

Professional Development Leave (PDL) for Academic Staff Policy

Staff who are seeking to travel overseas for PDL are required to review the [QUT Overseas Work Guidelines](#) prior to seeking authorisation to travel and complete the necessary declaration on the electronic travel form.

Section 1 - Policy Principles

(1) The Professional Development Leave (PDL) program provides support for academic staff to undertake a coherent program of activities directed towards:

- a. enhancing their knowledge, skills, professional experience and performance within their academic discipline; and
- b. assisting the University to meet its goals with respect to teaching, research, community and professional service.

(2) Through this program the University seeks to advance the professional and academic standing of staff and the University as a whole. The program supports staff who have demonstrated a record of achievement in their discipline, as well as providing for the development of staff in the early stages of their academic career.

(3) Professional Development Leave programs are normally carried out at a location other than the employee's home or QUT.

(4) Professional Development Leave programs of 20 working days or less (PDL-Short) are approved by the relevant authorising officer. For more information on PDL-Short, staff should consult the section on PDL-Short (Section 5). PDL-Short incorporates leave to attend conferences.

(5) Professional Development Leave programs of greater than 20 working days (PDL-Long) are approved by the relevant authorising officer. For more information on PDL-Long, staff should consult the section on PDL-Long policy (Section 4).

Section 2 - Professional Development Leave Committees

(6) Each Faculty/Division employing academic staff will have a committee designated to advise the Executive Dean of faculty/Head of Division on matters relating to Professional Development Leave.

Terms of Reference

(7) The Faculty/Division Professional Development Leave Committee will provide advice to the executive dean of faculty/head of division on the implementation of Professional Development Leave policy within the Faculty/Division. Specific duties for the Faculty/Division Professional Development Leave Committee are outlined below in Sections 3, 4 and 5.

(8) The Executive Dean of faculty/Head of Division will report as required to the Provost, based on advice from the Professional Development Leave Committee, on the nature of the Professional Development Leave programs undertaken within the faculty/division. The report will also cover funding levels for PDL-Long and PDL-Short, and the manner in which these funds were allocated, distributed and expended within the faculty/division.

Membership

(9) Professional Development Leave committees will include at least two elected academic staff representatives with full voting rights, and a secretary appointed by the Executive Dean of faculty/Head of Division. When establishing a Professional Development Leave committee, faculty/division staff should have regard to gender balance and other equity issues ([Council Procedure 1 - Committee Operations](#)).

Tenure and Frequency of Meeting

(10) Elected Professional Development Leave committee members will hold office for up to two years, with half the members standing down at the end of each year. Members are eligible for re-election.

(11) Professional Development Leave committees will meet at least bi-annually.

Section 3 - Professional Development Leave Funding

(12) QUT recognises that an appropriately funded professional development program is essential to meeting the University's mission, and that funds allocated to Professional Development Leave (PDL) represent an important investment in the skills and knowledge of the staff.

(13) Faculties and Divisions will allocate funds to support Professional Development Leave programs on an annual basis in an appropriate and transparent way. These funds will be split into a fund for PDL-Short and a fund for PDL-Long.

(14) Funds for PDL-Short will be distributed to Schools or equivalent units, and will be used to supplement School or equivalent budgets in funding PDL-Short programs.

(15) Funds for PDL-Long will be administered by the relevant Professional Development Leave committee.

Section 4 - PDL-Long

Eligibility

(16) The PDL-Long program provides support for ongoing and fixed term academic staff (including research-only academic staff) employed by QUT on a full-time or part-time (not sessional) basis.

(17) Staff applying for PDL-Long will normally have completed two years of continuous service at QUT, and have demonstrated a sustained record of productivity as recorded through the PPR-AS process ([Managing Unsatisfactory Performance Policy - Senior Staff](#)). In exceptional circumstances staff may apply to the authorising officer to be considered for PDL-Long prior to completing two years of continuous service.

(18) Eligibility for PDL-Long may be withdrawn if the applicant's employment status changes (for example, the applicant gives notice of resignation or retirement). The faculty/division Professional Development Leave Committee will determine the continuing eligibility of applicants.

Programs Supported

(19) PDL-Long provides a consolidated period of time in which academic staff can engage in one or more activities relevant to their academic work. As such, PDL-Long is not normally approved for activities that can be undertaken while continuing normal academic duties.

