Training and Development Policy

GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

Effective: April 2024

Policy Statement

The Cook Islands Government is committed to building a culture of excellence across the public sector with a skilled, and professional workforce by providing employees opportunities to participate in activities that enhance their leadership abilities and grow the ability to function at a high level in a challenging, diverse, and constantly evolving work environment.

This Policy supports targeted and structured training and development of public servants at an individual and agency level to produce a professional, competent and motivated workforce. Preference will be given to training Cook Islanders to ensure the retention of skills and knowledge.

Scope

This Policy applies to employees of all public sector agencies.

This Policy does not apply to the following:

- Independent Contractors.
- Ministers and Members of Parliament.
- Island Mayors and Councillors.
- Ministerial Support Office staff.

Principles

The Public Service Act 2009 (PSA) provides the following values Public Servants must adhere to:

Honesty	Acting honestly, being truthful, and abiding by the laws of the Cook Islands.
Impartiality	Providing impartial advice, acting without fear or favour, and making decisions on their merits.
Service	Serving the people well through faithful service to the Government of the Cook Islands.
Transparency	Taking actions and making decisions in an open and transparent way.
Accountability	Being able to explain the reason for actions taken, and taking responsibility for those actions.
Respect	Treating the people, the Government of the Cook Islands, and colleagues with courtesy and respect.
Efficiency and Effectiveness	Achieving good results for the Cook Islands in an economical way.

The duty to act as a good employer (PSA 2009) requires employers to implement and comply with the Cook Islands Government Human Resource policies to ensure the fair and proper treatment of employees during employment, including the impartial recruitment of employees, provide employee capability development opportunities and good and safe working conditions.

The Cook Islands Government Policies and Employment Relations Act (ERA 2012) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin, beliefs, religion, gender or sexual preference, disability, age and health status whether for internal or external recruitment.

Legislation and Regulations

Public Service Act 2009 (PSA), Employment Relations Act 2012 (ERA) and other relevant legislation.

Definitions

Agency means any Public Service Department, instrument, or agent of the Government and includes a body corporate or organisation that is wholly owned or controlled by the Crown.

Agency Professional Development Plan contains specific training and development activities planned to occur in the Agency over the year. It consolidates all the training and development requirements for individual employees into one plan.

Coaching is when an employee's personal and professional development is actively supported to perform well in their job through instruction and/or training.

Competencies are a combination of knowledge, skills and attributes directly related to the job.

Conduct is the way in which an individual behaves and adheres to Public Service and Agency values.

Employee means a person engaged to work under an employment agreement. It does not include an independent contractor/consultant engaged under a contract for services.

Employer means the Public Service Commissioner or Heads of Public Sector Agencies or their delegated authority.

Job Description (JD) is the document used to describe the job content, responsibilities, organisational context and specific competencies required to perform the job to expectations of the Agency.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are qualitative or quantitative measures, directly linked to performance targets, to assess an employee's performance.

Key Results Areas (KRAs) in job descriptions are used to determine an employee's performance targets, linked to the Agency's Annual Business Plan.

Leadership Development involves providing employees with knowledge, skills, mentoring and coaching to attain key competencies for leadership roles.

Direct Report are those with responsibility for managing employees including but not limited to Managers, Supervisors and Team Leaders.

Mentoring is when support and/or guidance is provided to an employee's and/or teams personal or professional development regardless of the role or position they hold.

Performance Appraisal refers to a formal step in the Performance Management process that assesses the performance of an employee.

Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) has specific development activities to improve key areas of an employee's performance in their job and aims to improve poor performance.

Performance Management (PM) is an ongoing process of identifying, monitoring, evaluating and developing the work performance of employees to enable overall achievement of Agency goals and targets.

Performance Targets are outputs or goals to be achieved.

Professional Development is targeted training and experience to support employees gain increased competencies in their current role, or future roles identified in their career pathway.

Professional Development Plan documents an employee's annual performance objectives, focus areas from KRAs and KPIs, professional development plans, progress reviews and performance appraisal outcomes and measures agreed between the employer and employee. It incorporates and encompasses goal setting, training, development, and performance of an employee.

Proficiency is how the employee behaves and uses their competencies to perform in the job**.**

Public Service Commissioner (PSC) means the individual appointed under Article 73 of the Constitution and Section 5 of the PSA.

