

Qualification Request Policy

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1. Introduction and policy statement

To support achievement of the goal in our People Strategy of developing and maintaining an expert and resilient workforce, the ICO encourages staff to further their education by undertaking courses which lead to a recognised educational or professional qualification (e.g. CIPD, AAT, PG Certificate in Data Protection Law and Information Governance). The ICO may provide financial or other support and this will be dependent on sufficient budget and be reviewed against the criteria set in section 2 of this policy.

All staff are eligible to make an application for assistance under our qualification request policy. We will ensure that all applications are consistently and fairly considered in line with this policy. This policy does not apply to programmes of study that are being offered across the department or organisation (e.g. ACIP, ISO27001, Agile Project Management, ILM Level 5 Certificate in Coaching and Mentoring).

2. Criteria for assessing applications

Priority will be given to requests which meet the requirements for criteria A and B as detailed below.

Each application will be reviewed against the following criteria:

A. If the professional qualification or educational course is directly related to the current requirements of your job role.

If approved the ICO will provide the following assistance:

- 100% of registration fees, course fees, professional body subscription fees and examination costs;
- time off to attend examinations;
- half day revision leave for each exam
- time to attend the course for example day or block release, completing online e-learning modules or attending online webinars (pro-rated for part-time staff);
- up to one days study leave for each assignment required for completion of the qualification



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- 100% contribution towards the purchase of books and relevant library services, up to a maximum of £75 per course;
- reasonable travel expenses in line with the ICO expenses claim guide, subject to approval from your head of department;
- up to three days leave per year to attend mandatory residential and educational visits (Monday to Friday) at the standard full time working day (pro-rated for part-time staff). Confirmation from the training provider will be required; and
- reasonable expenses to attend mandatory residential elements of the course, subject to approval from your head of department.

B. The course adds value to the ICO, departmental or individual objectives

If approved the ICO will provide the following assistance:

- 80% of registration fees, course fees and examination costs;
- 80% of professional body subscriptions fees unless required for the job role where it will be 100%;
- time off to attend exams;
- half day revision leave for each exam;
- up to five days study leave per year dependant on the course (pro-rated for part-time staff);
- up to one days study leave for each assignment required for completion of the qualification;
- 100% contribution towards the purchase of books and relevant library services, up to a maximum of £75 per course; and
- reasonable travel expenses in line with the ICO expenses claim guide, subject to approval from your head of department.

C. The course is required for future career development and related to the work of the ICO.

If approved the ICO will provide the following assistance:

- 80% of registration fees, course fees and examination costs;
- 80% of professional body subscriptions fees unless required for the job role where it will be 100%;



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- time off to attend exams;
- half day revision leave for each exam;
- up to five days study leave per year dependant on the course (pro-rated for part-time staff);
- up to one days study leave for each assignment required for completion of the qualification;
- 100% contribution towards the purchase of books and relevant library services, up to a maximum of £75 per course; and
- reasonable travel expenses in line with the ICO expenses claim guide, subject to approval from your head of department.

D. The course is required for future development but is not related to the work of the ICO.

If approved the ICO will provide the following assistance:

- time off to attend exams or complete mandatory assignments up to a maximum of two days per year (pro-rated for part-time staff) subject to approval from line manager.

Requesting assistance

Staff are required to make a business case for all qualification requests stating:

- how the course relates to your current or future job role;
- the organisational, departmental and individual benefits;
- which recognised educational or professional qualification, certificate or diploma will be achieved following successful completion; and
- estimate of the all costs, including expenses, to complete the total course.

All applications will need to have a supporting statement from your head of department. Please use form QR1 for all requests.

3. Conduct and capability

To be eligible to apply for assistance your record of attendance, performance and conduct must be satisfactory. This will be evidenced through your probationary and development reviews completed by your



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line manager.

4. Gaining approval for assistance

Applications for assistance should can be submitted at any point in the financial year however employees are encouraged to submit their applications as soon as possible due to a limited budget being available. These are made by completing form QR1 available on ICON and sent to LearningandDevelopmentTeam@ico.org.uk in the first instance. The Learning and Development team will notify staff as to whether or not their request for assistance has been approved. Where approval is given, the written notification will confirm details of the assistance which will be provided by the ICO. When Learning and Development notify that assistance has been approved you will also be asked to sign and return the agreement for re-payment of training fees as detailed in section 9 of this policy. (Appendix A).

