

5.01 Assistance to Study – Adult Further Education

This policy is about support available to you if wish to undertake, in your own time, formal courses leading to a recognised academic/vocational qualification, which is related to your work.

- You may be eligible for support, both financial and special leave, to undertake a recognised qualification, which is related in some way to your work – [Section 1.3 Selection Criteria for Assistance](#)
- You need to complete an Application Form which must be endorsed by your line manager/Head of Branch – [Section 2.1 Procedures](#)
- If eligible, you would qualify for reimbursement of 80% of course fees, up to a limit of £1,000 per academic year), and 80% of the cost of compulsory residentials, together with the cost of travel to the course and special leave to study and take examinations – [Section 4 Package of Assistance](#)
- You may be eligible for special leave to complete projects or assignments where these count towards successful completion of the qualification – [Section 4.4 Special Leave and Time Off](#)
- You may be eligible for 50% of cost of any necessary equipment – [Section 4.11 Equipment](#)

The following terms within this policy are defined in the glossary:

No specific terms within glossary

You may also be interested in the following policies:

3.08 Special Leave, 5.02 Assistance to Study – Essential Qualifications, 5.03 Subscriptions to Professional Bodies

This policy is version 6.

For a printable version please click the icon. Please make sure that your printed version is current with the one on this portal.

This homepage is only a guide to the policy, not the policy itself. In the event of any discrepancy between the content of this homepage and the associated policy, the wording of the policy shall apply.

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1 Assistance to Study

1.1 Policy Statement

1.1.1 Further Education has an important part to play in developing the knowledge and skills of civil servants and contributes to the Investors in People standard.

1.2 Aim

1.2.1 Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Departments and Agencies will, subject to resources, and in accordance with the selection criteria and underpinning procedures, assist you should you wish, in your own time, to undertake formal courses of academic/vocational study related to your work and leading to recognised academic/vocational qualifications.

1.2.2 Courses of study leading to qualifications, which are initiated by NICS Departments and Agencies and deemed **essential** to a post, are normally funded by Departments and are outside the Further Education scheme.

1.3 Selection Criteria for Assistance

1.3.1 In determining the available budget, account will be taken of prior commitments. For new applications the following criteria will be applied in priority order:

Criterion 1	The course of study will make a contribution to your performance as outlined in the objectives in your Personal Performance Agreement
Criterion 2	The course of study will make a contribution to the achievement of branch business objectives
Criterion 3	The course of study will make a contribution to the Department's/NICS business objectives.
Criterion 4	The course of study will contribute to your personal development and have some potential relevance to performance.

1.3.2 If you are on a Career Break you will not be eligible for assistance under the Assistance to Study Scheme.

2 Procedures for Applying for Assistance to Study: Adult Further Education

2.1 If you wish to apply for assistance you should follow the Assistance to Study user guide in this handbook.

2.2 On receipt of applications, consideration will be given to Line Manager/Head of Branch comments on your ability to complete the course of study without detriment to job performance.

2.3 Applications will be processed in line with the criteria priority order as follows:

- a) Applications made under Criterion 1 will receive first consideration, followed by those made under Criterion 2.
- b) Applications made under Criteria 3 and 4 will only be considered if funding is available. In the case of demand exceeding available funding, the date of receipt of the application will be taken into account (on a first come first served basis within the criterion).
- c) In the event of funding remaining available after initial allocation, this will be allocated after the closing date on a first come first served basis.

2.4 An application for assistance is no guarantee that it will be successful. You are therefore responsible for meeting the costs of those courses of study, which have not had funding approved by Departments and Agencies.

2.5 Should an application not be supported by line manager/Head of Branch or be refused by the Training Unit, you will be informed in writing of the decision and reason. If you are dissatisfied with the decision, please follow the Grievance user guide in this handbook.

2.6 Departments and Agencies will make every effort to honour any prior commitment made to you if you transfer from another Department or Agency during your period of study. However, consideration will be given to other competing priorities and budget pressures.

2.7 If you have previously been unsuccessful within the last five years on a course of study you may be refused, but each case will be taken on its merits.

2.8 If you have an unsatisfactory attendance record at the date your application is submitted to Line Manager/Head of Branch (in other words if you are in receipt of a current written warning and are serving a trial period or are in receipt of a current final written warning) you will not be considered for support under the assistance to study scheme.

2.9 Applications must be received by the closing date set by Departments, for example 31 July. Late applications will only be accepted, subject to available funding.

2.10 If a course spans more than one academic year, you should submit an application in relation to each year of your course (continuing application). This will allow you to provide details of costs which apply to the current year of study and facilitate departments in managing their budgets. Eligibility for continuing support is subject to successful completion of the previous year of study (evidence must be provided). Departments and Agencies will take account of continuing commitments in determining available budget for new applications. It should be noted that ability to fund continuing applications will be dependent on availability of funding; every endeavour will be made to support continuing applications.

2.11 At the end of the course of study you must forward evidence of your successful completion. This will be used in assessing the benefits of the scheme.

2.12 Failure to complete a course of study will result in the Department or Agency recouping fees on an agreed pro rata basis, except in exceptional circumstances. However, each case will be considered on its merits.