Training is a structured learning process to enable employees to achieve the level of competence needed for their current job or future career development.

Workforce Plan is a document that analyses the current workforce, determines future workforce needs, and identifies the gap between the workforce available and future needs, and implement solutions so that an Agency can achieve its mission, goals, and strategic plan.

Procedures

Employers are responsible for administering this, Policy. The employer is responsible for ensuring all policies are easily accessible to employees. However, employees are responsible for ensuring they read and understand this Policy and any relevant Government policies. A breach of the Policy may be considered a misconduct and may be subject to disciplinary action and/or dismissal.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Office of the Public Service Commissioner (OPSC) supports implementation of this Policy by:

- Assisting Agencies to develop links between goals, performance and employee development by providing tools such as templates, Guides and informing them of training opportunities.
- Coordinating Public Service wide training initiatives (i.e. Public Service Orientation).
- Monitoring Agency performance through the Agency Annual and Mid-Year Performance Appraisal.
- Investigating unresolved employment disputes that may arise from this Policy.

Employer Obligations

Employers must encourage training and development as an ongoing part of human resource management to support the achievement of Agency goals and targets.

Employers must ensure:

- There is a current Agency Strategic Plan, Business Plan and Workforce Plan (Annex 01) in place.
- All employees complete an Agency Induction programme.
- All new employees complete the Public Sector Orientation.
- To seek development opportunities (e.g., coaching and mentoring) for employees.
- Agency budgets where possible, should include employee training and development.
- JDs are current, clearly outline the key results to be achieved by the job (KRAs) and the required competencies and professional standards required.
- There is discussion and confirmation of employee training, capability and development needs and ensure:
    - It is relevant to the employee's performance and professional development.
    - Impacts of these are evaluated regularly.
    - Employer and employee agreeing that the training will be beneficial to the Agency goals and objectives
- To coordinate and oversee the implementation of a Performance Development Plan.
- Prior to approving any training, consideration has been given to the:
    - Employee's performance.
    - Employee's availability to attend the proposed training.
    - Employment conditions, business continuity of role, duration and travel arrangements (if applicable).
    - Contingency plans if the employee does not return to work for the Agency.
    - The availability of resources i.e., laptops etc.

Employee Obligations

Employees are responsible for their own personal and career development and should:

- Seek feedback on performance to identify skill gaps and future development needs.
- Discuss their training needs with their Direct Reports.
- Actively search for training opportunities.
- Commit to attending agreed training and development activities and link performance to training and development opportunities.
- Submit a Back to the Office Template (BTOR, Annex 02) to their Direct Report, which can be used as part of the evaluation and review of training outcomes below.

There is no expectation that employees who participate in training and development activities will receive additional remuneration or will be promoted.

Employee Professional Development

Training and development activities are integral to improving and/or developing key competencies as part of a structured performance management process. The activities comprise of skills and professional development to enable employees to:

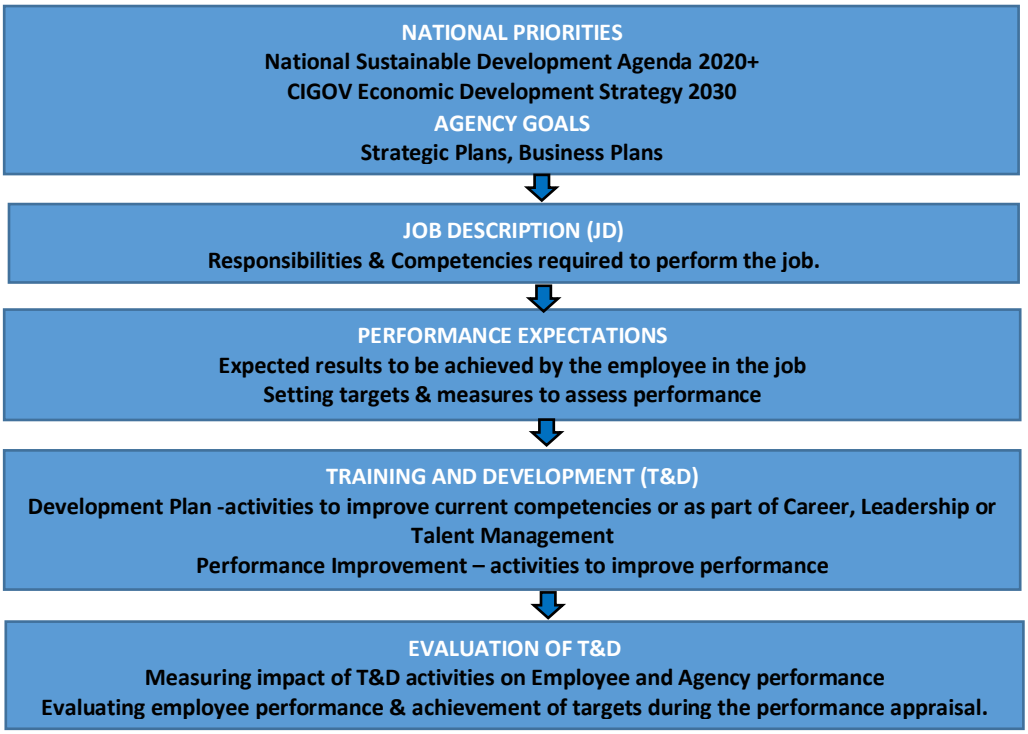
- Effectively perform in their current job.
- Prepare and assume additional responsibilities and perform new tasks.
- Develop in line with their personal and career aspirations.
- Contribute to national priorities i.e., NSDA 2020+, CIGOV Strategies.

