



SARAS - The Study and Research Assistance Scheme

Human Resources Policy

Effective Date: May 2009

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1 PURPOSE

To specify the levels and types of assistance available for Queensland Health employees who wish to undertake study or research activities that will enhance their knowledge, skills and abilities.

2 APPLICATION

This policy applies to:

- permanent full-time employees of Queensland Health employed under the *Health Services Act 1991* and the *Public Service Act 2008*
- permanent part-time employees on a pro rata basis (e.g. SARAS leave is only granted for normal working days/hours of a part-time employee, and at the appropriate ratio of part-time hours, i.e. three days per week would attract 3/5 amount of available leave and financial assistance)
- temporary employees who have served at least a continuous 12 month period of service
- senior executive service (SES), senior officers (SOs), district senior officers (DSOs) and health executive service (HES) officers unless otherwise specified
- employees on leave without pay for purposes other than study leave (e.g. maternity leave) provided prior approval has been obtained and course requirements are satisfied in accordance with the provisions of this policy
- employees transferring either permanently or temporarily within Queensland Health. The relevant delegated authorities are to negotiate any financial reimbursement arrangements (e.g. through sharing financial support).

This policy does not apply to:

- casual employees, trainees or apprentices
- temporary employees in their first 12 months of service.

When an employee transfers into or leaves Queensland Health, continuity of any SARAS benefits are to be negotiated by the relevant delegated authorities.

3 GUIDELINES

Guidelines may be developed to facilitate implementation of this policy. The guidelines must be consistent with this policy.

4 DELEGATION

The 'delegate' is as listed in the Queensland Health Human Resource Delegations Manual as amended from time to time.

5 REFERENCES

- *Public Service Act 2008*
- *Health Services Act 1991*
- Directive 7/08 – Leave without Salary Credited as Service
- Directive 12/99 – Study and Examination Leave
- Performance Appraisal and Development HR Policy G9

- Queensland Health Intellectual Property Policy
- Study and Research Assistance Scheme (SARAS) Guidelines

6 SUPERSEDES

- IRM 3.7-13 SARAS – The Study and Research Assistance Scheme

7 POLICY

This policy supplements Directive 12/99 - Study and Examination Leave (the directive). Accordingly, this policy is to be read together with the directive. Refer also Study and Research Assistance Scheme (SARAS) Guidelines.

7.1 Leave and financial assistance

As part of Queensland Health's commitment to encouraging all employees to participate in further education, there are two types of SARAS assistance offered. The two types of assistance are:

7.1.1 Leave assistance

Leave assistance is provided to assist employees in balancing work and study or research requirements.

The types of leave included for SARAS purposes are:

- **course attendance leave:** this paid leave entitlement enables the student to attend courses during work hours, when the course is not available outside work hours
- **examination leave:** this paid leave entitlement includes necessary travel time to attend examinations, when an examination falls during work hours
- **study leave:** this unpaid leave entitlement is available for the student to prepare for examinations, assignments and other course assessment requirements
- **residential or practical school leave:** this leave entitlement may be paid or unpaid, according to the category of assistance approved
- **leave for post-graduate research based programs:** employees enrolled in a research based post-graduate degree may take leave for activities, i.e. surveys, interviews and focus groups, that cannot be undertaken outside work hours.

7.1.2 Financial reimbursement

The purpose of financial reimbursement is to assist employees in the payment of tuition fees, higher education contribution scheme (HECS), Fee-HELP, HECS-Help and other directly related fees. Approval for financial assistance is at the discretion of the delegated authority. All funding for approved study and research assistance is to be borne by the relevant business unit.

Financial reimbursement is to be administered in a planned and consistent manner that ensures optimal use of business unit funding. The use of these funds is to comply with all applicable legislation and in a manner that can withstand public scrutiny.

