

External Study Program Procedure

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Purpose

This procedure describes the application process, criteria, conditions, and reporting requirements relating to External Study Programs (formerly Study Leave) for University academic staff in continuing or fixed-term appointments.

Applicable governance instruments

Instrument	Section	Principles
People Policy	1 People recruitment, management and development	1.11
University of Tasmania Staff Agreement 2021-2025	Part H 57.2 Part N 108.1	
Higher Education Standards Framework 2021	Domain 3 Standard 3.2.3	

Procedure

1. Purpose of External Study Programs

An external study program provides academic staff with the opportunity to apply for up to six months away from their normal duties to undertake an approved study program, beyond the expectations of their

normal duties, which will demonstrably benefit both the individual and the University, and contribute to ongoing research, learning and teaching, strategic objectives, governance, and/or social mission.

A formal external study program also aids the University in meeting its requirements under the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*, to support fit for purpose professional development for academic staff to maintain their currency and competence.

Access to a program of external study is not an automatic entitlement but is based on the needs of the University, the nature of the proposed program and the capacity of the staff member to make effective use of the external study program period.

An external study program may be undertaken for a range of purposes and include the following types of activity:

- Research and/or research training (excluding undertaking work towards a Research Higher Degree, and for the sole purpose of attending a conference);
- Teaching and teaching development;
- Industry placement, or advanced practice;
- Community and/or professional participation; or
- Leadership and other service development.

An academic staff member may also be encouraged to undertake an external study program in order to further a strategic imperative of the University.

While on an external study program, the staff member is subject to all University rules, policies, procedures, guidelines, codes of conduct and relevant legislation and regulation, and any requirements under their contract of employment.

Additional information and access to forms to support this procedure are available on the External Study Program intranet page.

Colleges and Divisions will usually make an annual call for applications; however, in any year Colleges and Divisions may choose not to proceed with any external study programs in circumstances where resourcing or other constraints (e.g., on travel) limit the capacity for allocation.

2. Eligibility

- 2.1. Full-time and fractional academic staff members who hold ongoing or fixed-term appointments are eligible to apply for an external study program once they have:
 - a. Completed the equivalent of three years full-time service from their date of appointment until the proposed date of commencement of the study program; or
 - b. Completed the equivalent of five years full-time service from the date of return from a previous period of external study until the proposed date of commencement of a new period of external study.
 - c. Fractional academic staff members are eligible to apply for an external study program provided they are employed at least 50% of full-time. The study program will be taken by fractional staff based on the employment fraction worked in the 12 months prior to commencing the program unless prior approval has been given to vary the fraction.
- 2.2. Fixed-term academic staff must have appointments of sufficient duration to enable them to return to normal duties at the University of Tasmania for a period at least equivalent to the period of external study.
- 2.3. Staff on probation are not eligible to apply for an external study program until they have received formal notification of their ongoing appointment, noting the probation period counts towards

eligibility under clause 2.1a.

- 2.4. External study program eligibility does not accrue whilst a staff member is on leave without pay, where the absence is for a discrete period of greater than 20 working days.
- 2.5. Staff are not eligible to apply if they have not satisfactorily completed the requirements of any previous period of external study.
- 2.6. The *University of Tasmania Staff Agreement* outlines what prior service at other Australian universities may be recognised as qualifying service for external study program eligibility purposes.

3. Duration and timing

- 3.1. The period of external study will normally range from two to six months, noting exceptional circumstances at 3.4.
- 3.2. The period of external study may be taken over discontinuous periods of time (for example, in January, June and November), or for specific days in a week (for example, Thursday and Friday).
- 3.3. An external study program must be arranged to cause minimum disruption to the functioning of the School/ Institute, College, or Division. Where staff members are not required to teach in summer semester programs, the period of external study should normally include the months of December, January and/or February.
- 3.4. Exceptional circumstances that impact the length and/or timing of the external study program (such as the outstanding importance of the program or uniqueness of the experience, or invitation from an exceptional international partner) will be assessed at the discretion of the College Executive Dean/Head of Division.
- 3.5. The period of the External Study Program must include all minor periods of illness or injury that do not of themselves constitute a significant obstacle to the achievement of the program's objectives.
- 3.6. Where an illness or injury prevents the staff member from carrying out a significant part of the proposed program, the Executive Dean may be asked to approve an extension of time, or a credit of eligibility for the program, equivalent to the period of sick leave. Requests must include supporting medical evidence and approval is subject to the needs of the School.

