

Institutional Policy on Research Leave

1. Purpose

1. This document outlines general principles that should guide policy and practice around research leave, and recognises the value of flexibility across Departments/Schools. There is no expectation that a single standardised approach needs to be followed, but that these principles will allow Heads of Departments/Schools to use research leave in the way that works best for them in delivering their research aspirations and strategic priorities.
2. It is recognised that research leave is part of a complex web of workload allocation, research culture, and a method for meeting the strategic needs of the Department/School, and so should be seen in the broader context of these interacting parts, rather than any desire to impose a single model of research leave across the University. This variability reflects variations in disciplinary research cultures and the different ways that Departments/Schools organise teaching.
3. The flexibility in the processes for research leave allows Departments/Schools to use research leave in the most effective way for achieving their research aspirations and priorities. There is no expectation that the production of an Institutional Policy on Research Leave requires any large-scale, university-wide changes, or the introduction of additional bureaucracy, or loss of departmental autonomy.
4. A goal of these principles is to ensure greater equity, transparency and parity around the University. Providing quality time for research is an important component of supporting the University's ambition to be a world-leading research-intensive University and facilitating staff to meet the University Research Performance Expectations.

2. Definitions

1. Research leave is a period when someone on an ART contract is relieved of teaching, undergraduate supervision, and administrative duties for a period.

3. Policy statement

1. All Departments/Schools should offer the opportunity for staff on ART contracts to take Research Leave.
2. Most Departments/Schools at the University aim to allocate about 40% of work time for research for ART staff, based on an established workload model. Research Leave is in addition to this, recognising that Research Leave provides opportunities to focus on more substantial or long-form outputs in addition to day-to-day regular research activity.
3. Research Leave may be used flexibly by Departments/Schools. For example, there may be a requirement to carry out some citizenship duties, or keep abreast of departmental activities e.g. by attending department meetings and awaydays while on leave. PGR supervision will normally remain with the academic during a period of Research Leave. The teaching timetable is constructed, and module availability is decided, well in advance of the academic year, and so it is common for Research Leave applications to be submitted and processed a year or more in advance of the Research Leave period, to allow Departments (and especially HoDs) to plan ahead.
4. The unit of leave is usually a semester. Some Departments award leave for half a semester, and some Departments award leave for up to two semesters (i.e. one academic year). In many Departments, staff are eligible to apply for one semester of research leave after 5-6 semesters. In some Departments/Schools, Research Leave is by exception; in others, research leave is the norm.
5. This policy is not contractual and is not intended to be incorporated into individual terms and conditions of employment. It may be subject to review, amendment or withdrawal

4. Strategic use of Research Leave

1. Research Leave should be awarded strategically, and the Department/School should satisfy itself that the outcomes of research leave are of benefit to the Department. Examples of activities that are appropriate during research leave include:
 - To reinvigorate research e.g. after a period of citizenship (e.g. HoD) or maternity/parental leave
 - The collection of significant amounts of new data or research materials
 - To write a significant or complex research grant
 - To build new research or industry networks
 - To gain new research skills
 - To write research outputs that are ambitious or time-consuming
 - To work on impact and knowledge exchange from a research project

