



# **Sabbatical and Special Research Leave Policy**

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose

The University of Limerick has a clear policy of encouraging academic staff to avail of a period of sabbatical and special research leave for research or scholarship, which provides members of faculty a period of uninterrupted time to invest in their professional development. Sabbatical leave allows for a period of leave to be taken outside Ireland, while special research leave is taken within Ireland. In addition, faculty members may apply to take unpaid professional leave in line with the Career Break Procedure and Leave of Absence Procedure.

## 1.2 Scope

### 1.2.1 *To whom does the policy apply?*

This policy applies to members of faculty who are employed on the University of Limerick academic career framework and who meet the eligibility criteria.

### 1.2.2 *In what situations does the policy apply / Eligibility?*

#### **Sabbatical:**

A member of faculty will be eligible to apply for one semester of **sabbatical leave** after three years of qualifying service or one academic year of sabbatical leave after six years of qualifying service. The time spent on leave does not count as qualifying service for subsequent leave. In exceptional circumstances, applications that do not meet the above timelines will be considered on individual merit and will be subject to approval by the relevant Executive Dean and Provost.

#### **Special Research Leave:**

Faculty are eligible to apply for their first **Special Research Leave (SRL)** at any stage of their career. Faculty will be eligible to apply for a subsequent SRL after 8 years of qualifying service from the time of their return to UL following the previous SRL. SRL and sabbatical leave cannot be taken back-to-back. In exceptional circumstances, applications that do not meet the above timelines will be considered on individual merit and will be subject to approval by the relevant Dean and Provost.

### 1.2.3 *Who is responsible for ensuring that the policy (and any associated procedure) is implemented and monitored?*

The relevant Faculty Sabbatical/Special Research Leave Board will have responsibility to ensure the purpose of the sabbatical/special research leave is acceptable and that the application meets the requirements of this policy as well as monitoring the reported outcomes of each sabbatical or special research leave in relation to this policy. The HR Director will ensure this policy is implemented as approved.

## **1.3 Definitions**

### **1.3.1 *Sabbatical***

Sabbatical Leave provides the faculty member relief from all teaching, supervision / examining duties and administration, to enable the faculty member to engage in research on a full-time basis for an agreed duration of sabbatical. Sabbatical leave allows for a period of leave to be taken outside of Ireland for one semester or one full academic year. UL encourages faculty to take sabbatical leave abroad as it provides opportunities to work within different situations and systems, establish international relationships and networks and collaborate with international colleagues on research projects during the sabbatical and into the future. The benefits of sabbatical leave abroad both to the individual and to UL have proved to be invaluable. Sabbatical proposals generally emphasise enhancement of research skills and knowledge. However, a sabbatical may also be taken by staff employed on the academic career framework to enhance the quality of teaching and promote innovation by investing in pedagogical or curricular knowledge when these are judged to be mutually beneficial to the faculty member and their department.

### **1.3.2 *Special Research Leave (SRL)***

Special research leave provides the faculty member relief from all teaching, supervision/examining duties and administration, to enable the faculty member to engage in research on a full-time basis for an agreed period. UL encourages sabbatical leave to be taken abroad. However, in cases where faculty apply for sabbatical but cannot take the sabbatical abroad for personal reasons, the University will consider granting special research leave (SRL) within Ireland to the faculty member. SRL releases a faculty member from regular duties for a period of one semester so that the faculty member may concentrate on a scholarly endeavour or invest in a relatively brief professional development opportunity. An SRL may be completed on or away from campus.

## **2 Context**

### **2.1 Legal and Regulatory Context**

#### **2.1.1 *Relevant legislation***

Sabbatical leave/special research leave is not provided for in legislation.

### **2.2 Other Context**

**2.2.1** The University of Limerick's mission is to be internationally renowned as a distinctive university, which shapes the future through educating and empowering people to meet the challenges of tomorrow. The pursuit of excellence in teaching, learning and research is core to the University of Limerick mission. From the outset, the implementation of this mission has been conditioned by the commitment to ensure that activities are relevant to Ireland's economic, social and cultural development. Research is an integral part of the mission. Individual researchers in all faculties extend the frontiers of knowledge in a broad diversity of academic disciplines, while dedicated research institutes develop critical masses of research expertise in focused areas.