4. Preparing and submitting an application

- 4.1. Colleges and Divisions will usually make an annual call for external study leave applications. Applications will normally be submitted by 31 March for study programs commencing the following calendar year or commencing in the December of the year of application.
- 4.2. Applicants should consult their direct supervisor in the first instance about their proposed program, measurable outcomes, alignment with School/Institute and College/Division strategic objectives and expected benefits to the applicant's academic performance.
- 4.3. In planning the application, applicants should bear in mind the criteria against which applications are assessed (see section 5).
- 4.4. Applicants must complete the application form accessible from the External Study Program intranet page and submit it for initial assessment by the Head of School/Institute/Divisional Section using the instructions on that page.

5. Criteria for assessment of applications

Applications for an external study program will be assessed against the following criteria:

- a. The extent to which the applicant demonstrates and models behaviours consistent with the University's values;
- b. A proven record of productivity or demonstrated potential by the staff member, as well as their capacity to fulfil the aims of the proposed external study program;
- c. Alignment of the outcomes of the proposed external study program with School/Institute/College/Division/University strategic objectives;
- d. Clear identification of the benefit to the staff member of the proposed external study program in the staff member's Individual Work Plan and performance conversations;
- e. Academic appropriateness of the proposed external study program to enhance the performance of the academic beyond normal academic activities and with measurable outcomes;
- f. Demonstration of the outcomes and benefits from any previous periods of external study; and
- g. Support of the Head of School/Institute/Divisional Section and assurance of School/Institute/Divisional section functioning during the staff member's absence.

6. Assessment of Applications

Colleges and Divisions are encouraged to take a strategic approach to external study program planning as a part of their People Plans, and this should be taken into account in the consideration of all applications.

Initial Head of School/Institute/Divisional Section Assessment

- 6.1. The Head of School/Institute/Divisional Section will complete their assessment of the application, considering the:
 - a. Applicant's record of behaviour consistent with the University's values;
 - b. Applicant's proven record of productivity, contribution and demonstrated potential as relevant to the aims of the proposed study program;
 - c. Alignment of the outcomes of the proposed study program with School/Institute and College/Division strategic objectives;
 - d. Clear identification of the benefit to the applicant of the proposed program in performance conversations and the applicant's Individual Work Plan;
 - e. Academic appropriateness of the proposed study program and its outcomes to enhance the performance of the applicant beyond normal academic activities;
 - f. Demonstrated outcomes and benefits from any previous periods of external study; and
 - g. Impact of leave accrued during the program on the management of leave balances.

Where the proposed program involves an overseas partner, the Head must consider whether a Foreign Matters Assessment is required and if so, contact the Legal Office to arrange one. A copy of the assessment must be included with the application.

- 6.2. Using the instructions on the External Study Program intranet page, the Head of School/Institute/Divisional Section will either:
 - a. Forward the application with their recommendation of support and assurance of School/Institute/Divisional Section functioning during the applicant's absence to the College External Study Program Committee or Head of Division; or

- b. Not support the application and return it to the applicant with clearly identified reasons.

College Committee or Head of Division Assessment

- 6.3. College applications will be assessed by a College External Study Program Committee (the Committee) chaired by the Executive Dean. The Committee should normally consist of all College Heads of School/Institute and all Associate Deans, as well as external representation from a senior academic from another College. The Committee’s gender balance should be considered when selecting the external representative.
- 6.4. Members of a College Committee will act fairly and without bias. Applicants and members of the Committee should bring to the attention of the Chair any instances where they believe that a conflict of interest, discrimination or bias may affect the assessment of applications, so the Chair may determine the appropriate action. Where there is a significant conflict of interest, including where a Committee member has an application before the Committee, the relevant member(s) of the Committee will absent themselves from the assessment of that application.
- 6.5. The Committee will normally meet in April/May for assessment of study programs commencing the following calendar year or commencing in the December of the year of application.
- 6.6. Applications will not be considered if any reports from a previous period of external study are outstanding or if a previous study program report is deemed to be unsatisfactory by the Committee.
- 6.7. The Committee will assess each application against the following considerations, using the instructions on the External Study Program intranet page:
 - a. The criteria for external study programs (see section 5);
 - b. The recommendation(s) of the Head of School/Institute/Divisional section;
 - c. The capacity of the School/Discipline or Institute/Centre/Divisional section to maintain functioning during the staff member’s absence;
 - d. The capacity of the College to provide any necessary financial support (see section 9);
 - e. The risks to the safety and wellbeing of the staff member while travelling to and/or undertaking the proposed external study program;
 - f. The outcome of a Foreign Matters Assessment (if applicable); and
 - g. The other applications under consideration, in order to evaluate the relative priority of each application against the criteria.
- 6.8. The Executive Dean approves applications for external study after consideration of the recommendations of the Committee and will record their approval using the instructions on the External Study Program intranet page.
- 6.9. Divisional applications will be assessed in the same way by the Head of the Division, using the timeframe and criteria as listed at 6.5-6.8.

