

SOAS-FUNDED ACADEMIC LEAVE POLICY

1. Policy Statement

1.1 Research and education-focused leave play a vital role in building a culture of research intensiveness and learning and teaching excellence. Grant-funded research leave provides academics with funded time to devote themselves to research projects and programmes. The purpose of SOAS-funded research leave for Teaching and Research (T&R) academics is to enable them to focus intensively on their research, and to support the production of publications, grant proposals and knowledge exchange activity that generates impact. For those on the Academic Education-Focused career route (AER), it is to enable them to update their knowledge of innovative approaches to pedagogy and to deliver against the scholarship requirements appropriate to their role, such as publication, engagement with external education bodies, delivery of internal or externally funded teaching and learning projects etc. that benefit the School and make a contribution to the sector. SOAS is committed to ensuring that the opportunity to apply for School-funded academic leave is open to all who are eligible and that departments accommodate as many of those applications as is feasible.

2. Definition and Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all permanent academic staff in academic departments on both T&R and AER contracts.

3. Eligibility

3.1 All academic staff on permanent T&R and AER contracts are eligible to apply for one term of SOAS-funded academic leave after every three years of normal service.

3.2 For T&R staff, 'normal service' includes periods of time spent pursuing grant-funded research projects but excludes externally funded paid research leave where colleagues are explicitly bought out of teaching and administration to pursue writing projects.

4. Allocation of SOAS-funded Leave

4.1 Allocation of SOAS-funded leave for T&R should actively support SOAS' and departments' research, impact and knowledge exchange strategies and be focused on producing high quality publications, grant proposals, and/or external engagement and knowledge exchange that seeks to have a positive social, economic, cultural and/or environmental impact.

4.2 Allocation of SOAS-funded leave for AER should actively encourage scholarship activities such as pedagogic research, internal and externally funded education grants and projects, writing and training which will lead to enhancements in teaching, learning, assessment and pedagogy, engagement with external education bodies, with a demonstrable link to the improvement of the student experience within the School and make a contribution to education in the sector.

4.3 Individuals entitled to apply for SOAS-funded academic leave should submit an application using the online form. These forms will be reviewed by the relevant Head of Department who will make a recommendation to the Head of College. Applicants should outline a clear and achievable plan with a timeline and clear, detailed and specific outcomes. For leave applications for the 2023/24 academic year, all applicants on T&R contracts will be required to complete a Personal Research Plan and discussed this with their Departmental Research Convenor. For staff on AER contracts, they will also be required to present a personal plan for their period of leave which has been discussed with their

Departmental Learning & Teaching Convenor. On completion of the period of leave, the member of staff must submit a report to their Head of Department summarising the activities undertaken and the benefits that will accrue to themselves and the School.

4.4 Heads of Department will review applications and accommodate as many of the leave requests as possible providing there is no appreciable risk of negative impacts on student and staff experience.

4.5 Where there are more applications than can be reasonably accommodated, the following criteria should be used to assess applications: i) track record of successful outcomes from previous leaves and fulfilment of departmental and School citizenship responsibilities; ii) career development, where priority will be given to post-probation and early career researchers.

4.6 Allocation of leave should seek to balance equity of distribution of teaching and administrative work in a way that is fair, consistent and feasible, paying particular attention to equalities in terms of career stage and protected characteristics.

4.7 Departmental allocations should be submitted by Heads of Department to the relevant Head of College to ensure provisions made by departments are fair and feasible.

4.8 Any appeals will be considered by the Provost/Pro-Director of Teaching and Learning and the Pro-Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange.

5. Provisioning Academic Leave

5.1 SOAS-funded academic leave will be granted only after due consideration of department workloads including teaching needs and responsibilities, with the aim of minimising disruption to teaching programmes and administrative duties.

5.2 SOAS-funded academic leave should be accommodated by the department with no additional cost being incurred for short-term teaching cover. This will require the teaching, administrative, supervision and assessment duties of the person going on leave to be covered by colleagues within the existing workload in the department. It is expected that specialist teaching will be delivered within these arrangements, either through the timing of leave (i.e., in the term before or after the delivery of specialist modules) or through the form that leave takes (i.e., a proportional reduction in teaching and administrative duties over the course of a year, where it is not possible to reassign specialist teaching).

5.3 Departments will be expected to indicate the number of leaves the department can accommodate without placing unreasonable work burdens on other staff or damaging student learning experience and expectations.

5.4 Holders of School-level posts will be accorded School-funded leave in line with the Standing Orders and individual contractual arrangements. In general, this is as follows: Heads of Department, the Head of the Doctoral School, Associate Directors, College Conveners, the Director of Learning & Teaching and Pro-Directors are entitled to one year of paid research leave (pro rata) on completion of a full term of office

5.5 The maximum amount of academic leave that can be taken at one time is three terms, i.e., one year's leave.

5.6 A record of academic leaves will be compiled, and records of leave and outcomes will be held by the School.

6. Expectations whilst on leave:

6.1 Staff on SOAS-funded academic leave will be expected to continue to supervise PhD students during the period of their leave unless there are exceptional circumstances and arrangements are made with co-supervisors to switch principal supervision to them during the leave period.

6.2 Staff on SOAS-funded academic leave will also be expected to attend department away days and all-School meetings unless absent on fieldwork.

7. Exclusions

7.1 SOAS-funded academic leave will not normally be approved if the applicant intends to use the leave to teach at or do any other form of paid or unpaid work for another organisation.

8. Equalities Considerations

8.1 Staff are eligible to apply for an additional term of leave if they have taken a period of parental leave of between 6 and 12 months. This leave must be taken within three years of the end of the period of parental leave and can be taken consecutively to paid research leave. Parental leave is the only type of leave that does not stop the counter of terms of service, that is, during all other periods of paid or unpaid leave no further leave is accrued.

8.2 The Heads of Colleges will make an annual report with a breakdown of leave applications made and granted to the Equality and Diversity Committee, to monitor the distribution of leave from an equalities perspective.

Guidance for Leave Allocations

1. In the allocation of SOAS-funded academic leave and alongside operational considerations about how research leave can be managed within the department, the following criteria will be considered:

- a. Leave which is contractual (e.g., HODs, ADs, parental leave)
- b. The specific objectives and outputs proposed for the period of leave
- c. Cases where an application for academic leave for the previous year was refused (although this will not by itself be a criterion for agreeing leave)

2. Weight can also be given on the grounds of personal mitigating circumstances.

3. It is recognised that it will be difficult for everyone who is eligible for academic leave to be able to be allocated leave during the terms for which they are due. If staff are required to wait to take leave, their additional period of work will count towards their future leave (e.g. if they are due to take leave in Term 1, but are not authorised to take it until Term 1, the additional term worked would count toward future leave). Collegiality and flexibility will be important in the academic community as we work towards ensuring that those most in need of leave are accommodated.