

Outside Studies Program for Academic Staff Policy

Section 1 - Key Information

Policy Type and Approval Body	Academic – Academic Board
Accountable Executive - Policy	Provost
Responsible Manager - Policy	Provost
Review Date	15 November 2027

Section 2 - Purpose

(1) This Policy informs prospective applicants, Deans, and Outside Studies Programs Committees, of the principles associated with the Outside Studies Program (OSP).

Section 3 - Scope

(2) This Policy applies to:

- a. all Campuses;
- b. all post probation academic staff members on continuing contracts (teaching and research, teaching focused or research continuing), employed full time and part time (0.5 FTE and above).

Section 4 - Key Decisions

Key Decisions	Role
Approve OSP applications via recommendations from the OSP Committee.	Provost
Assess and approve OSP applications for academic staff who work in a central area rather than a school.	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Industry Engagement)

Section 5 - Policy Statement

(3) The purpose of an Outside Studies Program (OSP) is to promote research and scholarship. This period free from the full range of University duties provides an opportunity for academic staff to focus on research and scholarship, including exposure to and collaboration with field-leading scholars and industry partners.

(4) Normally staff will pursue their programs at major centres of learning overseas although industry based programs may be undertaken in Australia or overseas.

(5) OSP is an important step in the development of academics. Deans will take appropriate note of this when determining the capacity of the School to cover workloads. Academic staff have a responsibility to establish a long-term research/scholarship development plan with their supervisor, including a plan for OSP.

(6) La Trobe is committed to ensuring that the OSP application process is fair and equitable, taking family and other responsibilities into consideration.

Section 6 - Procedures

Part A - Eligibility and Conditions of Leave

Eligibility

(7) OSP is not an automatic entitlement. Approval to undertake a program should not be assumed even when the applicant satisfies the basic eligibility requirements.

(8) All post probation academic staff members on continuing contracts (teaching and research, teaching focussed or research continuing), employed full time and part time, 0.5 EFT (50% of full time) and above, are eligible to apply for OSP.

(9) Fixed term contract staff are not entitled to apply for OSP, unless provided for under the [La Trobe University Enterprise Agreement 2023](#) as amended from time to time.

(10) Staff must normally have worked at La Trobe in a continuing role and must have accumulated at least three years of service by January 1 in the year in which they submit an application for OSP, unless prior service as an academic staff member at another higher education institution has been recognised, in which case staff must normally have served and accumulated two years at La Trobe by January 1 in the year in which they apply for OSP (see 'Recognition of Prior Service' below).

(11) Should an application be made by a staff member who has not served three years at La Trobe it must be accompanied by a justification from the Dean indicating the special circumstances, or a copy of the contract of employment confirming prior approval to submit an early application.

(12) OSP will not normally be used to undertake PhD work as this can be accommodated under alternative workload arrangements.

Payment of Salary

(13) The University will continue to pay a staff member's salary during their period of OSP.

OSP Accumulation

(14) Eligible academic staff members may apply for OSP after three years of continuous service, from commencement at La Trobe or from the end of the last period of OSP.

(15) The period of OSP available accumulates at the rate of one month (full time) for each six months of full time service, with a maximum accumulation of twelve months. For part time staff the period of OSP available accumulates using their average part time fraction over the period of service. See [OSP How-to Guide](#) for further information.

(16) A staff member may apply for an OSP of shorter duration than the period of OSP accumulated. The balance of the accumulated OSP, to a maximum of 6 months, will be carried over and may be used towards a future program.

(17) Any period of paid leave shall count in assessing the OSP accumulated.

Recognition of Prior Service for the purposes of OSP

(18) The University recognises prior service as an academic staff member of other Australian universities and higher education providers.

(19) Academic staff shall be able to apply for recognition of a maximum of three years of prior continuous service in a full time or part time (0.5 FTE and above) position, dependent upon such service being confirmed by the other university.

(20) Provided there is not more than two months between the cessation of employment with another university and commencement at La Trobe, continuity shall be deemed not to have been broken. The period between cessation and commencement will not be taken into account in determining the period of service.

(21) While staff on fixed term contracts are not eligible to apply for OSP, a staff member who is appointed to a continuing position following a fixed term appointment may apply for recognition of prior service, for the purpose of OSP, for the period of the fixed term appointment.

(22) For staff seeking recognition of prior service for a fixed term appointment at La Trobe, approval to undertake OSP will not normally be granted until a minimum of two years has been served in a continuing position.

(23) Staff wishing to apply for recognition of prior service for the purposes of OSP should provide relevant details to their Supervisor and the School OSP Contact before submitting an application. The details will be verified with Human Resources.

Requirement to Return to the Service of the University

(24) Normally eligible staff may apply for OSP provided that they undertake, and are eligible, to return to the service of the University for a period at least equal to the length of the program.

(25) Staff who do not comply with the requirement to return to the service of the University as defined above may be required to reimburse the University the financial grant provided. The amount repayable will be determined on the basis of the period of service to the University after completion of the OSP.

