

Briefing Paper on Study Leave for Teaching Focused Staff

Executive Summary and Recommendations

The Teaching Reward and Recognition Learning Circle of the Warwick Higher Education Academy have researched the prevalence and characteristics of teaching-focused staff and study leave across the sector. Whilst generally not offered routinely by most UK HEIs, there are examples of good practice which could inform and shape policy at Warwick and it is the analysis of these case studies that has led to the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- Academic Leave should have two strands: Research-focused Leave and Education-focused Leave
- All permanent academic staff should be eligible for Academic Leave on an equal basis, and to either Research-focused or Education-focused leave, regardless of the nature of their contract, as necessary for their career development and departmental strategy
- Applications for Academic Leave should underpin University/Department Research and Education strategies and support the REF and the TEF
- Applications for Academic Leave should be considered as part of career development for all academic staff, and leave may be taken to enable a staff member to meet an element of the promotions criteria across any of the areas of activity
- Examples of Education-focused Leave activities may include undertaking pedagogical or subject-based research; major curriculum reviews and development; teaching in other institutions; learning new programmes or techniques; developing widening participation, employability, or other departmental strategies related to education. (NB This is not an exhaustive list and the Learning Circle will continue to research and develop a list of types of activity suitable for Education-focused Leave)
- Both Research-focused and Education-focused Leave should result in demonstrable outputs which may include publications, grant applications, curriculum change, new policy or strategy, or collaborations with other institutions
- Recipients of Academic Leave should be required to complete an end-of-leave report, and encouraged to feedback on their activities more widely (for example via the annual Education conference for Education-focused Leave, or within departments or faculties)
- Education-focused leave should be monitored by the University Education Committee
- Academic Leave is a privilege and not an automatic right and the Department must be able to demonstrate how the teaching and administrative duties of applicants will be covered during their absence

Existing Practice

The Learning Circle has completed a horizon-scanning exercise of all Russell Group Universities, and all TEF Gold Universities in the UK, as well as Monash University. Of the 62 institutions considered, clear information about leave was publicly available at 36 institutions. Of these, only twelve explicitly

offer study/sabbatical leave to staff on teaching focused contracts or for Education-related development, and of those that do offer such leave, most have introduced such a policy in the last five years.

Case Studies

Lancaster

Lancaster changed the name of its Sabbatical Leave scheme to Academic Research and Education Leave in 2017 and examples of teaching-related leave activities are embedded throughout. The policy exists to enable academic staff at all career levels to spend dedicated and uninterrupted time on research or education activities, that enable them to deliver academic achievement and learning at a high level and work of significant value and impact to the University. The leave should support the individual but also the University's strategic aims. There should be measurable outcomes, for example world class research outputs, significant grant applications or significant education focused on the development of learning teaching and engagement. Staff are required to participate in a mid-term discussion and provide a report at the end of the leave. The applications for leave should have measurable expected outcomes for example course developments expected or pedagogical research outputs and these should be additional to 'normal' activity. The University's Research Committee and Education Committee will monitor the usage and outcomes from the Academic Research and Education Leave policy on an annual basis to consider its effectiveness.

Monash

Monash's Outside Study programme is designed to lead to one of the following outcomes:

- The creation of new publications
- New research grant applications
- International research collaborations or staff exchanges
- Innovations in teaching, for example major curriculum

It includes a travel grant of up to \$5,000 outside Australasia and \$2500 within Australasia if applicable. The OSP committee consider a range of factors when deciding whether or not to grant the award including

- If the programme is justified in terms of the expected benefit to the staff member and university
- If the travel overseas is appropriate
- If the length of absence is justified
- Applicants need to have a proven and sustained record of productivity, impact and excellence in research, education and engagement and are meeting the relevant academic performance standards

Newcastle

The purpose of the academic sabbatical leave policy (revised in 2016) is to enable the university to successfully achieve its vision to be a 'World-Class Civic University' and is underpinned by the Institution's Research Strategy and the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy:

- To enable academic staff to have dedicated time to focus on research and pedagogical teaching activities
- To ensure academic are supported in their career development
- To act as part of the reward and recognition scheme at the University
- To respond and contribute to the REF and the TEF

The aim is to enable members of academic staff to request a period of dedicated time in which they can focus upon specific elements of their job role. It is considered to be a privilege and not a contractual entitlement. It may be used to undertake research or scholarship, to obtain experience in another organisation, or learn about a new teaching programme or technique. Leave must be of strategic importance to the teaching and learning and student experience of the unit or department concerned. Applicants must agree to give feedback on proposed activities.

There are no examples of teaching-focused study leave projects but clearly Newcastle consider undertaking pedagogical research, learning new teaching programmes/techniques, and gaining experience of different approaches to teaching in other institutions or settings are all eligible areas. The link to the strategic aims of the Department and/or wider University ensure that such study leave projects will support University strategy and underpin initiatives such as the TEF. The requirement for feedback is also embedded into the policy. For the individual the benefits are improved practice and contributions to career development (and possibly promotion).

Queens Belfast

Belfast revised its sabbatical policy in 2012 and views the leave as pivotal to support high quality research and teaching initiatives. They consider the leave a crucial element in academic staff development. Staff are encouraged to spend their leave away from the University in order that staff may benefit from the opportunities gained from spending time at other institutions but this is not compulsory. The key principle is that the leave must demonstrably be for the benefit of the individual and department.

The teaching-based criteria for study leave are:

- to pursue a course of study on teaching or a teaching-related matter;
- to undertake research facilitating the development of the existing curriculum or the addition of a new specialism;
- to undertake research and development in relation to the curriculum where major restructuring is planned;
- to teach in other institutions in order to learn new approaches to teaching and learning;
- to undertake projects relating to the enhancement of learning and teaching by electronic means, eg projects relating to the internet or e-universities.

Staff must compile a portfolio of evidence to support a teaching-based application – eg course materials prepared for students, positive views from external examiners/HEFCE assessors/accreditation bodies, evidence of curriculum development activities or innovative strategies in teaching and learning, publications on teaching-related matters, prizes and awards etc. Any such portfolio submission should conform to a standard format.

Nottingham Trent University

The Trent Institute for Learning and Teaching (TILT) provides funding for salary replacement for sabbatical leave. There is an application process for this leave rather than time earned through a set number of years/terms of employment. The TILT sabbatical scheme is intended to provide colleagues with dedicated time to pursue developments which will impact positively on learning and teaching at NTU. These might include, but are not limited to:

- Innovation in learning, teaching, assessment, or professional practice with a plan to disseminate.
- Developing innovative approaches to curriculum design and delivery and new course development.
- Integration of key themes into learning and teaching practices, such as employability, globalisation.
- Researching and testing innovative approaches to learning and teaching or developing new products and means of engaging students in learning.
- Pedagogic research and scholarship, including writing and submitting a research bid.

Academic and professional services staff are eligible to apply, with the support of their line manager. Applicants must have achieved Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy to be eligible for this scheme (or be working towards affiliation).

References

Lancaster: <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/hr/total-reward/files/sabschemtop.html>

Monash: https://www.monash.edu/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/779265/Outside-Study-Programme.pdf

Newcastle: <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/hr/leave/sabbatical.php>

Queen's Belfast:

<https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/HumanResources/MoreDetails/EmployeeBenefits/FileStoreLeaveHolidaysandAbsence/Filetoupload,618168,en.doc>

Nottingham Trent: <https://www.ntu.ac.uk/c/tilt/funding-and-resources>

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