SARAS financial reimbursement does not include:

- membership fees for professional associations
- textbooks, handbooks, periodicals, irrespective of the category of assistance
- reimbursement of late fees and other fines/penalties levied by an institution
- paid leave or financial assistance for an employee repeating a subject, unless the delegated authority considers that extenuating circumstances caused, or largely contributed to, failure to pass the subject. Such situations may include an extended illness, pregnancy or personal issue.

7.2 Categories of SARAS assistance

There are three categories of assistance that can be offered to employees studying approved courses. The relevant delegated authority approves the category of assistance to be provided to the employee. The categories are:

7.2.1 Essential

This is the highest level of assistance, and is used to assist in gaining mandatory qualifications for an employee's current job roles and/or is a requirement for continued employment.

(Approval under the essential category is rare, unless a case for exceptional circumstances can be identified. There are very few mandatory qualifications required for administrative and operational stream jobs, and employees in the professional and technical streams would normally require mandatory qualifications to be completed prior to appointment).

Examples of where approval for the essential category is applicable are as below:

- If the technical requirements of a job change, and the incumbent is required to upgrade qualifications to meet the new requirements.
- In the case of indigenous health workers required to undertake a Certificate III in Indigenous Primary Health Care under mandatory requirements for their position.

7.2.2 Highly desirable

This category is used where the study or research:

- is the most cost effective method of developing skills and knowledge of direct relevance to the employee's current and/or changing job role, and which will provide a direct and immediate advantage to the work unit
- is of specific assistance to the department in meeting its corporate objectives and outcomes
or
- provides skills which are assessed as being highly desirable in the work area and there is a general need for such skills.

7.2.3 Desirable

This category is applied when the focus is on improving general education levels for departmental benefit, or developing personal skills for general application and future job roles in public sector employment.

This category may also assist the individual to pursue a different career path either within the department or the public sector, or provides skills that may assist the employee to perform their work but there is already an abundance of the skills available (i.e. not critical to the work unit).

8 APPLYING THE POLICY

8.1 Application of SARAS categories

8.1.1 Leave allowance

All categories of leave are non-cumulative. Maximum amounts of leave have been determined, and approval for all leave types is subject to the discretion of the delegated authority.

Course attendance leave

Essential	No limit
Highly desirable	<p>Paid leave up to a maximum of eight hours per week (including travel time), provided attendance requirements are not available outside work time.</p> <p>Leave may be granted to employees on variable working hours (flex time) between the hours of 9:00am and 5:00pm to a maximum of eight hours per working week. A maximum of 1.5 hours leave only is allowed between 12 noon and 2:00pm.</p> <p>Employees are required to work standard hours in those weeks where the leave exceeds five hours per week.</p> <p>Employees not on variable working hours (e.g. those on standard hours, shift work etc) may take a maximum of eight hours per working week during their normal hours of duty, excluding the minimum period allowed for lunch (or equivalent).</p> <p>An employee on variable working hours can seek course attendance leave for the whole or part of course attendance requirements. In this way, the employee can avoid exceeding five hours leave per week and having to work standard hours.</p>

Desirable	<p>Paid leave up to a maximum of five hours per week (including travel time), provided attendance requirements are not available outside work time.</p> <p>Leave may be granted to employees on variable working hours (flex time) between the hours of 9:00am and 5:00pm to a maximum of five hours per working week. A maximum of 1.5 hours leave only is allowed between 12 noon and 2:00pm.</p> <p>Employees not on variable working hours (e.g. those on standard hours, shift work etc) may take a maximum of five hours per working week during their normal hours of duty, excluding the minimum period allowed for lunch (or equivalent).</p>
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Leave for post-graduate research based programs

Essential Highly desirable Desirable	<p>Paid leave conditions such as the number of work hours per category are equivalent to those for course attendance leave. If the staff member is enrolled in a research based post-graduate degree, leave may be taken for activities such as interviews, focus groups and surveys that cannot be undertaken outside work hours.</p>
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Examination leave

Essential Highly desirable Desirable	<p>Paid leave, including necessary travel time.</p> <p>Available for examinations held on work days between 9:00am and 5:00pm, or other approved standard hours of duty, provided the examination requirements cannot be satisfied outside these hours.</p> <p>This excludes the minimum period allowed for lunch (or equivalent).</p>
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Study leave

All study leave is to be without pay. Employees may use flex/accrued time (if applicable) or access annual/recreation leave or long service leave (full/part day or on half-pay) for study purposes.