3 Line Manager Responsibilities

3.1 Line managers have responsibility for ensuring that:

- a. they agree your training needs and associated training objectives;
- b. they make decisions on whether to support an application for assistance under the terms of Assistance to Study scheme and inform you of their decision. In supporting the application form, line managers are confirming, to the best of their knowledge, that the content is correct and that they are willing to support the application (e.g. granting time off, meeting travel expenses, etc);
- c. ensure Head of Branch is aware of commitment to study leave and travel expenses;
- d. you are made aware of ineligibility if subject to a current written warning, in respect of attendance, and serving a trial period, or in receipt of a current final written warning (in such cases the application form should not be completed);
- e. you are fully aware of the personal commitment and the extra time required for study in order to successfully complete your course;
- f. deadlines for submissions are met;
- g. they monitor your attendance and progress at regular intervals;
- h. they monitor your adherence to the conditions of the Assistance to Study Scheme;
- i. where appropriate, they monitor and recommend the payment of claims for reimbursement of approved expenses in line with Departmental/Agency procedures;

- j. they provide the necessary support so that you gain the maximum benefits from your course of study, for example a work based opportunity to apply and consolidate knowledge and skills gained from a course through specific work based assignments.

4 Package of Assistance

4.1 General

4.1.1 Departments and Agencies offer the following assistance for approved studies under the Assistance to Study Scheme:

4.2 Fees (including examination fees)

4.2.1 80% of course fees for the most economical method for the course of study up to a maximum of £1,000 per academic year will be paid. The maximum limit will be subject to an annual review, taking account of increases in courses' fees.

4.2.2 Departments and Agencies may identify an alternative viable option to meet the identified need.

4.3 Books

4.3.1 50% of essential books, up to a maximum of £50 per academic year on provision of evidence from Educational Establishments, for example a signed letter from your course tutor, will be paid. You must source the most economical means, in other words Departmental/public libraries etc.

4.4 Travelling Expenses

4.4.1 Travel (in accordance with NICS provision) to an approved course of study and any compulsory residentials at public transport rate will be paid. Reimbursement will only be considered for those costs identified on the application form. Such expenses are met from branch budgets*, subject to available resources.

4.4.2 Should you receive travel expenses or other assistance from another source, you will have the amount paid from Departmental/Agency funds reduced accordingly.

* In the case of a few Departments/Agencies where a central budget is held.

4.5 Special Leave and Time Off

4.5.1 A maximum of five days special leave with pay may be granted per academic year of course, which can be made up of study leave, project leave/assignment or combination of both. In addition, time off will be granted to undertake examinations, compulsory residentials and for graduation (provision detailed below).

Course Attendance

There is no provision for day release under the Assistance to Study scheme. Department/Agencies should give consideration to granting use of annual leave/flexi leave/unpaid leave to facilitate attendance during working hours where service needs would allow.

Study Leave

Study leave, to facilitate preparation for examinations will be granted as follows:-

- a) Half-day study leave for each examination lasting up to and including one and a half hours;
- b) One day study leave for each examination lasting over one and a half hours.

Project Leave/Assignments

Where assessment is carried out through projects or assignments and not by examination, you must provide evidence from your educational establishment to demonstrate the project or assignment is necessary and counts towards the successful completion of qualification. In such circumstances special leave will be granted as follows:-

- half day leave for 3000 - 5000 words (or equivalent) *
- one day leave for over 5000 words (or equivalent) *

*In the case of specialist disciplines, advice will be sought

Where a Project or Assignment does not count towards the successful completion of qualification, no special leave will be awarded.

Examinations

Time off to take examinations, (including travelling time), if held during normal working hours will be granted. You must provide evidence of the date/time/venue of the examination. This is in addition to special leave for study or project/assignments.

4.6 Part-time and Job-Sharing

4.6.1 If you are part-time or job-sharing you will be awarded special leave on a pro-rata basis but at least one half-day special leave with pay should be given for study for each examination.

4.7 Timing

4.7.1 Days taken as special leave and time off for study should be selected to cause the minimum possible interference to work in consultation with your line manager.

4.8 Equipment

4.8.1 50% of the cost of essential equipment, on provision of evidence from Educational Establishment (for example a signed letter from your course tutor), subject to a maximum of £100 will be paid.

4.9 Computers

4.9.1 Where Departments/Agencies have spare computers available, they may provide temporary use of basic computer/word processing facilities, or suggest another viable alternative.

4.10 Examination Results

First Resit No study leave entitlement is available. Payment of resit fees plus time off to sit the examination will be allowed.

Subsequent Attempts No assistance is available.

4.11 Graduation

4.11.1 Up to a maximum of half a day special leave, in addition to five days special leave for study or project/assignments (as detailed in para 4.6 and 4.7). All costs associated with graduation are your responsibility.

4.12 Residentials, for example Summer Schools

4.12.1 Assistance will be given for fees (80%) and time off to attend residentials that are a compulsory* course requirement. A maximum of three days per academic year will be approved for this purpose, in addition to special leave for study or project/assignments (as detailed in para 4.6 and 4.7).

*evidence from Educational Establishments will be required, in other words a signed letter from course tutor

