

Policy No:	59/149
Policy Title:	Education Assistance Policy
Section Responsible:	Corporate and Community Services
Minute No:	-1124/3044
Review Date:	30th June, 2014

Purpose

Greater Hume Shire Council ("Council") recognises that appropriate continual learning can be valuable for the development and welfare of its employees. Appropriate education can contribute to the quality and competence of employees and in turn increase further the productivity and success of Council.

The objective of this Policy is to outline the assistance Council may provide to employees who wish to undertake relevant continuing education with the Council's approval. This Policy covers both the financial assistance and assistance with working arrangements, which may be provided by Council, to assist employees balance the demands of work and further studies.

This Policy will differentiate between Council required education and employee initiated education.

Nothing in this Policy affects the application of Council scholarship programs or policies, training and development provisions of the Local Government (State) Award 2010.

Scope

This Policy applies to employees who wish to undertake further education who meet the eligibility requirements listed below. This Policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment.

Education includes but is not limited to, further part time and distance learning education courses leading to the award of a recognised academic or vocational qualification, from a recognised educational institution.

Statement

Council Required Education

Where it is a Council requirement to study as a condition of employment (eg trainee/apprentice positions), the provisions of the Local Government (State) Award 2010 Clause 27, Training and Development will apply. Similarly, for senior staff or other contract employees that have education assistance as part of their contract, the provision of their contract will dominate.

Employee Initiated Education

Clause 27 (v) of the Local Government (State) Award 2010 states:

“Council may grant an employee undertaking a course consistent with Council’s training plan although not at Council’s requirement, leave with pay or leave without pay to attend course requirements provided that the employee gives reasonable notice of such requirements. Where the employee is not granted such leave Council shall give preference in granting annual leave or to other accrued leave to attend course requirements provided that the employee gives reasonable notice of such requirements. Council may pay course fees at its discretion”.

Provision of Assistance

Council may, at its absolute discretion, provide assistance to employees to complete education (having regard to resource limitations) where:

- the proposed education is relevant to Council's requirements
- the proposed education is relevant to the employee’s career development with Council; and
- the employee has consistently demonstrated a satisfactory or above average job performance

Application Process and Terms of Assistance

Employees must make a written application for educational assistance prior to enrolment in the relevant educational course.

Written applications should include where possible the following details:

- course name
- type of qualification being pursued
- the name of the educational institution in which the course will be undertaken
- the duration of the course, indicating whether it will be completed on a part time, full time or by distance learning basis
- a list of the course subjects and a summary of the contents of each course
- where the employee has already completed some components of the course, a list of the subjects already completed and evidence of the grading received for each completed subject
- an itemised list of the costs involved in completing the course (eg course fees and other expenses expected to be incurred such as textbooks, travel, time etc) and evidence to confirm these costs
- an explanation of how the course of study directly relates to the employee's current/prospective job description and responsibilities and how it will contribute to the employee's career development; and

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- an explanation of how the course of study is relevant to the business objectives of the Council.

Approval Process & Terms of Assistance

Once an application has been received, the Director of Corporate & Community Services will advise in writing, whether Council will provide educational assistance, what form the assistance will be provided, and over what period of time. For example, Council may choose to provide assistance on a term by term basis.

Any assistance provided is at the absolute discretion of Council and may be withdrawn at the end of the specified approved period without additional assistance being provided.

The employee will be required to incur all education costs upfront and Council will reimburse those approved expenses provided the employee has satisfied all other requirements. The provision of on-going assistance is also conditional upon the following:

- the employee passing the relevant units/subject for which assistance has been approved and provides evidence to the Council's satisfaction of this
- the employee has, during the course of study, consistently maintained a satisfactory or above standard in their work performance
- the employee is still employed by Council, at the completion of the relevant course units/subject for which assistance has been approved; and
- the employee agrees to repay the financial assistance provided in the circumstances listed below.

Retrospective assistance will not be granted to an employee. This means that applications for financial assistance made after the completion of a course will not be accepted. An employee must make an application in writing, notifying Council prior to enrolment in the course.

Approval for educational assistance is valid for a maximum period of 12 months. Employees must re-apply at the end of the approval period, prior to re-enrolling in an education course.

Repayment of Educational Assistance Costs

Where the employee's services have been terminated for any reason by Council while undertaking further education, or within two years of completion of further education or part thereof, for any part of which the employee has been reimbursed or had the fees otherwise paid by or on behalf of Council, the employee will be required to repay Council as a debt, whom such repayments will be made in accordance with the following scale, all relevant financial assistance provided by the Council in connection with the education course:

- up to 12 months from the date of the relevant reimbursement date – 100% of the costs reimbursed by the Council
- from 12 months to 18 months from the date of the relevant reimbursement date – 50% for the costs reimbursed by the Council

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- from 18 months to 24 months from the date of the relevant reimbursement date – 25% of the costs reimbursed by the Council.

If Council, in its absolute discretion, decides to pay further education costs on behalf of an employee in advance, if the employee commences but later withdraws from further education, the employee agrees to immediately repay Council that part of the education costs which have been paid by Council as at the date of the employee's withdrawal from further education.

Types of Assistance Available

Council aims to make continuing education more expedient and/or less costly for its employees. The following forms of assistance may be provided in Council's absolute discretion.

Financial

Fees for approved education courses are reimbursed to relevant employees (who are still in the Council's employ) at the end of each semester (or unit of study) upon provision of evidence of successful completion, including a copy of the employee's academic transcript and demonstration of satisfactory or above average work performance. Other approved expenses, such as purchase of required textbooks and other required resources, may be reimbursed by the Council upon the relevant employee meeting the same requirements and in addition, by providing evidence of purchase (such as purchase receipts).

Recommended study assistance contributions are as listed below.

<u>TAFE</u>	Certificate & Advanced Certificate	<u>Up To:</u> Annual Fee \$300
<u>TAFE</u>	Associate Diploma/Diploma	Annual Fee \$700 Per Semester \$350
<u>UNIVERSITY</u>	Post Graduate, Degree, Diploma or Certificate	Per Subject 1350 Maximum \$8000 per employee.

Employees will only be able to claim reimbursement for subjects/course units successfully completed and for reasonable expenses actually incurred.

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Leave

Any absence for study (study preparation, voluntary residential schools, workshops etc) requires an application for leave (annual, LWOP, RDO or time in lieu).

Supervisors are expected to sympathetically assess these applications.

Paid study leave will be granted to attend compulsory examinations, workshops or residential schools. Application for study leave (travel to/from and the examination) should be submitted with supporting documents.

POLICY DOCUMENT CONTROL

GHS Education Assistance Policy	First adopted	15 Aug 2007 Min 1124
GHS Education Assistance Policy	Revised	18 April 2012 Min 3044