The expected outcomes from training and development include, but are not limited to:

- Having a committed and skilled workforce capable of meeting current and future Agency goals.
- Improving employee productivity and contribution to Agency wide service commitment.

Linkages to Performance Management

The Cook Islands Government is committed to building a culture of 'excellence' across the public sector through structured training and development to strengthen a knowledgeable, skilled and professional workforce, this may include the participation of employees in activities that not only grows the individual's talent and leadership skills to perform physically and mentally in a diverse, challenging and constantly evolving environment. These activities are recorded, monitored and evaluated through the Performance Development Plan. (Refer to Performance Management Policy)



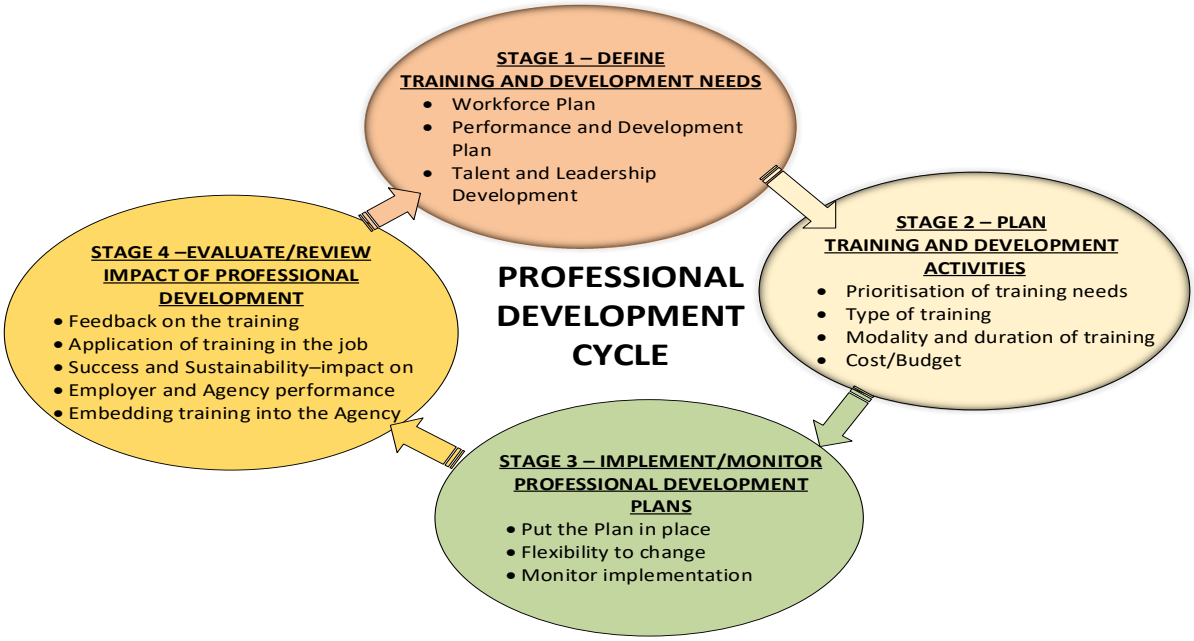
Professional Development Activities

All training and development of employees will target:

- Development of knowledge and skills to ensure employees perform well in their role, to enable better performance, support career progression and maintaining the technical and/or professional standards.
- Development of leadership and management skills.
- Preserving institutional knowledge, maintaining experiences and knowledge within the institution through mentoring, coaching, development and sharing of knowledge.
- Development of human relationship skills to strengthen communication whilst maintaining professional and respectful conduct according to the CIGOV Code of Conduct Policy and Public Service values.
- Enabling the development of individual potential.

