

Academic Sabbatical Policy/ Procedure

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1. Policy

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for the effective consideration and implementation of sabbatical leave across St Mary's University, ensuring there is consistency in approach.

2. Scope of the Procedure

2.1 A sabbatical is a continuous specified period granted to an individual academic employee to focus on research, teaching, or enterprise and engagement, that delivers University / Faculty / Institutes / Academic Service strategic objectives.

2.2 Sabbaticals are normally funded by external sources and the employee remains a salaried employee of the University during the sabbatical leave. Sabbaticals may be funded by the Faculty / Institute or a University scheme (e.g. REF, KEF, TEF etc).

3. Exclusions

3.1 Unpaid periods of absence are dealt with through the Special Leave Policy or Career Break Policy (in development).

4. Principles

4.1 The sabbatical policy aims to support the:

- Development of academic employee skills, knowledge and expertise, in line with the strategic aims of the University
- Retention of academic employees through the development of those employees
- Fair and reasonable deployment of the University's resources
- Equality of opportunity for academic staff irrespective of their academic roles or areas of work

5. Eligibility

5.1 A sabbatical is not an automatic entitlement but is based on the merits of the proposal and the strategic and resource needs of the Faculty / Institute / Academic Service.

5.2 Any substantive academic employee, who has three years' continuous service with St Mary's University at the time of commencement, is normally eligible to apply for a sabbatical. Periods of maternity, paternity, adoption leave or long-term sickness absence do count towards three years' continuous service.

5.3 Academic employees in senior leadership roles wishing to apply for a sabbatical should discuss their plans and the timing of the sabbatical with their relevant manager. Academic employees completing a fixed period management role, e.g. Head of Department, should discuss their plans and the timing of the sabbatical with their relevant line manager to ensure relevant plans are in place.

5.4 Academic staff awarded a sabbatical will not normally have a subsequent application approved within a 5-year period.

5.5 Employees subject to an adverse outcome of the University's formal Capability or Disciplinary Procedures will not be entitled to apply for or go on a sabbatical for the duration of the sanction.

6. Duration

6.1 The length of the sabbatical should be commensurate with the time required to achieve the sabbatical objectives and reflect the strategic significance of the agreed outcome for the Faculty / Institute / Academic Service.

6.2 A sabbatical is likely to be one teaching block and may only exceed 1 calendar year in exceptional circumstances, with the beginning and end dates agreed in advance of the sabbatical commencing.

6.3 There is no link between the length of a sabbatical and an individual's length of service with the University.

7. Purpose

7.1 A sabbatical must align with the strategic objectives and ambitions of the University and result in an outcome that contributes strategically. The following would normally be considered as appropriate reasons:

- the pursuit of research, innovation or scholarly work above the normal requirements of the role, either within the University or elsewhere, leading to recognised outputs, e.g. through visiting other institutions, facilities or libraries
- initiation and development of teaching and education collaborations with other organisations that could include other education providers, industry, business, professional bodies, the public and third sectors
- the completion of a book, series of articles or substantial outputs that are in keeping with the priorities of the department
- the pursuit of experience from other leading-edge institutions, e.g. in innovative teaching techniques, professional or management practice, above and beyond normal expectations for CPD
- release of an individual for a specific project or other activities not defined above and that demonstrate clear value to the individual and the University – e.g. designing a new suite of academic programmes that aligns with the strategic priorities of the department

7.2 The following instances would normally be supported through a secondment, rather than a sabbatical:

- the undertaking of an exchange position with another HEI or working directly in a government department, industry or commerce
- secondment to an external professional body which is both in the career interests of the individual and to the benefit of the University
- an opportunity to actively participate in policy development processes which could include a contribution at a senior level to relevant professional bodies at national and international level

8. Application Process

8.1 Application processes will be implemented within each Faculty / Institute / Academic Service. Applications should include clear justification for the financial support being requested and should normally provide the Faculty / Institute / Academic Service with not less than 6 months' notice of the proposed sabbatical's commencement. Exceptional instances of short notice funding will be considered on a case by case basis.

