



## Q&A

### 1. What is the purpose of the Scientific Learning and Development Fund (SLDF)?

Investment in scientific learning & development is a strategic objective for Viapath. It is central to the development of a compelling employee proposition that will progressively establish us as the employer of choice for people that want to work, and develop a career, in pathology.

The SLDF signals our clear intent to current and future employees that we are serious about investing in our people. It also establishes equality of opportunity, so that any employee can nominate themselves for training and support through discussion with their manager, irrespective of their location, role or seniority.

### 2. How does this relate to the individual and collective training needs that have been identified through the 2016 Operational & Financial Planning (OFP) process and the budget provisions that were agreed?

Including learning & development planning within the OFP process helped to ensure that local needs were considered as part of the overall budgeting process and to develop a 'bottom up' figure for investment this year. The outputs from our scientific learning and development fund will sit alongside the proposals that informed the OFP process and together will constitute the 2016 Learning & Development plan at laboratory, service, location and group levels.

### 3. What sort of courses can be applied for?

Courses must be both scientific and qualification based development and relevant to your current role and level in Viapath.

### 4. What is the purpose of the Scientific Learning & Development Council and who are the members?

The Council has been established to provide focus for the strategically important area of scientific learning & development. Its terms of reference ensure:

- appropriate investment is made in scientific staff development
- that all investment is strategically aligned to the current and future needs and opportunities facing the services we deliver
- equality of opportunity and access to all our employees, at all levels and in all locations and services.

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The Scientific Learning & Development Council (SLDC) reviews all the applications once the window closes. The SLDC's role is to steer the application of funding fairly across Viapath. The Council consists of an Ops Director, a General Manager, HR and Scientific Directors, the Organisation & People Development Manager and a member of the Future Leaders in Innovation Steering group representing our scientific community.

**5. If an agreement to support an individual to pursue a specific programme was approved between 2014-2016 does the individual need to re-apply through this process or is the previous agreement sufficient?**

There is no need for the individual to re-apply but the commitment should be made known to the Scientific Learning & Development Council to ensure that it has full visibility of all relevant activity. If the agreement that has been entered into includes the provision of financial support then the employee must sign the contractual undertaking to complete the programme and to acknowledge that the company funding will be recoverable in certain circumstances e.g. resignation within two years of completion of the programme in question.

**6. If an employee started a course prior to the new application window can funding be backdated?**

No, funding can only be given for subsequent periods after the application date.

**7. If an employee is on a Fixed Term Contract can they still apply for funding?**

Yes, however funding will not be issued unless a permanent contract has been secured.

**8. If an application was approved in 2014-2016, does there needs to be another application for the continuing year(s)?**

There is no need to reapply for the continuing year(s) of funding for your course. Once your application has been approved all subsequent years will be covered. However the applicant does need to contact the L&D department in good time before the start of the continuing year so that they can confirm the cost and a Purchase Order can be raised.

A new application is only required for new courses and any course add on, for example a top up from a foundation to a full degree.

**9. If an employee is still in probation can they apply for funding?**

No, applicants must have successfully completed the probation period before applying to the SLDF.

**10. If an application is approved, how accessible is the 75% of funding?**

Once applications are approved applicants will be notified by email and issued with a learning agreement. Once in receipt of the signed learning agreement a sponsorship letter and a purchase order number will be issued to the applicant. This is needed so the applicant can provide the learning provider with proof of sponsorship by Viapath and the Purchase Order (PO) number to be invoiced against.

**11. What individual contribution is required for those in MLA, ATO, SATO MTO and Associate Practitioner roles (Band 4 and below equivalent) who wish to apply for funding under £500?**

Applications should be submitted as per the instructions, if the application is successful then the course will be 100% funded and the applicant will not need to pay any contribution.

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**12. If an employee has applied previously can they apply again for another course?**

Yes, however preference will be given to those who are applying for the first time.

**13. Is it possible to get support with my 25% contribution towards the course?**

In exceptional circumstances, Viapath may be able to offer a study loan, please contact [michelle.plange@viapath.co.uk](mailto:michelle.plange@viapath.co.uk) for further details.

**14. How does this initiative relate to the annual Performance, Planning and Review (PPR) process and in particular the Personal Development Plan (PDP) element?**

Ideally individual PPR and PDP discussions will include a thorough review of the employee's near and longer term L&D needs but the SLDF ensures that every employee has an additional opportunity to raise the subject, have access to financial support and to secure adequate time to study.

**15. How often do Viapath open an SLDF window?**

Having reviewed the success of the SLDF over a number of years, we plan to have at least one 'window' for self nomination per year and this will be an integral part of our ongoing operation as a company. We will however review this on an annual basis in line with the OFP.

**16. How will decisions be made in respect of individual applications for support?**

The SLDF stimulates a significant level of response and therefore it is highly unlikely that we will be able to support every application received. The ambition is to create equality of opportunity but the process will be competitive in nature such that the most compelling cases will be prioritised. Consideration **will therefore be given to the quality of the application, the justification provided and the basis upon which the applicant sets out the benefits of the proposed training to themselves and the organisation.** Each application should be reviewed and approved by the relevant Line Manager and Service Delivery Manager and in so doing they should ensure the application is well founded and articulated before submission to the Council for consideration.

**17. If an employee makes an application for support but is unsuccessful, what will happen and what other options will be open to them?**

All unsuccessful applications, will receive a written response from the Council. In the case of an application which is approved but needs to be deferred to the next funding period we will contact the individual and discuss the next steps for them.

Wherever possible, unsuccessful applicants will be given guidance, advice and encouragement to pursue an alternative course and/or to reapply or seek alternative sources of funding. We are determined to maximise the positive impact of this initiative and dealing positively with all applications is important in this regard.

**18. If an employee wishes to attend a conference, to present a poster or just to update their knowledge should they pursue this through this through the SLDF?**

In such circumstances the individual should discuss with their Line Manager, or Service Delivery Manager and Clinical Lead and Apply utilising the L&D Application Form. You should not apply through this route.

**19. This is a scientific L&D initiative. Does that mean employees other than scientists cannot receive support for their training and future development?**

This initiative is focused specifically upon the scientific community. People in other functions should discuss their L&D development ambitions with their manager through their Appraisal Process.

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