

University of Westminster

Policy on Research Sabbaticals

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The University allocates research time to academic colleagues as part of their agreed duties and informed by annual objectives. The principal means by which time is made available to focus on research and research-related activity is via the Workload Allocation Model (WAM). Another means involves focusing time allocated to research into longer periods to allow for more effective concentration of energy and of resources and to lead to more substantial and impactful outcomes. It is this focused time which we refer to as a *sabbatical*.
- 1.2. A sabbatical period is not a period of leave or absence. Any colleague granted a sabbatical will normally continue to be employed on their existing contract during the sabbatical period. The primary difference is that the agreed objectives and duties for the (research) sabbatical period will be research-related rather than covering the normal range of academic responsibilities which include e.g. teaching and administration.
- 1.3. A sabbatical will not be granted for the purpose of taking regular academic or other employment elsewhere in order to gain financial advantage, although a partial exception to this is applicable to certain kinds of research grant or knowledge exchange, or where the University wishes to develop more formal partnerships with particular institutions.
- 1.4. The provision of sabbaticals helps to realise the University's *Strategy for Research Development and Support 2018-2023*. The Strategy states that 'we will enable and unlock the very best research from our diverse colleagues by explicitly supporting them with resources and policies designed to cover the entire academic lifecycle' and that 'we will ensure that a consistent approach to sabbaticals is taken across schools and colleges'.
- 1.5. The *Strategy* also stipulates that 'we will ensure that issues around gender, diversity, BME and other protected characteristics are specifically included and addressed, monitored and acted upon'. This is in support of our *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy* which further states: 'we acknowledge the special role of higher education in promoting equality of opportunity and furthering social inclusion and mobility, within and beyond our university. We recognise that ensuring equality of opportunity is essential for our culture, performance and success.'
- 1.6. The sabbatical policy is an important tool to help researchers from backgrounds less represented in our research community or whose research career has been held back by recognised personal circumstances, such as family and caring commitments, make up some of the deficit.
- 1.7. Access to focused periods for research will help the University of Westminster 'create a positive place and culture so all our people are supported and encouraged to realise their ambition' (*Being Westminster*).

2. Principles

- 2.1. Sabbaticals are available for colleagues to apply for in all Schools of the University.
- 2.2. Each School will make a minimum of one sabbatical opportunity available in any academic year.
- 2.3. The sabbatical period will typically run either from 1 January to 30 April or 1 September to 31 December.
- 2.4. Schools are free to provide additional opportunities for sabbaticals in any year, depending on their size and available resources, as part of a single University process for granting sabbaticals.
- 2.5. Available sabbaticals will be clearly and transparently advertised by Human Resources in April of each year, agreed in September and implemented in the following academic year.
- 2.6. The application and decision-making process will be consistent across all Schools and will be overseen at College level to ensure fairness and consistency.
- 2.7. Resourcing a sabbatical period involves the strategic planning of available research hours, and Schools should therefore seek to plan as far ahead as possible.
- 2.8. Colleagues with an identified need for focused research time are encouraged to apply for funding from external sources (e.g. Fellowships) in the first instance, as such schemes typically allow for a fuller range of support mechanisms. The expectation is that such funding will normally be used to offset the costs of providing staffing cover during the sabbatical period.
- 2.9. Colleagues granted the opportunity to focus on research in one semester and without external funding may reasonably expect greater emphasis on other academic duties in the following or previous semester.
- 2.10. Schools are additionally encouraged to explore a more flexible and nuanced approach to allocating research time, such as further shorter periods of time dedicated to research (e.g. a month), resources allowing. Any such provision should be included in the single University process for allocating focused research hours.
- 2.11. The Policy on Research Sabbaticals is part of the University's *Strategy for Research Development and Support*, as noted above. Concentrating time for non-research-related academic and non-academic activity within the University will make reference to other relevant strategies and policies.

3. Eligibility

- 3.1. All academic colleagues with WAM hours for research are entitled to apply for a period of concentrated research (a sabbatical). The sabbatical can only be taken up after a qualifying period of six semesters of continuous service post-probation at the University of Westminster. If a sabbatical is taken for a semester, the census period resumes in the semester following return from the sabbatical semester (unless the sabbatical semester has been externally funded).
- 3.2. Any colleague applying for a sabbatical should have had the need for this focused time identified previously as part of their PDR / annual research discussion.

- 3.3. Any colleague supported in applying for a sabbatical must demonstrate that they have achieved all the research objectives set during the qualifying period.
- 3.4. Part-time colleagues may apply for a sabbatical period in line with their contract fraction.

