

Study and Research Assistance Scheme (SARAS)

Policy Number: G10 (QH-POL-223)

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Purpose: To specify the assistance available for employees who wish to undertake study or research activities to enhance their knowledge, skills and abilities.

Application: This policy applies to the following Queensland Health employees working for the Department of Health, non-prescribed Hospital and Health Services, and prescribed Hospital and Health Services:

- permanent full-time employees
- permanent part-time employees (on a pro rata basis)
- temporary employees who have served at least a continuous 12 month period of service
- senior executive service (SES) officers, senior officers (SOs), district senior officers (DSOs) and health executive service (HES) officers unless otherwise specified.

This policy does not apply to casual employees, trainees or apprentices.

Delegation: The 'delegate' is as listed in the Department of Health Human Resource (HR) Delegations Manual and the Hospital and Health Services Human Resource (HR) Delegations Manual – HRM Functions of the Director-General, as amended from time to time.

Legislative or other authority:

- *Public Service Act 2008*
- *Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011*
- Directive 7/08 – Leave without Salary Credited as Service
- Directive 9/13 – Special Leave

Related policy or documents:

- Performance Appraisal and Development HR Policy G9 (QH-POL-189)
- Queensland Health Intellectual Property Policy (QH-POL-009)
- Self Education – FBT Fact Sheet
- Study and Research Assistance Scheme (SARAS) Guidelines

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1 Leave and financial assistance

Queensland Health offers financial and leave assistance under the Study and Research Assistance Scheme (SARAS) to assist employees who are pursuing courses of study and research projects.

Three categories of assistance are available to employees studying approved courses - essential, highly desirable and desirable (as defined in the definitions section). The delegate is to determine and approve the categories of assistance to be provided to the employee.

The leave and financial assistance outlined in this policy is applicable to Permanent part-time employees on a pro rata basis at the appropriate ratio of part-time hours. For example three days per week would attract 3/5 amount of available leave and financial assistance.

1.1 Financial assistance

Financial reimbursement is to assist employees pay tuition fees, higher education contribution scheme (HECS-HELP), FEE-HELP and other directly related fees. Approval for financial assistance is at the discretion of the delegate and all funding for approved study and research assistance is to be borne by the relevant business unit.

The maximum financial assistance that can be provided is as follows:

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.

Financial payment is conditional upon employees passing the subject/s undertaken and/or meeting the requirements of their educational institution during the semester/year.

Irrespective of the category of assistance, SARAS financial reimbursement does not cover,

- membership fees for professional associations
- textbooks, handbooks, periodicals
- 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 delegate 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.

1.2 Leave assistance

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

Maximum amounts of leave have been determined in Table One and approval is subject to the discretion of the delegate. All categories of leave are non-accumulative.

SARAS leave is only granted for normal working days/hours of a part-time employee and at the appropriate ratio of part-time hours.

Table One: SARAS leave assistance

Type of leave	Essential	Highly Desirable	Desirable
Study Leave - preparation for examinations, assignments and other course assessment requirements.	Unpaid leave - no limit ^a .	Maximum of 15 days unpaid leave per year ^a .	Maximum of 10 days unpaid leave per year ^a .
Course Attendance Leave - attendance at courses <u>during work hours</u> (including necessary travel time), <u>provided attendance requirements are not available outside work hours.</u>	Paid leave - no limit.	Paid leave up to a maximum of eight hours per week [#] .	Paid leave up to a maximum of five hours per week [*] .
Post-graduate research based programs Leave - research activities i.e. surveys, interviews and focus groups (including necessary travel time) <u>that cannot be undertaken outside work hours.</u>	Paid leave - no limit.	Paid leave up to a maximum of eight hours per week [#] .	Paid leave up to a maximum of five hours per week [*] .
Examination Leave - examinations held <u>within work hours</u> (including necessary travel time).	Paid leave - no limit [^] .	Paid leave - no limit [^] .	Paid leave - no limit [^] .
Residential or Practical School Leave	Paid leave - no limit.	<u>Compulsory attendance</u> - up to a maximum of 20 days per year paid leave, with the remainder to be without pay. <u>Non-compulsory attendance</u> - up to 25 days per year leave without pay or debited to recreation/long service leave.	<u>Compulsory attendance</u> - up to a maximum of five days per year paid leave, with the remainder to be without pay. <u>Non-compulsory attendance</u> - leave without pay or debited to recreation/long service leave.

^a Employees may also 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 subject to the discretion of the delegate.

^{*} This excludes the minimum period allowed for lunch (or equivalent) e.g. a maximum of 1.5 hours leave between 12 noon and 2:00pm. The leave may be granted to employees on variable working hours (flex time) between the hours of 9:00am and 5:00pm. Employees not on variable working hours (e.g. those on standard hours, shift work, etc) may take the leave during their normal hours of duty.