## **3 Related Procedures for Sabbatical and Special Research Leave**

### **3.1 Consideration of Sabbatical/SRL Proposal prior to Formal Application**

Prior to the completion of the sabbatical / SRL application form by the faculty member, verbal approval to apply must be sought by the individual from their Head of Department/School.

In considering the viability of the proposal, the Head of Department/School must be confident that the conditions of leave as outlined in section 4.2 (SL) and 5.3 (SRL) of this policy can be met. In addition to those conditions, the applicant's research and publication record and teaching and administrative record, particularly over the previous three years, will be considered. Evidence of the applicant's ability to deliver as reflected in the direction of their research record and/or conference presentations will need to be provided by the applicant to the Head of Department at this stage of the process.

### **3.2 Faculty Sabbatical/Special Research Leave Committee**

In order to implement this policy, each Faculty will establish a committee to consider all Sabbatical and SRL applications from staff members and to monitor the reported outcomes of each person's sabbatical or SRL in relation to this policy.

Membership of the Faculty Sabbatical/SRL committee will include:

- Chair Dean or Deans Nominee
- 2 members of Faculty at Professor or Associate Professor level with strong research and / or teaching profiles
- 1 external Faculty member e.g. ADR / ADAA other Faculty

The committee will meet twice a year. One meeting will take place in early February to consider and make recommendations on applications received. Another meeting will take place in early December to consider, evaluate and report on, submitted reports arising from completion of leave. A report will be submitted by the committee to Executive Committee annually following the December meeting noting the outcomes of sabbatical/special research leave for each Faculty for the year.

### **3.3 Application Form / Approvals Process**

Following agreement in principle between the faculty member and the Head of Department/School relating to the broad arrangements of the leave, the sabbatical / SRL application form must be completed by the faculty member and submitted electronically, along with their CV, to the Faculty Sabbatical Leave Committee via the Faculty Manager by January 31st for leave due to start in the forthcoming academic year. Previous sabbatical or SRL reports should be appended to the application if prior sabbatical/SRL has been undertaken.

In order for the application to receive a favourable recommendation, the Committee must have evidence that the conditions of the leave will be met. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the completed application form includes sufficient information for the committee to make this judgement. Applicants are advised to include

clearly described outcomes or results, which can be used to document the attainment of objectives.

#### **Process of approving sabbatical or special research leave**

- a. Members of the committee will consider applications independently and then decisions will be reached at a committee meeting. After evaluating an application against the conditions laid out by the University SL and SRL policy, the committee will collectively assign one of the following three ratings to the application: "highly recommended," "recommended," or "not recommended."
- b. Recommendations will be passed to the Dean of the Faculty. The Dean will make final decision in consultation with relevant Heads of Department/School. HR must receive approval of applications by 15th March for leave due to start in the forthcoming academic year.
- c. All applicants will be informed of the Faculty decisions in writing.

Applicants should contact the Finance Department to agree financial arrangements for the period of the Sabbatical leave. The overall sabbatical budget will be approved by Finance and the Head of Department/School. Financial arrangements must be agreed in advance between the applicant, Head of Department, Dean and Finance Division., before the Finance Division signatory approves the application.

#### **3.4 Sabbatical Leave / SRL Report and Evaluating Outcomes**

Within 30 days of returning from leave, the faculty member is required to submit a written sabbatical /SRL report to the Head of Department / School and Dean of Faculty, detailing how the objectives in the application have been met. In the report the faculty member should also comment on any difficulties or opportunities encountered, indicate outcomes such as publications and grant applications, together with any new research possibilities; provide a development plan that will show how the work completed can be built upon. This sabbatical / SRL report should be submitted to the Faculty Office, who will ensure copies are provided to the Head of Department / School, the Dean and the Faculty Sabbatical & SRL Committee. In all situations, no further application for sabbatical/special research leave will be considered positively unless the sabbatical/ SR leave report is submitted.

The Sabbatical Leave report should also include a table of travel undertaken during the sabbatical leave in the format set out in the document Sabbatical Leave Illustrative Examples. A copy of this table should be sent to Finance by the faculty member upon return from sabbatical for closeout of the sabbatical budget.