Essential	No limit
Highly Desirable	Maximum of 15 days per annum
Desirable	Maximum of 10 days per annum

Residential or practical school leave

Essential	No limit
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Highly desirable	For compulsory attendance - up to a maximum of 20 days per year paid leave, with remainder to be without pay. Leave for non-compulsory residential schools subject to departmental convenience – up to 25 days per year (leave without pay or debited to recreation/long service leave).
Desirable	For compulsory attendance - up to a maximum of five days per year paid leave, with remainder to be without pay. Leave for non-compulsory residential schools subject to departmental convenience (leave without pay or debited to recreation/long service leave).

8.1.2 Financial assistance and approval

Essential	No limit on reimbursement of all course and associated costs (e.g. travel expenses, field trips, laboratory fees etc).
Highly desirable	Payment of course costs up to a maximum of \$2,000 per year, or \$500 per subject/course.
Desirable	Payment of course costs to a maximum of \$800 per year, or \$200 per subject/course.

Whenever possible, approval for SARAS is to be clearly linked to performance appraisal and development (PAD) through a learning and development plan. Performance Appraisal and Development HR Policy G9 provides information for performance management, and the identification of learning and development goals and strategies.

The following is to apply regarding the provision of SARAS:

- Granting of applications for SARAS leave and financial assistance is subject to organisational convenience and budget limitations. However, requests for leave and/or financial assistance are not to be unreasonably refused.
- Business unit budgets and resources are to be managed to allow all applications for SARAS assistance to be considered in a fair and equitable manner.
- Employees and managers have a shared responsibility to ensure minimal disruption to service delivery as a result of SARAS leave. When practicable, courses are to be undertaken at an institution as close as possible to where the employee works and in their own time.

Managers and employees are encouraged to contact their local human resources unit for more information on the procedures for application and administration of the SARAS scheme.

8.2 Intellectual property

In the course of study or research conducted by employees receiving SARAS, intellectual property (IP) may be created. Examples of IP in the form of copyright material created by the Queensland Health employee, is most likely to be either:

- publications, guidelines, procedures protocols, data, and presentations for use within QH to implement service delivery improvements

- or
- assignments and theses required as part of the assessment requirements for a formal course of study.

Employees receiving SARAS should adhere to the provisions in the Queensland Health Intellectual Property Policy.

8.3 Transition provisions

Employees who currently have approval under the provisions of prior departmental SARAS policies **are to retain that status for the period previously approved**. At the conclusion of the period previously approved, further approvals are to be considered in line with this policy.

8.4 Applying for SARAS

Within the boundaries set by this policy, the delegated authority has the discretion to determine the type and length of leave granted, and/or the level of financial assistance provided.

SARAS is approved on a per semester basis. The SARAS Application for Assistance form is to be completed at the beginning of the course/program, and a new application is required for each semester of study.

When there are changes to the program of study detailed in the original SARAS application for assistance (including subject and/or semester time changes) an amended application is required.

The employee's supervisor recommends or not recommends SARAS, specifying the category of assistance to be provided noting any leave requirements.

The delegated authority approves or not approves the application. A copy of the completed application is to be returned to the applicant for their reference and a copy sent to Queensland Health Shared Service Partner (QHSSP).

QHSSP are to retain the original application on the employee's personal file.

Notification for all leave (e.g. examination, study, course attendance) is to be provided in the appropriate manner (i.e. leave application) prior to leave being taken. This is to allow for suitable staffing arrangements to be made.

Applications are to be made at least one month prior to the commencement of the study.

Accrued recreation and long service leave credits do not need to be exhausted prior to taking SARAS leave, paid or unpaid.

