



## **Elected Members' Assistance to Study Scheme**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Belfast City Council is fully committed to ensuring that all elected members are given the opportunity to develop the relevant knowledge, skills and capacity to enable them to effectively fulfil their role. Elected member learning and development benefits the individual member, the Council in driving forward its corporate priorities, and the wider Belfast Agenda and as a consequence benefits the communities we serve.

As part of this commitment members can, on a part-time basis, undertake accredited courses of study resulting in recognised qualifications which will support them in their role and further enable them to undertake their roles and responsibilities in an effective and capable manner. Members' individual Personal Development Plans (PDPs) are the means by which learning and development needs are identified and the suggested activities/interventions to meet these.

This scheme sets out the guidelines for approving requests from members to undertake part-time study and outlines the assistance available. All applications under the Members' Assistance to Study Scheme must lead to a nationally recognised qualification. Otherwise all other individual learning and development requests will be progressed using the approved Members' PDP process.

Funding for part-time study will be met from the member's designated PDP budget of £730 per annum. Individual development budgets may be carried forward from year to year of each council mandate to facilitate, learning, and development. This means that £2,920 is available to spend any time during the 4 year term.

Given the individual PDP budget allocation it is anticipated that the types of qualifications that could potentially be supported by the Assistance to Study Scheme include awards, certificates, diploma and degree type qualifications.

### **1.2 Conditions of assistance**

A course of part-time study which a member requests to undertake must always, in the first instance, be able to be linked clearly to the role of an elected member as detailed in the members' role profiles and the corresponding knowledge and skills framework. In addition, the following conditions must also be met:

- the course of part-time study will assist the member in performing their role and in so doing enable them to contribute to the achievement of the objectives detailed in the Belfast Agenda
- the development need has been identified in the member's PDP and a course of study is the most appropriate method to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills
- part-time study must lead to a nationally recognised qualification or credits which can be off-set for future studies.
- studies must be undertaken in an educational/training establishment located in Northern Ireland
- value for money is achieved by selecting the provider with the most competitive costs for undertaking and completing the study
- subsequent applications for continued study will be considered in line with the available budgets.



- In the event of a member being co-opted during the council term, the remaining budget of the member leaving the council may be transferred to the new councillor. If the budget for the full term (£2920 as 1.1 above) has all been used then there will be no budget to reallocate to the new councillor.

### 1.3 Application Process

A member wishing to undertake accredited part-time study should first discuss the detail with the relevant officer in Corporate Human Resources:

Fiona Gunning, Principal HR Advisor, Corporate Human Resources  
Telephone: 07522128811 email: [gunningf@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:gunningf@belfastcity.gov.uk)

On receiving the request, Corporate HR will be responsible for ensuring that the part-time study is appropriate, is identified as a development need in the member's current PDP, and is within the financial limits of the member's annual PDP budget allocation.

Should approval be given for a member to undertake a course of part-time study Corporate HR will make all the necessary administrative arrangements, including the payment of the appropriate fees.

The application process and relevant forms are set out in Appendix 1.

### 1.4 Members' Responsibilities

An accredited course of part-time study will provide personal benefits to a member in terms of their learning and development given the degree of commitment expected from members choosing to undertake part-time study. This includes:

- raising their interest with the relevant Corporate HR officer and discussing suitability of the course of part-time study at the earliest opportunity, ideally at a facilitated PDP meeting
- completing and submitting all relevant forms, including enrolment/registration forms by the required date
- attending classes/activities scheduled as part of the programme of study
- advising the relevant Corporate HR officer as soon as possible, and, no later than within two weeks, if, for any reason, they may have cause to discontinue the course of study.

### 1.5 Assistance available

A member's PDP budget (£730 annually or £2,920 over the 4 year council term) can be used to meet the cost of the following associated with the agreed course of study:

- Tuition / registration fee
- Examination fees
- Residential fees associated with any compulsory residential element to the approved programme or course of study



- Textbooks and other materials subject to a maximum cost of £75 per year\*
- Travel costs.

*\* Note: where payment for textbooks or materials has been made, these items must be returned to Corporate HR on completion of the course of study.*

## 1.6 Recoupment of costs

### Completion of Study

Members will be expected to complete the part-time study within the agreed academic timetable unless special circumstances occur. Special circumstances are considered as:

- illness (personal/family)
- maternity/paternity leave
- adoptive leave
- long-term caring responsibilities
- family bereavement
- changes to employment status/working patterns

### Repayment of Expenses Incurred

Members will be asked to complete an agreement that they will repay the costs incurred by the Council up to the point at which they discontinue their studies. Recoupment of costs will be sought in the following circumstances:

- resignation during the Council term; and
- discontinuing study for any other reason other than those outlined in point 1.

Recoupment of expenses **will not** be sought in the following circumstances. The member is not:

- selected by his/her Party to stand for re-election.
- elected to the Council for another term; and
- illness or any other extenuating personal circumstances preventing the Member standing for re-election (this will be considered on a case-by-case basis).