[#] Employees are required to work standard hours in those weeks where the leave exceeds five hours per week. An employee on variable working hours can seek course attendance/post-graduate research leave for the whole or part of course attendance requirements/research activities. In this way, the employee can avoid exceeding five hours leave per week and having to work standard hours.

[^] 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. This excludes the minimum period allowed for lunch (or equivalent) e.g. a maximum of 1.5 hours leave between 12 noon and 2:00pm.

Definitions:

Essential	<p>This is the highest category of SARAS 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.</p> <p>Examples of when approval for the essential category is applicable are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the technical requirements of a job change, and the incumbent is required to upgrade qualifications to meet the new requirements • indigenous health workers are required to undertake a Certificate III in Indigenous Primary Health Care under mandatory requirements for their position.
Highly desirable	<p>This category of SARAS is used when the study or research is one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • specific assistance to the department in meeting its corporate objectives and outcomes • provides skills which are assessed as being highly desirable in the work area and there is a general need for such skills.
Desirable	<p>This category of SARAS is applied when the study or research is one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the focus is on improving general education levels for departmental benefit • developing personal skills for general application and future job roles in public sector employment • assisting an individual to pursue a different career path either within the department or the public sector • 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).
Standard hours	For the purpose of this policy, standard hours are based on relevant legislation, Awards, Agreements etc.
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.
FEE-HELP	FEE - Higher Education Loan Program - A loan available to eligible fee-paying students by the Australian Government to help pay part of their tuition fees.
HECS-HELP	Higher Education Contribution Scheme - Higher Education Loan Program - An Australian Government loan available to eligible students enrolled in supported places to cover all or part of the student contribution amount.

Student	A person undertaking research or studying under instruction at an educational institution, university or other place of higher education or technical training.
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History:

March 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy formatted and sections re-ordered as part of the HR Policy Simplification project. • Policy amended to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ moved SARAS assistance categories into definitions section ○ summarised SARAS leave assistance into Table One ○ removed duplication of intellectual property and tax implications information - refer to relevant QH policies. ○ removed duplication of leave without pay credited as service information – refer to Directive 7/08 - Leave without Salary Credited as Service ○ removed transition provisions ○ updated references and naming conventions.
April 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amended section 5 References to reflect Self Education – FBT Fact Sheet.
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.
February 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amended section 8.4.4 to reflect SARAS leave instead of recreation leave.
August 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed as a result of the HR policy consolidation project.
Previous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRM 3.7-13 SARAS – The Study and Research Assistance Scheme

Study and Research Assistance Scheme (SARAS) – Processes and provisions for specific employee groups

The following information is provided as the minimum mandatory standard practice, procedure or process to enable satisfactory compliance with this Queensland Health HR policy.

Local guidelines/procedures may be developed to facilitate implementation of this policy. Any local guidelines/procedures must be consistent with this policy and schedule and ensure employee entitlements continue to be met.

1 Application process

Step one: A SARAS Application for Assistance form is to be completed at least one month prior to the commencement of the course/program for each semester of study. When there are changes to the program of study detailed in the original SARAS application (including subject and/or semester time changes) an amended application is required.

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

Step three: The delegate approves/declines the application. Within the boundaries set by this policy, the delegate has the discretion to determine the type and length of leave granted, and/or the level of financial assistance provided. Granting of applications for SARAS leave and financial assistance is subject to organisational convenience and budget limitations.

Step four: A copy of the completed application is to be returned to the applicant for their reference and a copy sent to Payroll who are to retain the original application on the employee's personal file.

The following is to apply regarding the provision of SARAS:

- SARAS is approved on a per semester basis.
- 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.
- Accrued recreation and long service leave credits do not need to be exhausted prior to taking SARAS leave, paid or unpaid.
- 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.
- SARAS should be clearly linked to performance appraisal and development (PAD) through a learning and development plan. Refer to Performance Appraisal and Development HR Policy G9 for information on PAD.
- 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.

2 Financial reimbursement of tuition fees/HECS- HELP 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%).

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.

An official HECS/HELP statement of liability from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) is required for all requests for payment. A copy of the tax invoice for the course fees should also be supplied to assist in determining the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) nature of the reimbursement.

3 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 employee complaint procedures.

4 Provisions for specific employee groups

4.1 Employee groups with 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 or PDA/PDL for a course, 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.

4.2 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.

4.3 Employees on leave without pay for purposes other than study leave

Employees on leave without pay for purposes other than study leave (e.g. maternity leave) continue to be eligible for SARAS provided prior approval has been obtained and course requirements are satisfied in accordance with the provisions of this policy.

4.4 Employees transferring either permanently or temporarily

When employees transfer either permanently or temporarily within Queensland Health, the relevant delegates are to negotiate any financial reimbursement arrangements (e.g. through sharing financial support).

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

4.5 Workers' compensation

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