7. Notification of outcome of application

- 7.1. The Secretary of the College Committees or office of the Head of Division will ensure applicants are informed in writing of the outcome of their application. All applicants will have access the Head of School/Institute/Divisional Section recommendation and the College External Study Program Committee recommendation. For unsuccessful applicants, feedback will be provided by the Committee Chair or Head of Division as to why the external study program was not approved.
- 7.2. Circumstances may dictate that approval of an external study program application be withdrawn or deferred. This may include, but is not limited to, changes to travel risk levels, government restrictions, changes to the hosting organisation’s ability to safely support the program, or

substantial changes to University operating conditions. The applicant will be informed in writing by the Executive Dean/Head of Division if this is the case, including the reason(s).

8. Review of outcome of application

- 8.1. Unsuccessful applicants may request that the Executive Dean's/Head of Division's decision be reconsidered on the basis of procedural error; that is, failure to comply with this procedure. Procedural error is the only ground for review.
- a. The unsuccessful applicant and the Executive Dean as Chair of the College Committee or Head of Division will confer before the applicant formally seeks a review.
 - b. If the Executive Dean or Head of Division agrees there has been a procedural error they will reconsider the decision, including determining if correcting the error would make a difference to the decision.
 - c. If there is no agreement that a procedural error is at question, the applicant will be notified in writing, and no further action will be taken by the Executive Dean or Head of Division.
 - d. If the applicant then elects to proceed with a formal request for review, written requests for review must be submitted to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic or designee within 14 days of the applicant being formally advised that the Executive Dean/Head of Division considers there has been no procedural error under c) above. The request must clearly specify the details of the alleged procedural error and provide any available evidence to support the allegation.
 - e. If the applicant is a member of the Academic Division, the Vice-Chancellor (or nominee) will consider the formal request for review instead of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic or designee, following point d).
 - f. The decision of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic or designee or Vice-Chancellor (or nominee) is final, and the applicant will be informed in writing.

9. Funding for an External Study Program

- 9.1. The Executive Dean or Head of Division determines in accordance with College or Division priorities if and to what level financial assistance will be provided to support a staff member's participation in an approved study program, noting that financial support may not be provided or be necessary.
- 9.2. Financial assistance to staff members, if provided, may be used to meet reasonable, necessary expenditure for travel and accommodation or living costs during an external study program, organised in accordance with the University's current *Travel Procedure*. Any financial assistance will not be paid as an allowance but held in an account or project for use by the staff member.
- 9.3. Financial assistance will not be provided for equipment items.
- 9.4. Staff members are responsible for any incidental expenses and the cost of meeting legal obligations associated with an external study program, such as the costs of obtaining a passport.
- 9.5. Any financial assistance is to be budgeted for by the College/Division and be based on the College/Division resources allocated for this purpose. While Colleges/Divisions may in any year have a nominal budget reserved for such purposes, they reserve the right to allocate some or no funds to applications in any single round.
- 9.6. Further information on external study programs and employment conditions, insurance, travel and workers' compensation is available on the University staff intranet.

