 weeks after payment. If confirmation of acceptance on the course will be later than this, you should contact HR pay and reward as soon as possible to discuss the arrangements.
24. You must ensure that all sections of the professional qualification learning loan agreement form are completed and supporting documents are submitted as failure to do so will delay the application and approval of the professional qualification learning loan.

#### Payment of the professional qualification learning loan to the course provider

25. On receipt of your professional qualification learning loan application, HR pay and reward will make arrangements to pay the course provider.
26. You must ensure that the invoice submitted with your professional qualification learning loan application for payment to the course provider is for Wiltshire Council and not an invoice to yourself.
27. Payment will only be made via invoice from Wiltshire Council to the course provider.
28. The professional qualification learning loan will be paid in one lump sum direct to the course provider.
29. HR pay and reward will confirm with you once payment to the course provider has been processed.

#### Repayment of the professional qualification learning loan

30. HR payroll administration will set up repayment arrangements to Wiltshire Council and confirm the details with you.
31. Repayments for the loan will be made from your monthly salary in equal instalments over the duration of the programme of study.

32. If during the repayment period HR payroll are unable to deduct the monthly amount from your net pay for reasons such as sickness, maternity/paternity or unpaid absence, the missing payments will be added to the remainder of the loan so that the payback period is extended.
33. In exceptional circumstances, if you work part time or are on salary point 28 or under, consideration may be given to extend the loan repayment period for a further 1 year so that the monthly repayments are more manageable. You should contact HR payroll administration on completion of the professional qualification learning loan agreement form to discuss these arrangements.

#### Commitment and obligations

34. By completing and submitting the professional qualification learning loan application and agreement form you are agreeing to payment of course fees by Wiltshire Council in the form of a loan with deductions from your salary (net) as repayment.
35. Once you have received approval for the professional qualification learning loan and payment to the course provider has been confirmed you are committed to the scheme.
36. Any professional qualification learning loan must only be used for course fees. You may not use the loan to cover other costs incurred such as travel or course books or other learning materials.
37. Any professional qualification learning loan must not be more than the actual costs of programme of study.
38. You must complete all payments for the professional qualification learning loan within the duration of the course and by completion of the course, unless in exceptional circumstances agreement has been made to extend the repayment period.
39. If you do not commence or complete the course and payment has already been made, you will be required to continue salary deductions to repay the outstanding balance of the loan arrangement. You may arrange to re-pay this amount in one lump sum by contacting HR payroll administration.
40. On completion of the course Wiltshire Council is under no obligation to make available a role taking into account the qualification or in any way alter your terms and conditions of employment. You will be able to apply for roles that meet your new skills and abilities as they arise.

## Leaving Wiltshire Council

41. If you leave Wiltshire Council you will be required to repay all outstanding balances of the loan from your final salary. If HR payroll are unable to deduct the full amount from your final salary you will be invoiced. You will be able to continue with your course but will need to make alternative arrangements to finance any future study.
42. If you are made redundant from Wiltshire Council, you will be required to repay all outstanding balances of the loan from your final salary.
43. If you move service areas during the loan repayment period, the loan repayments will continue. You should discuss with your new manager how your programme of study is to be supported in line with the time to train policy and procedure

## Professional fees and related occupational costs

44. As part of the programme of study you may be required to be a member of a professional body or association.
45. You are responsible for payment of your professional fees, memberships, registrations or subscriptions and the professional qualification learning loan may not be used towards this cost.
46. This also applies to the payment of practicing certificates and all other types of occupational licenses which are necessary for you to hold.
47. You may be able to claim tax relief through the HMRC on any professional fees and subscriptions you pay; further information is available on [HR Direct](#).

## Roles and responsibilities

### Employee responsibilities

48. To ensure that you read this policy and understand the criteria, commitments and process for a professional qualification learning loan arrangement.
49. To discuss your intention to apply for a professional qualification learning loan arrangement with your manager as soon as possible prior to requesting a professional qualification learning loan to ensure

arrangements are in place to approve the loan and to permit study time in line with the time to train policy.

#### Line manager responsibilities

50. To consider requests for a professional qualification learning loan and to check that the details of the professional qualification learning loan follow this policy and procedure.
51. To agree study time in line with the time to train policy and procedure.