(20) PDL-Long may consist of, but will not be limited to:

- a. undertaking research in libraries, universities and research institutions;
- b. undertaking professional experience in the workplace;
- c. visiting industrial, professional or governmental agencies and establishments;
- d. teaching in an educational institution, or developing teaching or curriculum materials;
- e. exchanges and secondments to other universities or industrial, professional or governmental agencies and establishments. Note that exchanges and secondments involve procedures additional to those contained in this Policy. Staff should examine the procedures relating to secondments and exchanges available from Human Resources; and
- f. undertaking studies for the completion of a higher degree.

(21) The Faculty/Division Professional Development Leave Committee will determine whether or not the proposed program of activities meets the requirements of the Professional Development Leave policy.

Process for Considering Applications

(22) The process for considering PDL-Long applications will be determined by the Executive Dean of faculty/Head of Division on the recommendation of the relevant Professional Development Leave committee. The process will be communicated to staff within the faculty/division in a timely manner. The process should be consistent with the following elements:

- a. Academic staff will provide their head of school or equivalent with advance notice of their PDL-Long application, and discuss the proposed program with their Head of School or equivalent. This is expected to occur as part of the planning cycle of the PPR-AS process.
- b. Applications will be lodged by a due date set by the Professional Development Leave committee. Applications involving an absence greater than two months should reach the committee at least six months before the commencement of the proposed program. After submission, the committee may seek further information from the applicant if required.
- c. The Head of School or equivalent will provide a statement on the program framed against the criteria below. This statement should indicate whether the application is supported by the Head of School or equivalent. The statement should detail how the academic staff member's normal teaching and other duties will be covered during the period of absence.
- d. Final approval for a Professional Development Leave program will be granted by the authorising officer, after all relevant supporting documentation has been received. Such documentation may include letters of support from host institutions, finalisation of salary details from host organisations, etc.

Criteria for Assessing PDL-Long Applications

(23) The proposed duration and location of the program will be considered by the PDL committee in terms of the objectives of the program. In addition, PDL-Long applications will be assessed by the committee in relation to the following criteria:

- a. the extent to which the PDL-Long program expands staff members' knowledge, skills, experience and performance within their academic discipline;

- b. the extent to which the PDL-Long program delivers tangible outcomes related to faculty/division goals in one or more of learning and teaching, research, and leadership and engagement;
- c. the extent to which the activities are consistent with the overall objectives of the program;
- d. the feasibility of the objectives;
- e. the proposed dissemination strategies.

Support for PDL-Long

(24) Support for PDL-Long will be determined by the Professional Development Leave Committee based on the nature and merit of the program, and on available funds. Support may consist of:

- a. leave from normal academic duties at QUT for the duration of the program;
- b. the staff member's salary; and
- c. fair and reasonable cost of travel based on actual expenditure consistent with QUT's [Travel Policy](#).

(25) Where airfares are funded the applicant will receive a return airfare to the principal destination, consistent with requirements contained in QUT's [Travel Policy](#) and associated procedures contained in QUT's [Finance Manual](#) (QUT staff access only).

(26) Funding of the cost of travel is designed to assist with the additional costs associated with living and travelling away from one's normal place of residence.

(27) Where an applicant is attending a conference as part of their PDL-Long program the applicant may request funding to cover conference registration fees.

Outside Earnings

(28) Given the costs associated with working and living away from home, especially overseas, staff members are encouraged to seek funding over and above the support provided to them by QUT. This may include scholarships or grants, salaries or other forms of income from sources external to QUT.

(29) In some cases the activities conducted by a staff member on PDL-Long may provide a commercial or financial benefit to an external organisation. In these cases the staff member may wish to seek some funding for their program from the external organisation.

(30) In relation to salaries or income from external organisations employing the staff member, the following provisions apply:

- a. Staff members living away from their normal place of residence will retain net external income (i.e. external income less PDL related expenses) up to a maximum of 50% of their gross QUT salary for the period of the PDL-Long program. Where dependents accompany the staff member on PDL-Long this amount will be increased by 5% per dependent. When two QUT staff members with common dependents are going on PDL-Long, dependents can only be counted once. Net external income earned in excess of these amounts is to be paid to the relevant cost centre within QUT.
- b. For staff members living at their normal place of residence, their gross QUT salary is reduced by the total amount of their net external income, less an allowance for Professional Development Leave related expenses. Alternatively, the staff member may retain their full QUT salary, and the external income is to be transferred to the relevant cost centre within QUT, less an allowance for Professional Development Leave related expenses.
- c. Staff members may choose to forego their QUT salary for the period of their PDL-Long program. In this case, the staff member will retain all remuneration received from external sources.

(31) In the points above, Professional Development Leave related expenses refer to costs not normally incurred while employed at QUT, and are determined by the executive dean of faculty/head of division in each case on the recommendation of the relevant Professional Development Leave Committee.