4. Criteria

- 4.1. An application for a sabbatical period must clearly articulate the intended outcomes and demonstrate why focused time is needed to achieve those outcomes. Applications must also set out a SMART scheme of work for the planned sabbatical period presenting suitably ambitious Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound outcomes.
- 4.2. Applications must evidence how the research strategies of the University and its research communities / centres will be realised by the planned activity and demonstrate how the work will further develop internal and external networks for research and knowledge exchange.
- 4.3. Where applicable, applications must explain why external funds cannot be sought to support the proposed sabbatical period. If external funding is available, colleagues should apply for that prior to application to the University and demonstrate that they have done so.
- 4.4. An application for a semester-long sabbatical must include clear and credible plans to bid for external funds to support the research after the sabbatical is over.
- 4.5. PhD supervision should be maintained during a research sabbatical, but the application must detail how other duties will be covered / reassigned in order to accommodate the proposed sabbatical.
- 4.6. Where cases for a sabbatical are deemed to be similarly compelling, priority will be given to applicants from backgrounds shown to be under-represented in research or whose research career has been negatively impacted over the previous three years by personal circumstances.
- 4.7. If there are no applications of sufficient quality in a particular School, no sabbatical will be awarded.
- 4.8. EDI-related data on applications and on approved sabbaticals will be collected at the decision-making stage and shared with the Research and EDI Committees.

5. Process

- 5.1. There is a single application form for all research sabbatical opportunities across the University. The form covers all criteria set out in section 4 above.
- 5.2. All opportunities will be advertised in a single communication in April each year for those sabbaticals which would commence in the academic year beginning 18 months later.
- 5.3. Application forms must be endorsed by the line manager and Head of School and submitted to the School Research Director by the end of August.
- 5.4. The School Research Director will convene a panel comprising three further senior researchers from the School, a Research Director or an experienced researcher from another School, and the College Research Director. The panel

should follow HR guidance to be diverse in its constituency and be able to demonstrate that it reflects a range of researcher backgrounds and perspectives.

- 5.5. Decisions will be made by the end of September. The College Research Director will inform all applicants of the outcomes and report the names and projects of successful applicants at the next College Research Committee. The School Research Director will provide clear and supportive feedback to unsuccessful applicants who may be offered research mentoring as part of the College mentoring programme or opportunities provided in the University Researcher Development Programme.
- 5.6. Applicants have the right to appeal against the decision not to approve a sabbatical. Grounds for appeal are limited to:
 - 5.6.1. New evidence which was not available at the decision point (e.g. confirmation of external funding, additional arrangements for cover of duties).
 - 5.6.2. Procedural failure or irregularities.¹

6. Reporting and Monitoring

- 6.1. All colleagues in receipt of a sabbatical should remain in contact with their line manager during the sabbatical period and report any material changes to their sabbatical plans promptly to the School research director.
- 6.2. All colleagues in receipt of a sabbatical must complete a report on the outcomes of the sabbatical period using the designated form.
- 6.3. The report must be submitted within one month of the end of the sabbatical period to the College Research Director and copied to the School Research Director and line manager.
- 6.4. Satisfactory outcomes against the agreed objectives will be reported for information to the College Research Committee.
- 6.5. An unsatisfactory report in the view of the College Research Director will be discussed with the line manager and will result in one or more of the following: the requirement to complete the objectives within an agreed time frame; non-eligibility for sabbaticals in the future; reduction in the number of hours allocated for research via the WAM; other sanctions to be agreed with the Head of School and following advice from HR.

7. Application Form...

Appendix 1

- Written notice of an appeal must be sent to the Director of Human Resources within five working days from the date of the outcome notification, clearly stating the grounds for the appeal.

¹ See Appendix 1 for more on the Appeals process.

- Every effort will be made to hear the appeal as soon as possible, and the University will normally aim to acknowledge the appeal and to confirm the date of the formal appeal hearing within ten working days of receipt of the appeal.
- The colleague will be given the right to be accompanied at the appeal hearing and an HR representative will be present. The appeal will be heard by another manager (nominated by HR) from outside the College in question and not involving the original panel as far as is reasonably practical.
- The appeal will ordinarily be conducted as a review of the decision to not award a sabbatical as opposed to re-assessing the case. That is, the appeal will involve a determination as to whether the decision was one that a reasonable person could have made on the basis of the evidence and arguments which were presented to the decision makers.
- In exceptional circumstances the appeal chair may determine that the award of a sabbatical be re-considered. Such a decision will be entirely at the discretion of the appeal chair.
- The decision will be notified in writing, within 14 days after the date of the appeal meeting. This decision is final.