8.2 All applications must be made using the designated form and should include a statement from the Head of Department or equivalent, commenting on the merits of the application together with the impact on work allocation for the Department.

8.3 Consideration by the Faculty / Institute / Academic Service will be based on the merits of the proposal submitted with regard to the following criteria:

- clearly stated objectives for the sabbatical that support and deliver on the University and Faculty/Institute/Department/Academic Service or equivalent objectives
- evidence that the sabbatical will support the professional development of the individual

- measurable outcomes and impact, directly related to stated objectives
 - a clear plan for the proposed use of time and other resources, evidencing appropriate return on investment, e.g., the length of the time requested and the relationship to the quantity and quality of planned outputs / impact
 - a clear plan to ensure the effective handover and covering of teaching commitments for the duration of the sabbatical
- 8.4 In order to take full advantage of the development opportunities offered by the sabbatical, academic employees are required to discuss their intentions with their Head of Department, prior to committing themselves to any plan.
- 8.5 The Faculty / Institute / Academic Service will review the applications submitted and may also consult with other individuals for specialist input as appropriate. Feedback on the outcome of the process will be provided by the Associate Dean or Head of Department / Service
- 8.6 Once the Faculty / Institute / Academic Service have approved for consideration, the final case will be submitted to the relevant University Committee (University Research Committee – Research and Enterprise, Academic Development Committee – Teaching and Learning), for review, decision making and conferment. Assessment will be made relative to the criteria in 8.3 and the University Research Strategy.
The relevant University Committee will confirm the outcome of this process to the Faculty / Institute / Academic Service, with any accompanying feedback provided by the Faculty / Institute / Academic Service to the individual as required. HR will be informed and record the sabbatical on the HR file.
- 8.7 When a University scheme is funding the sabbatical, the relevant University Committee will award the sabbatical funding at the time of conferment in accordance with the regulations of the individual scheme (e.g. REF).
- 8.8 Applications for sabbatical are not subject to appeal, but appropriate feedback should be given to unsuccessful candidates to support future applications.
- 8.9 The University reserves the right not to grant the leave for technical, organisational or operational reasons. For example, academic subject shortages or market pressures may make it difficult to recruit a replacement on a fixed-term and temporary basis.

9. Monitoring and Review

- 9.1 A successful sabbatical will be subject to monitoring at the halfway point in the sabbatical and the submission of an end of sabbatical report to the Head of Department and Faculty / Institute / Academic Service. The mid-point and end of sabbatical report will be shared with the relevant University Committee.
- 9.2 Difficulties or unforeseen circumstances which may occur prior to, or during, the sabbatical and which impact on the employee's ability to meet the objectives should be discussed immediately with the Head of Department, relevant Associate Dean or equivalent and the Faculty / Institute / Service will judge whether the sabbatical should continue.
- 9.3 During a sabbatical, normal expectations of performance remain and can be address by the line manager, with HR support, through the University's normal informal and formal processes and procedures.

10. Terms and Conditions

- 10.1 Terms and conditions of employment for employees on sabbatical remain unchanged.
- 10.2 All academic employees are required to have an annual appraisal and the employee should put arrangements in place to ensure it occurs.
- 10.3 The University strongly encourages employees to take appropriate levels of annual leave during the sabbatical to support their wellbeing, and employees on sabbatical are expected

to book annual leave on the HR system. Existing arrangements for sickness absence will continue to apply, and the sabbatical will not normally be extended.

10.4 During the sabbatical period, the employee is expected to maintain reasonable contact with their line manager and with the University. This would typically (but not exclusively) include:

- support the effective hand over of normal teaching duties and cover arrangements
- regularly checking work emails and a suitable out of office message
- keeping informed of news and events within their Faculty / Institute / Service and across the University
- respond in a reasonable timeframe to issues where their input is required

10.5 Employees should be available for meetings with their Head of Department or equivalent if required.

Relevant Policy Headings

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Appendix 1 – Sabbatical Flowchart