#### Head of service responsibilities

52. To consider requests for a professional qualification learning loan and to check that the details of the professional qualification learning loan follow this policy and procedure.
53. To make arrangements for study time in line with the time to train policy and procedure and to agree how this may be supported.
54. To understand that any defaults in repayment of the loan will be costed to the service area

#### HR responsibilities

55. To assist managers and heads of service in applying this policy and procedure.
56. To process payments to course providers in line with finance procedures.
57. To confirm payment of the professional qualification learning loan with employees and to make arrangements for deductions from salary.
58. To inform Finance of any loan arrangements and provide a copy of individual loan agreements.

#### **Frequently asked questions**

59. Can I use this scheme for any training course or programme of study?

You can only apply for a professional qualification learning loan to complete a professional qualification. In order to be deemed work



related, you must be able to demonstrate its relevance to your current work position or future employment with Wiltshire Council. It must also be through an accredited programme leading to a recognised qualification.

60. What if I experience issues with my course or course provider?

In the unfortunate event that you experience issues or have reason for complaint regarding your course, this will need to be taken up directly with your course provider.

61. Can my line manager decline my application?

Applications are subject to approval by your line manager and head of service in line with the criteria set out in the policy and procedure. If your application is declined for any reason, this will be discussed fully with you.

There is no right of appeal. However, if your circumstances change, and you feel that you now meet the criteria for a professional qualification learning loan (taking into account the reasons given for your previous application being declined), you may submit a new professional qualification learning loan application.

62. Can I apply for the scheme more than once?

Yes, as long as you have completed the payments on any previous course of study programme.

63. I have failed my course and have to retake. Can I apply for another professional qualification learning loan?

Yes. However in this instance, it is recognised that you may have more than one professional qualification learning loan in repayment at the same time. If this is the case, the sum of the professional qualification learning loans must not equate to more than £10,000 per year.

64. What if my course lasts for more than 1 year and requires payment in instalments rather than a lump sum?

Each instalment will be set up as a loan and you will therefore need to complete a professional qualification learning loan agreement and make arrangements for each instalment for the course. In this instance, it is recognised that you may have more than one professional qualification learning loan in repayment at the same time.

If this is the case, the sum of the professional qualification learning loans must not equate to more than £10,000 per year.

65. I have agreed a professional qualification learning loan for a 2-year course with fees for the 2 years paid upfront. What happens if I do not start the 2nd year of the course?

You will be provided with a professional qualification learning loan to cover fees for the 2 year course and repayments will be spread over the 2 years duration. You will be committed to repaying the remainder of the professional qualification learning loan through the monthly repayments. If you wish, you may arrange to repay this amount in one lump sum by contacting HR payroll administration.

66. What if I have a professional qualification learning loan and I now wish to reduce my hours?

If you reduce your hours, the professional qualification learning loan repayments will remain as originally agreed. However, in exceptional circumstances, please contact HR payroll administration to discuss how repayment of the loan can be achieved (i.e. a reduced monthly amount over and extended repayment period).

## **Glossary**

### **Benefit In Kind Tax**

Benefits in kind are benefits which employees receive from their employment but which are not included in their salary. Where benefits in kind are taxable, tax is paid on the taxable value of the benefit. HM Revenue and Customs defines this as the cash equivalent value.

For example, if you have a professional qualification learning loan arrangement which equates to more than £10,000 per year, you will pay tax on this amount.

### **Equal Opportunities**

This policy has been Equality Impact Assessed to identify opportunities to promote equality and mitigate any negative or adverse impacts on particular groups.

### **Advice and guidance**

If you require help in accessing or understanding this policy [or completing any of the associated forms] you should contact your line manager or trade union representative if you are a member.

If, due to the nature of your query, it is not appropriate to contact your line manager you should contact your head of service who will nominate an appropriate manager or colleague to help you.

See [guidance for managers – giving advice on policies](#).

### Further information

There are a number of related policies and procedures that you should be aware of including:

- Learning and Development policy and procedure
- Time to Train policy and procedure
- Apprenticeship policy and procedure
- There is also a national [Professional and Career Development Loans](#) scheme which offers a loan at a reduced interest rate

For further information please speak to your supervisor, manager, service director or contact your [HR case adviser](#).

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