5. Applying for Research Leave

1. Departments/Schools should have a transparent process by which expectations of Research Leave are outlined, and [an application process should be followed, outlining clear policies and including a form for applications and reports \(examples are here\) should be followed](#), including feedback when the application is unsuccessful, or amendments are required before leave is awarded. [Heads of Departments/Schools and the relevant senior leadership team\(s\) should be involved in the application and approval of Research Leave \(see 6.3.\)](#)
2. [Research Leave can also be awarded on the basis of research planning with an individual](#) (e.g. when HoDs come to the end of their terms). Applications should include a plan for the Research Leave period, including for example, outputs, impact-related activities, public engagement, visits, grant applications, data collection, archival work, etc. A statement of likely outcomes or deliverables from the period should be required, as well as a statement of the relevance of the proposed work to the Department/School research strategy.
3. Departments/Schools should be flexible in the length of Research Leave. For example, it may be appropriate to award a reduction of workload to make time for research activities, rather than complete relief from all other duties; or to temporarily suspend the research-leave scheme for the whole Department/School to cover other eventualities.
4. The impacts of any suspension of Research Leave would need to be risk-assessed in terms of REF ambitions and Departmental research aims. Many Departments grant longer periods of research leave in acknowledgement of periods of particularly demanding service, such as HoD. Some departments also allow people to apply for additional leave after parental and/or sick leave, as part of their EDI strategy. In these cases, additional periods of leave are used to enable people to reset their research activity.
5. Flexibility in Departmental/School Research Leave policies and practices is necessary because of the demands of delivering the curriculum and other workload issues. It is recognised that HoDs may need to reduce the frequency of leave (e.g. making leave less frequent by increasing the length of time before staff are normally eligible for leave) and/or agree on a limit on the number of research leaves that will be granted each year in the Department. Similarly, it may be necessary to allocate Research Leave earlier than might be normal in order to meet a need for e.g. completion of an important output or to facilitate research impact. It is up to Departments to decide how competitive or selective they wish to make the process, depending on how many staff on Research Leave the Department/School can accommodate in any given year.
6. [Where relevant, Individuals applying for Research Leave are encouraged to discuss their application with their mentor and, if the leave is awarded, maintain contact with their supervisor for the duration of the Research Leave.](#)

6. Awarding Research Leave

1. Decisions about Research Leave applications should be made by a group with appropriate responsibility for workload and research management and governance. This will normally be the Departmental/School Research Committee or the Department Management Team. The role of this group will be to enable scrutiny of applications by a wider group of colleagues. Applications will not be automatically accepted.
2. In exceptional cases, where the period of Research Leave is expected to be longer than one academic year, this should be approved by the Associate Dean for Research/Dean of the Faculty.
3. Due to the impact of research leave on others' workloads (e.g. covering teaching responsibilities, reallocating citizenship roles), the involvement of the Head of Department or their deputy is expected in discussions and approvals of research leave. Heads of Department and their management teams should be agile in making decisions, reducing/increasing numbers going on Research Leave where appropriate.
4. Departments might choose to be more specific in their criteria for applications, e.g. to meet particular departmental needs. Departments might take into consideration other factors in their decision-making, such as the time since the last research leave and significant citizenship roles undertaken.
5. [Individuals on Research Leave are expected to remain contactable by their Head of Department/School.](#)

7. Evaluating and Monitoring Research Leave

1. Departments/Schools should evaluate Research Leave after completion. This may take the form of a formal report to the awarding body to assess the effectiveness of the leave awarded against the criteria used for the initial decision. [This may include consideration of the activities and outputs outlined in the initial application; if a significant change of planned activities/outputs is necessary then the awarding body should be notified.](#)
2. Where research leave is deemed to have been ineffective, Departments should follow-up with proportionate actions designed to address the issue identified. For example, by facilitating increased mentoring, or a delay before the next period of research leave is granted.
3. [Where periods of sickness coincide with Research Leave or require a portion of Research Leave to be deferred, this should be raised with the Head of Department/School and the relevant HR contact, and arrangements made as necessary.](#)
4. Departments should ensure that they have a mechanism for evaluating the outcomes of research leave against their criteria for awarding it. The body that awards leave should be the body that evaluates its outcomes. The evaluation of research leave should take into account any issues of equality, diversity and inclusion.
5. Departments/Schools should regularly reflect on their Research Leave processes and ensure that their policies are inclusive, equitable, fair and transparent. This monitoring of the process should include collecting, reporting and regularly reviewing data on application numbers and success rates by e.g. gender. Departments have a responsibility to take into account all relevant EDI considerations. Periods of dependent's leave (maternity leave, adoption leave, etc.) should not prejudice the allocation of research leave.

6. Departments/Schools should reflect on their use of Research Leave as part of their Annual Research Review report to URC.

8. Monitoring and Review of the Policy

1. The use of research leave and the effectiveness of this policy will take place through the Annual Research Review process.

Document control

Approval body:	University Research Committee
Policy Owner:	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Responsible Service:	Research, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange
Policy Manager:	TBC
External regulatory and/or legal requirement addressed:	N/A
Equality Impact Assessment:	TBC
Approval date:	November 2025
Effective from:	December 2025
Date of next review:	June 2027 (in line with Annual Research Reviews).