Professional Development Cycle

Training and Development is carried out in four stages as shown in the diagram below and described in the ensuing sections.



Stage 1: Define: Training and Development Needs

A Workforce Plan is where the Agency analyse, forecast and plan for its workforce supply and demand - getting the right number of people with the right skills, talents and experience in the right jobs at the right time to accomplish planned goals and objectives. A Workforce Plan provides Agencies, divisions and managers with a tool to assess gaps, determine specialist, technical or leadership roles, interventions to meet and/or anticipate current and future business goals and/or service demands, align the workforce with the strategic goals of the Agency and to anticipate change. Agencies should define relevant training and development requirements and employee assessment training needs (Refer to the CIGOV Performance Management Policy) into the workforce plan and this must be done at an:

a) Agency level (Refer to Annex 03 Training and Development Guide).
b) Employee level.

Stage 2: Plan: Training and Development Activities

Plans should be reviewed at a minimum annually and updated to reflect the dynamic strategic and operating environment of the Agency, including Workforce Plan, Business Plan and budgetary requirements and the effectiveness of previous training.

In their annual Business Plan performance review, the Head of Ministries reports to the PSC on Training and Development Plans and Workforce Plans, and the Heads of other Agencies are encouraged to report this information in their annual performance reports and/or annual reports.

The Training and Development needs identified will be prioritised in relation to Agency requirements and collated as part of a Workforce Plan (Refer to Annex 01) and the employee Professional Development Plan. The plans must be done at an:

1) **Agency level to identify**
    - Current knowledge/skill gaps of employees. Type of training, modality and timing of the training.
    - The provider of the training.
    - Number of people requiring the training.
    - Cost associated with the training.
    - Prioritising of training in line with Agency requirements and available budget.

- Succession principles based on merit, best fit – knowledge, skills, attributes, performance and the recruitment and selection process (Refer to CIGOV Recruitment Policy).
- Any approved change in the organisation.

Employers need to consider the following as part of Professional development activities outlined below:

a) **Training Options**

Training can be provided through a combination of:

- Competency training: to address skills and knowledge gaps.
- Proficiency training: to address performance/behavioural gaps identified during the performance appraisal process.
- Developmental Training: to acquire knowledge or skills to enhance specialist or professional capabilities, career progression or leadership prospects.

b) **Types of Training** (Refer to training examples in the Training and Development Policy Guide)

Depending on the training needs identified, the requirements of the job being performed, and subject to available budget, employee training may be provided:

- National - in country or within the Agency, includes, e-learning and/or with registered tertiary education providers and accredited organisations.
- Overseas – E-learning and/or registered tertiary education providers and accredited organisations outside the country.
- On-the-job training.

c) **Training Duration**

Training duration will depend on the type of training, and it can be either:

- Training undertaken while remaining in full-time employment, or
- Training taken outside of full-time employment where the employee works part-time or takes study leave.
- Training may be scheduled and/or prioritized in the employee's PDP.

Employers may approve study leave for work related studies identified in the employee's Professional Development Plan as per the conditions set out in the CIGOV Leave policy and within the following parameters:

- The costs, risks and benefits of the training to both the Agency and employee are discussed and agreed.
- Impact of the employee's absence on Agency outputs and service delivery.
- Employee work performance.
- What role the employee will return to upon completion of their study.

d) **Professional Development**

Agencies, can award leave for defined periods at the discretion of the Head of Agency, to enable employees to gain skills to improve their performance. (Refer to the CIGOV Leave Policy).

e) **Training Budget**

Employers and Managers are responsible for prioritising and sourcing resources to support training and development activities identified in the Workforce Plan (Refer to Workforce Guide Annex 04).