Salary and Leave Accruals

(32) Subject to the above section on outside earnings, a staff member's normal salary and conditions of employment accrue during any period of paid PDL-Long. For absences of three months or more, normal recreation leave credits accrue, and should be taken in the course of the PDL-Long program. If this is not possible, staff members must seek approval from their Head of School or equivalent for the leave to be taken at a later date.

(33) Staff members may choose to forego their QUT salary for the period of their PDL-Long program. In this case the staff member will continue to accrue normal leave credits, including long service leave, recreation leave, sick leave, and service credits for salary progression during the period of leave.

(34) The university does not continue to pay superannuation payments during periods of PDL-Long without pay.

Service on Return

(35) The staff member is expected to continue in service at QUT after completing the PDL-Long leave. The period of service on return will be equivalent to the period of absence. If this undertaking is not fulfilled, the Executive Dean of faculty/Head of Division may recommend to the Provost that the staff member be required to refund some or all of the funding provided by QUT.

Report on PDL-Long

(36) Following completion of PDL-Long, staff are required to report to the relevant PDL-Long committee through their Head of School or equivalent on the outcomes of the program. The report is used to assess the extent to which the objectives of the program have been met, and will be referred to when considering subsequent applications for PDL-Long by the staff member.

(37) The report also will describe how the outcomes of the program have been or will be disseminated within the faculty/division. PDL-Long reports, once approved by the committee, will be accessible by other staff members within the faculty/division.

(38) Professional Development Leave report guidelines are available from the [Human Resources Department](#) website.

Variations to Approved Programs

(39) Staff members are expected to pursue the approved program. Except for certified illness or compassionate grounds, any substantial alterations to the duration, location, purpose or timing of the program must be approved by the authorising officer.

(40) Unauthorised variations to a PDL-Long, or failure to complete a PDL-Long, may result in the Provost on the recommendation of the authorising officer, in consultation with the Professional Development Leave committee, requiring the staff member to refund some or all of the support provided for the program.

Appeals

(41) A staff member may appeal a Professional Development Leave committee's recommendation to reject their program. Appeals can be made only on the grounds of process. Appeals must be lodged with the Vice-President (People) and Chief People Officer within two weeks of formal advice to the staff member that the application has been rejected. The appeal will be considered by a panel comprising:

- a. Provost/Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor;
- b. Two elected academic staff members from a faculty/division committee (other than that of the appellant) designated to assess PDL-Long applications.

(42) This panel will review the process followed by the Professional Development Leave committee in evaluating the appellant's PDL-Long application. Should the panel conclude that there has been no breach in process, the panel will advise the appellant accordingly. There will be no further right of appeal.

(43) Where the panel concludes that there has been a breach in process, all relevant documentation will be referred to the authorising officer and the relevant PDL-Long committee, and the application will be reconsidered.

Section 5 - PDL-Short

Eligibility

(44) The PDL-Short program applies to ongoing and fixed term academic staff, including research only academic staff, employed by QUT on a full time or part time (not sessional) basis.

Programs Supported

(45) PDL-Short leave may consist of, but will not be limited to:

- a. conferences;
- b. undertaking research in libraries, universities and research institutions;
- c. undertaking professional experience in the workplace;
- d. visiting industrial, professional or governmental agencies and establishments;
- e. establishing or renewing contacts with professional colleagues working in related fields; and
- f. teaching in an educational institution, or developing teaching or curriculum materials.

(46) The Head of School or equivalent will determine whether or not the proposed program of activities constituting a PDL-Short program are appropriate.

Process for Considering Applications

(47) The process for considering PDL-Short applications will be determined by the Head of School or equivalent in consultation with the staff of the school or equivalent. The process will be communicated to staff in a timely manner.

(48) Applications for PDL-Short will be submitted to the authorising officer. The authorising officer may seek advice on the application's merit from staff members within the school or equivalent. The authorising officer will then determine the extent to which the application is to be supported, including where the application involves overseas travel.

(49) Applicants should endeavour to time PDL-Short programs so as to disrupt their teaching duties as little as possible. Where possible, applications for PDL-Short should be discussed with the Head of School or equivalent as part of the planning cycle of the PPR-AS process.

Appeals

(50) Appeals can be made only on the grounds of process. Academic staff will have access to the dispute resolution procedures ([Complaints Framework for Staff Policy](#)) in making appeals with respect to PDL-Short decisions.

Reporting

(51) The Head of School or equivalent will report annually to the Executive Dean of faculty/Head of Division through the relevant faculty/division Professional Development Leave Committee on the manner in which PDL-Short funds were expended.

Status and Details

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