For the purpose of this policy, standard hours are based on relevant legislation, Awards, Agreements etc. and are normally 9:00am to 5:00pm with $\frac{3}{4}$ hour lunch between 12 noon and 2:00pm.

8.4.1 Reimbursement of tuition fees/HECS etc.

Claims for payment are to be submitted within 12 months of successful completion of the subjects for which payment is being claimed.

Financial payment is conditional upon employees passing the subjects undertaken and/or meeting the requirements of their educational institution during the semester/year. For example, if an employee studies two subjects, and fails one, payment is to be made on a pro rata basis (i.e. 50%).

An official HECS/HELP statement of liability from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) is required for all requests for payment.

8.4.2 Employee groups who have professional development leave (PDL)/ professional development allowance (PDA) entitlements

The provisions in this policy are not to replace or remove access to SARAS for employees in occupational streams that have access to PDL and PDA entitlements as part of their Enterprise Agreement.

Employees are to be allowed to access more than one type of leave and/or financial assistance for each course/research study under either SARAS and PDA/PDL for a course or research or study.

It is expected that Enterprise Agreement provisions are to be used in the first instance for ongoing professional development and that SARAS provisions are to be used for specific job roles. Both forms of financial and leave assistance are to be clearly linked to the employee's PAD and learning and development plan.

8.4.3 Employees with full-time scholarship assistance

Employees are to require leave without pay during the scholarship period. Salary increments are recognised for any period where a staff scholarship, equal to part or full salary is granted.

8.4.4 SARAS leave without pay

Leave without pay can be taken as SARAS leave (without pay) and is recognised for the purposes of Long Service Leave in accordance with Directive 7/08 – Leave without Salary Credited as Service, on condition the course of study is successfully completed.

The first three months of any continuous period of SARAS leave are recognised for leave credited as service. Any continuous period not exceeding nine working days is recognised for sick leave credited as service. Salary increments are recognised for any continuous period not exceeding one month.

8.5 Appealing a SARAS decision

An employee may appeal a decision regarding SARAS leave or financial assistance in part or in full. The appeal is to be in writing and submitted as a complaint for resolution at the local level before escalation via formal grievance procedures.

8.6 Workers' compensation

Workers' compensation provisions continue to apply when an employee is attending courses, examinations or residential or practical schools on approved SARAS arrangements.

9 DEFINITIONS

Course of study	An accredited/formal course of study or research at a recognised educational institution, including single subjects which may not result in an accredited qualification.
Delegated authority	The ability to authorise leave and/or financial assistance is outlined in the Queensland Health HR delegations manual.
Fee-HELP	A loan available to eligible fee-paying students by the Australian Government to help pay part of their tuition fees. This replaced PELS for loans taken from 1 January 2005.
HECS	Higher education contribution scheme (see HECS-HELP).
HECS-HELP	An Australian Government loan available to eligible students enrolled in supported places to cover all or part of the student contribution amount. Replaced HECS for loans taken from 1 January 2005.
HELP	Higher education loan program.
PDA	Professional development allowance (for employees engaged under the <i>Health Services Act 1991</i>) as determined in relevant Awards and Agreements.
PDL	Professional development leave (for employees engaged under the <i>Health Services Act 1991</i>) as determined in relevant Awards and Agreements.
SARAS	A resource package designed to assist employees who are pursuing courses of study and research projects. This assistance comprises financial support and leave arrangements.
Student	A person undertaking research or studying under instruction at an educational institution, university or other place of higher education or technical training.

10 HISTORY

May 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amended section 7 to include reference to new SARAS Guidelines. Amended sections 7.1.1 and 8.1.1 to include leave for post-graduate research based programs.
December 2008	Amended section 8.4.4 to reflect SARAS leave instead of recreation leave.

August 2008	Amended to correctly state the financial assistance amounts for desirable category in section 8.1.2 as \$800 per year or \$200 per subject/course. These amounts are applicable from September 2007.
July 2008	Developed as a result of the HR policy consolidation project.