10. Varying an approved External Study Program

- 10.1. Variation to an approved external study program can only be made prior to the commencement of the study program, or in an emergency situation if the study program has commenced, and with the written approval of the Executive Dean as Chair of the College External Study Program Committee or the Head of Division.
- a. Details of any variations to an approved external study program must be submitted to the Head of School/Institute/Divisional Section as soon as practicable using the instructions on the External Study Program intranet page. The Head will make a recommendation to the Executive Dean/Head of Division for consideration;
 - b. The Executive Dean/Head of Division will advise the staff member and Head of School/Institute/Divisional Section in writing of the outcome of a request to vary an external study program, including any revision to the amount of financial assistance if appropriate;
 - c. In the case of an emergency, details of a variation must be provided to the Head of School/Institute/Divisional Section and Executive Dean/Head of Division as soon as practicable; and
 - d. Failure to seek approval of variations to an approved external study program may affect future eligibility.

11. Returning from an External Study Program

- 11.1. A staff member must return to work at the completion of their external study program for a period that is not less than the period of their study program.
- a. Where the staff member decides that they do not wish to return, or that they will not be returning to normal duties for a period at least equivalent to the period of the study program, they will inform the Executive Dean/Head of Division in writing of their intention; and
 - b. In such cases, the staff member, at the discretion of the Executive Dean/Head of Division, may be required to repay to the University all or a portion of salary and any financial assistance provided.

12. Outcomes and reporting

- 12.1. The University expects that a staff member's participation in an external study program will result in the outcomes identified in the approved plan and also benefit the University.
- 12.2. The outcomes from a program of external study should also be considered in a staff member's subsequent performance and career development conversations.

Initial report within 60 days of return

- 12.3. Staff members are required to submit an initial External Study Program Report to the Head of School/Institute/Divisional Section within 60 calendar days of returning from the program using the instructions and forms on the External Study Program intranet page. The report will include details of expenditure against any allowed financial assistance, the impact of any variations to the approved program, assessment of the achievements against each of the planned objectives and the outcomes of the program and expected future outcomes.
- 12.4. The Head of School/Institute will complete their section in the report form and forward to the College External Study Program Committee for consideration at the next available meeting. The Head of School/Institute will comment on the extent to which the staff member fulfilled the objectives and achieved the outcomes of the program, the program's benefits to the staff member

and the University, evidence of financial accountability and overall assessment of the program's success.

- 12.5. Following evaluation by the Committee, the Executive Dean will endorse, or otherwise, an External Study Program Report. In evaluating a report, the Committee will note the following:
 - a. Whether the staff member fulfilled the objectives and measurable outcomes of the external study program, including:
 - i. Outcomes that have been achieved at the time of reporting; and
 - ii. Outcomes expected over the following 12 months;
 - b. The benefits to the academic and to the University, and alignment with strategy;
 - c. Any concerns regarding the completion of the study program; and
 - d. Evidence of financial accountability.
- 12.6. If the Committee decides the report is unsatisfactory, and there are no acceptable mitigating circumstances (e.g., unforeseeable changes to the program while in program, ill health), the Executive Dean may determine that further investment in an external study program is unlikely to stimulate genuine academic effort in the staff member. In this instance, the staff member will not be eligible to apply again for a program of external study.
- 12.7. The Secretary of the College Committees or office of the Head of Division will ensure applicants are informed in writing of the outcome of the evaluation. All applicants will have access the Head of School/Institute/Divisional Section evaluation and the Committee evaluation.
- 12.8. Heads of Division will consider reports from Divisional staff in the same way as outlined at 12.4-12.7.

Final report within 12 months of return

- 12.9. Staff members will be required to submit a subsequent External Study Program Report to the Head of School/Institute/Divisional Section 12 months after returning from the program using the instructions and forms on the External Study Program intranet page.
 - a. This report will focus on outcomes that have been realised in the time since the initial report; and
 - b. The process of reporting will follow 12.3 to 12.8 above.
- 12.10 If an External Study Program Report is not received within the time frames listed above, the staff member will be notified by the Head of School/Institute/Divisional Section that unless a report is received within a further 30 calendar days, and in the absence of any mitigating circumstances, the staff member shall be considered in breach of reporting requirements and will not be eligible to apply again for a program of external study.

Related procedures

Performance and Career Development Procedure

Travel Procedure

Versions

Version	Action	Approved by	Business Owner/s	Approval Date
Version 1	Approved	Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic	Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic	16 May 2022
Version 2	Approved	Pro Vice-Chancellor, Strategic Projects	Pro Vice-Chancellor, Strategic Projects	16 May 2023