If a request is approved this will generally be for the full qualification, so employees will not need to reapply on an annual basis. Please note that although support for those already undertaking a qualification will be prioritised, ongoing financial support will be subject to sufficient budget being available.

You must ensure that your request has been approved by the Head of Workforce Development & Planning before you apply for any course.

5. Overall budget

Qualifications are funded from the Learning and Development budget, which is held by the Head of Workforce Development & Planning. A set budget will be made available for qualification fees in each financial year. Travel, accommodation and subsistence expenses will be funded from your own departmental budget.

6. Claiming for qualification expenses

Fees

There are two options which can be selected to pay for course fees:

6.1. Employees can request that Workforce Development and Planning provide confirmation that the ICO is supporting the course, and authorising them to invoice the ICO for their proportion of the fees. The individual will be responsible for paying their proportion of the fees only, if applicable.

6.2. Employees can request that the ICO pays the total fees to the educational establishment and then pay back their proportion of the fees to the ICO through an agreed payment plan. Staff will be required to sign an agreement stating the amount and dates payable and authorise any salary deductions before this option can be taken up.

Books and learning materials

Claims for books/learning materials which are listed as essential by the educational establishment, up to a maximum of £75 per course, should be made using the normal expenses claim form. All books should be retained following completion of the course as a departmental / organisational resource.

Travelling expenses

Travelling expenses at public transport rate and any accommodation or subsistence expenses should be claimed by completing the normal expenses claim form which is available on ICON. These costs will be payable by the employees department.

7. Funding for Apprenticeships

Many development needs including some professional qualifications can now be achieved through apprenticeship standards or frameworks. Apprenticeships are no longer just for people at the start of their career and are now an option that most people can consider. In addition, if your qualification can be completed through an apprenticeship the ICO can use apprentice levy funds to cover the cost (subject to sufficient levy funds being available). You will also be allocated time to complete the apprenticeship during your normal working week, either to attend external workshops or to complete distance learning (depending on the type of apprenticeship and selected training provider). To find out more about apprenticeships please contact Workforce Development and Planning.

8. Review of progress

Your line manager will hold a meeting with you every six months to review progress and the effectiveness of learning to date. It is your responsibility to attend the course regularly, complete work and submit assignments within agreed timescales. Continued support for your course will be dependent on satisfactory progress. Funding for the re-sitting of



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examinations will be at the discretion of the Head of Workforce Development & Planning.

9. Repayment of fees

If you choose to leave the course before completion and are still employed by the ICO you will be liable to pay back 100% of the fees paid by the ICO.

If you leave the employment of the ICO whilst still undertaking your course you will be liable to pay back 100% of total fees paid by the ICO before your last day of employment.

If you leave the employment of the ICO within one year of completing your course you will be liable to pay back 75% of the total fees paid by the ICO before your last day of employment.

If you leave the employment of the ICO within two years of completing your course you will be liable to pay back 50% of the total fees paid by the ICO before your last day of employment.

It is appreciated that there are some exceptional circumstances under which it would be inappropriate to seek a repayment of course fees. If an employee or their manager feels that this applies to their case they should refer the issue to the Head of Workforce Development and Planning for a decision.

Appendix A - Agreement for the re-payment of qualification fees

In the event that you discontinue any part of the course for which we have paid the fee, either because:

- a) you opt not to continue;
- b) due to unsatisfactory progress or attendance you are not allowed to continue; or
- c) you leave the employment of the ICO.

We will require you to refund a proportion of the fee paid by the ICO.

- If you choose to leave or are asked to leave the course before completion you will be liable to pay back 100% of the fees paid by the ICO.
- If you leave the employment of the ICO whilst still undertaking your course then you will be liable to pay back 100% of total fees paid by the ICO before your last day of employment.
- If you leave the employment of the ICO within one year of completing your course then you will be liable to pay back 75% of the total fees paid by the ICO before your last day of employment.
- If you leave the employment of the ICO within two years of completing your course then you will be liable to pay back 50% of the total fees paid by the ICO before your last day of employment.

Should you be unable to complete the course because of illness or some other factor over which you have no control, then this refund provision would not apply.

I understand and agree the terms and conditions as set out above in regards to the re-payment of qualification fees.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name: _____

Department: _____

Course: _____

Training Provider / Establishment: _____

Version	Changes made	Date	Made by
V1.0	Published	04.04.2019	Catherine Bentley
V2.0	Reviewed	28.06.2021	Deborah Toone