The Faculty Sabbatical and SRL Committee will convene to evaluate all submitted reports in relation to the leave objectives. The committee members will evaluate each report independently and an aggregate of these evaluations will be agreed at the committee meeting. Reports will be evaluated as "Good," "Satisfactory" or "Not satisfactory. That evaluation will be provided to the staff member in writing and a copy kept on the staff member's HR file.

In all situations in which reports are evaluated as "Not satisfactory," no further application for professional development leave may be made until a demonstrable improvement in research and/or teaching output has been achieved. The committee may also request a more detailed report in these circumstances.

## 4 Additional Related Procedures for Sabbatical Leave

### 4.1 Duration

The duration of leave shall normally not exceed one academic year, irrespective of the length of continuous service of the applicant since their appointment or since the termination of their most recent period of sabbatical leave.

### 4.2 Conditions of Sabbatical Leave

In addition to the eligibility criteria, the following conditions shall apply to sabbatical leave:

1. The purpose of the sabbatical must be acceptable to the Head of Department and Dean of Faculty.
2. The benefits of the sabbatical to the faculty member, the department, the Faculty and the University must be evident.
3. The timing of the sabbatical must be acceptable to the Head of Department and Dean of Faculty.
4. The effect of the sabbatical on the department's teaching, research and administrative responsibilities must not be detrimental.
5. Arrangements for the supervision of student dissertations, etc. must be put in place by the applicant and agreed by the HOD.
6. Appropriate arrangements to maintain the adequacy of supervision of Postgraduate Research (PGR) students (PhD & Masters) to facilitate the ongoing progression of their research must be arranged to ensure that they are supervised in line with Section 5.5.8 & 5.5.9 of the Handbook of Academic Regulations. This may include; remote supervision, appointing a joint supervisor or the responsibility being assumed by the existing joint supervisor during the period of leave.
7. Where the member of Faculty has availed of special research leave under the HOD Succession & Appointment Procedures during the period of qualifying service, the Faculty Sabbatical/Special Research Leave Committee may consider same when making recommendations to the Dean for candidates for approval.
8. Financial arrangements must be agreed in advance between the applicant, Head of Department, Dean and Finance Division.
9. Upon conclusion of the period of sabbatical leave, the member of faculty must return to UL, i.e. normally, the faculty member cannot retire or leave UL immediately following the period of leave. Unless otherwise agreed between UL and the faculty member, the faculty member will return to the same position and the same terms and conditions that applied prior to going on leave.
10. Upon return to work from leave, the faculty member must provide a written report to the Head of Department and Dean of Faculty and must present a feedback session to their department colleagues. In the event that a member of faculty applies for a second sabbatical leave, the extent to which the objectives of the first sabbatical were achieved will be assessed by the Head of Department and Dean of Faculty when considering the application for the second sabbatical.

### 4.3 Compensation

Compensation for each applicant for sabbatical leave will be examined on its own financial merits. The level of compensation during the leave will depend on the purpose for which the leave is granted and the form the absence takes.

There shall be no additional financial cost to the University through the operation of a sabbatical leave policy. In order to achieve this cost neutral position for the University, the total budget available under this Scheme for any individual academic staff member will be an amount equivalent to their gross salary for the period of the leave in question, less any replacement costs associated (inclusive of employers PRSI) with the leave.

Staff members availing of this scheme must contribute to the pension scheme an amount equal to the difference between normal employee contribution (based on full salary) and the amount actually contributed by way of deduction from reduced "sabbatical salary". For the avoidance of doubt, the reduced "sabbatical salary" for the purposes of pension contributions will be equivalent to 1/3 (33%) of the staff members full salary.

A subsistence allowance for travel, based on the Department of Finance approved foreign subsistence allowances (as amended from time to time) may be paid subject to confirmation of travel and the availability of a budget surplus after replacement costs (inclusive of Employer PRSI) have been allocated, along with the staff members "sabbatical salary". Subsistence allowance payments will be reduced by any amount received by the staff member from any source representing a grant towards the cost of such subsistence or the value of accommodation provided by a host University. In addition, vouched cost of travel for the staff member at the start and end of the sabbatical may be claimed tax-free and, in the case of their family, vouched cost of travel for one round trip abroad can be claimed but would be taxable as benefit in kind. These payments where claimed may not exceed the total budget available (inclusive of Employer PRSI where applicable).