Agency training budgets should include costs (where applicable) for:

- Domestic training and professional development programmes - materials, trainer fees, facilities (i.e. venue, catering and equipment), including travel, accommodation, meals, transport, insurance and per diem allowances if applicable.
- Overseas training and professional development programmes including travel, accommodation, meals, transport, insurance and per diem allowances if applicable.
- Secondments or work attachments.

f) **Bonding**

Those awarded a scholarship through CIGOV and Development Partners outside of CIGOV schemes are encouraged to return and work in the Cook Islands for the period stated if stipulated in their employee contract on completion of their training or make arrangements of repayment to the relevant funding entity if stipulated.

For employees who have approved study leave (i.e., for study not included under the Government scholarship scheme), they must be placed on a bond. Employees are required to return and work in the Cook Islands for a period equal to the time they were away on study or as mutually agreed with their employer. (Refer to Scholarship or Bonding Template Annex 05).

Approved tertiary study may be partly or fully funded by the Cook Islands Government, a development partner/sponsor or is funded privately. Agencies should identify and approach strategic partners for appropriate support and identify it in their training plans where this is provided.

Training can include but not limited to (Refer to Training and Development Policy Guide):

- Mentoring & Coaching.
- Succession Planning.
- On-the-job-training/Work attachments.
- Secondments (Refer to CIGOV Secondment Policy).
- Professional and/or Accredited Seminars/ Conferences and Training Courses.
- Leadership and Talent Planning, Development and/or Promotion.
- Professional Development.

2) **Employee level, the employee must:**

- Complete the PDP during the performance appraisal process which identifies and assesses the training and development activities, needs, gaps and impacts to support performance and deliver Agency goals/objectives.
- Discuss and agree with their Direct Report on the training and development that may be required to enhance performance.
- Be bonded who have study leave approved (that is not under a Government scholarship scheme) and are required to return and work in the Cook Islands for a period equal to the time they were away on study or as mutually agreed with their employer.
- Apply for professional development leave provided they seek the HOA approval and that the training and development activities in this Policy and the CIGOV Leave Policy is also considered.
- Be willing to step up to the next level, to move across to the next position or acceptable of any approved change to their roles and responsibilities in the organisation.

Stage 3: Implementing and Monitoring the Plan

Employers must oversee all Agency training and development activities and ensure employees identified for training:

- Demonstrate proficiency/pre-requisite requirements stipulated by the training provider or the institution meeting the training costs.
- Are performing in their job, unless the training is part of a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP).

Employers should monitor usage of the allocated training budget and propose alternative training if Agency budgets are modified. Employers should ensure that:

- Cancellations due to a change in strategic focus, employee's work allocation or development or the employee's inability to attend must be made at least five working days prior to the training commencing.
- Non-attendance to scheduled training, without prior approval is treated as unauthorised absence and disciplinary measures may be taken.

- Employees who have received paid study leave and do not complete the programme will have this fact noted in their personnel record and may be required to refund the associated costs.

Stage 4: Evaluating and Reviewing Training Outcomes

Employers or Agencies must carry out the following activities:

- Ensure BTOR must be completed within five days by the trainee.
- Evaluate the impact of Professional Development against the Agency business goals or employee's objectives and performance during informal and formal review.
- Update the Agency Workforce Plan as needed as an outcome of the evaluation of the Professional Development Plan.

Other Provisions

All records relating to the administration of this Policy must be kept for at least seven years for audit purposes and are only accessible by the employer and/or authorised staff. After the required seven-year period, the Agency may destroy the documentation in adherence with Government official information management policies.

The Office of the Public Service Commissioner is responsible for reviewing and/or updating this policy and associated documents as the need arises or at a minimum once every three years.

Associated Documents

Leave Policy
Performance Management Policy
Remuneration Policy
Secondment Policy
Training and Development Policy Guide (Annex 03)
Workforce Plan Guide (Annex 04)
CIGOV Organisational Fit for Purpose Standard

Template Documents

The templates set the minimum standards based on CIGOV Policies, ERA and PSA. They can be edited to suit individual Agency requirements as long as the minimum standards are not removed.
Workforce Plan Template (Annex 01)
Back to the Office Report (Annex 02)
Scholarship or Bonding Template (Annex 05)

Other information

For policy queries, contact the Office of the Public Service Commissioner on phone (682) 29421 or email: opsc.policy@cookislands.gov.ck.

This Policy, associated documents and templates can be found on the Public Service Shared Drive and on the OPSC website www.psc.gov.ck.