Subsistence and expense allowances paid during the period of sabbatical are subject to final calculation and audit by finance, evidence of travel and duration of stay will be required. The Sabbatical Leave Report should include full details of all travel undertaken. Any overpayment of subsistence allowance must be refunded to the University by the claimant. Illustrative examples of sabbatical are available in the Sabbatical Leave Illustrative Examples document.

## **5 Related Procedures for Special Research Leave (SRL)**

### **5.1 Special Research Leave (SRL)**

For reasons outlined previously, UL encourages sabbatical leave to be taken abroad. However, in cases where faculty apply for professional development leave but cannot take the sabbatical abroad for personal reasons, the University will consider granting special research leave (SRL) within Ireland to the faculty member. SRL releases a faculty member from regular duties for a period of one semester so that the faculty member may concentrate on a scholarly endeavour or invest in a relatively brief professional development opportunity. An SRL may be completed on or away from campus.

### **5.2 Duration of Special Research Leave**

SRL shall be granted for one semester.

### **5.3 Conditions of Special Research Leave**

1. The purpose of the SRL must be acceptable to the Head of Department and Dean of Faculty.
2. The benefits of the SRL to the faculty member, the department, the Faculty and the University must be evident.
3. The financial cost of the SRL must be affordable to the department and/or Faculty.
4. Financial arrangements must be agreed in advance between the applicant, Head of Department and Dean of Faculty.
5. The timing of the SRL must be acceptable to the Head of Department and Dean of Faculty.
6. The effect of the SRL on the department's teaching, research and administrative responsibilities must not be detrimental.
7. Arrangements for the supervision of student dissertations, etc. must be put in place by the applicant and agreed with the HOD.
8. Appropriate arrangements to maintain the adequacy of supervision of Postgraduate Research (PGR) students (PhD & Masters) to facilitate the ongoing progression of their research must be arranged to ensure that they are supervised in line with Section 5.5.8 & 5.5.9 of the Handbook of Academic Regulations. This may include; remote supervision, appointing a joint supervisor or the responsibility being assumed by the existing joint supervisor during the period of leave.
9. Where the member of Faculty has availed of special research leave under the HOD Succession & Appointment Procedures during the period of qualifying service, the Faculty Sabbatical/Special Research Leave Committee may consider same when making recommendations to the Dean for candidates for approval.
10. Upon conclusion of the period of SRL, the member of faculty must return to UL, i.e. normally, the faculty member cannot retire or leave UL immediately following the period of leave.
11. Upon return to work from leave, the faculty member must provide a written report to the Head of Department and Dean of Faculty and must present a feedback session to their department colleagues. In the event that a member of faculty applies for a sabbatical leave or a second SRL, the extent to which the objectives of the first SRL were achieved will be assessed by the Head of Department and Dean of Faculty when considering the application for the sabbatical or subsequent SRL.

### **5.4 Financial Implications of Special Research leave**

Approval will depend on the ability of the department and/or Faculty to cover the teaching duties of the applicant during their absence. The number of SRLs per department that can be approved in any one year will need to be decided upon by the Head of Department with respect to the existing financial budget of the department.

## **6 Related Documents**

Career Break and Leave of Absence Scheme

Sabbatical / Special Research Leave Application Form (*available on HR website*)

Sabbatical Leave Illustrative Examples (*available on Finance website*)

HOD Succession & Appointment Procedures

## 7 Document Control

<b>Document Version</b>	Version 1
<b>Document Owner</b>	Human Resources
<b>Approved by</b>	Executive Committee
<b>Date</b>	18 May 2022
<b>Approved by</b>	FHRAMC
<b>Date</b>	07 November 2022
<b>Approved by</b>	Governing Authority
<b>Date</b>	17 November 2022
<b>Effective Date:</b>	17 November 2022
<b>Scheduled Review Date:</b>	November 2027