Location of Program

(26) Normally, applicants will pursue their programs at major centres of learning overseas, except for industry based programs which may be undertaken in Australia or overseas. It is recognised that some research or teaching focused programs will be more appropriately carried out in Australia. In some circumstances programs can be taken at La Trobe. Where a program is to be taken in Australia a case must be made explaining why this is appropriate.

Length of Program

(27) Programs will normally be for a period between three months and six months, however applications for programs of less than three months, or greater than six months but less than 12 months, will be considered.

(28) Only in exceptional circumstances will an OSP be approved for a duration in excess of the period of OSP accumulated.

Timing of Program

(29) The timing of a program shall be such that, in the opinion of the Dean and the OSP Committee, it will cause the least disruption to the academic needs of the School. Deans are required to provide a clear indication on this matter on the application form.

(30) It is normally expected that:

- a. a program may extend for up to six months;
- b. the time interval between OSPs will be at least three years by January 1 in the year in which a subsequent OSP application is submitted.

Recreation and Long Service Leave

(31) An applicant will be required to incorporate in the application at least the amount of recreation leave that will accrue during the OSP. Applicants whose programs include recreation or long service leave will not conduct their studies during such leave. Leave is to be defined prior to commencement of the program and amended only with approval from the Dean.

Absences Not Classified as Part of an OSP

(32) Absences from the University which will not be classified as part of an OSP may include:

- a. conferences of less than two weeks duration;
- b. secondment to other institutions;
- c. representing the University elsewhere;
- d. obligations arising from membership of government bodies or international organisations;
- e. exchange of staff between institutions;
- f. other specific purposes such as field work, recommended for approval by the Dean and approved by the OSP Chair. However, in cases where leave to undertake field work was sought in the same year as an OSP the field work would not automatically be considered to be separate from the OSP;
- g. a period of specific training to fit a staff member for a change in task or an upgrading of that task, or to learn the application of a new technique;
- h. long service leave;
- i. recreation leave, except as detailed above.

Part B - Application Process

Criteria

(33) A research focused OSP application must outline a fully developed program with clear objectives to achieve specific outcomes not possible without a period of OSP, that align with the research priorities set out in the University's Strategic Plan and contribute to the University's research profile. Evidence of how the period of OSP will contribute to the following tangible outcomes within a definable period must be included, including their impact and how they will be disseminated:

- a. publications or non-traditional research outputs in high quality outlets as measured by the relevant disciplines and external measures of quality;
- b. new/external research grant applications with collaborators from host institution/s;
- c. strong international research collaborations or research student and staffing exchanges.

(34) A teaching focused OSP application must outline a fully developed program with clear objectives that align with University priorities, contribute to the University's research profile and engage explicitly with the scholarship of learning and teaching. Evidence of how the period of OSP will contribute to the following tangible outcomes within a definable period must be included, including their impact and how they will be disseminated:

- a. publications or non-traditional research outputs in high quality outlets for higher education research;
- b. national or international grant applications related to educational research or innovation with collaborators from host institution/s;
- c. strong national or international teaching or curriculum collaborations or exchanges, along with dissemination of the outcomes of those collaborations.

(35) An industry focused OSP application must outline a fully developed program, with clear objectives to achieve outcomes not possible without a period of OSP, that align with the industry partnership priorities set out in the University's Strategic Plan and contribute to the University's partnership profile. Evidence of how the period of OSP will contribute to the following tangible outcomes within a definable period must be included, including their impact and how they will be disseminated:

- a. publications or non-traditional research outputs in high quality outlets as measured by the relevant disciplines and external measures of quality;
- b. new external industry collaborations and new research funding with industry collaborators;
- c. new/external research grant applications with collaborators from host organisation/s;
- d. strong student and staffing exchanges to industry.

Consideration of Applications

(36) Applications for OSP from each School are reviewed by the OSP Committee which makes recommendations for approval to the Provost.

(37) In cases where the OSP Committee cannot recommend for approval all applications that have met the criteria, the following factors will be considered:

- a. early career researchers who are submitting their first OSP applications;
- b. staff who have a very strong record of scholarly or teaching activity.

(38) The Provost will consider the following prior to approving the recommendations from the Outside Studies Programs Committee:

- a. objectives and academic content of the proposed program will benefit the staff member in terms of research and scholarly activity and provide significant benefit, including improvements in research and/or teaching for the University;
- b. applicant has a workload plan that has scheduled OSP for this period and has met the required measurable goals to be achieved before applying for OSP, with such goals to be relative to opportunity;
- c. proposed program, full details of which are to be provided, justifies the period requested;
- d. applicant's teaching and other duties can be covered without unreasonable additional duties for other academic staff from the School – such details are to be confirmed by the Dean;
- e. timing of leave causes minimum disruption to the School; and
- f. appropriate recreation leave is included in the period designated as OSP.

(39) Applications submitted by academic staff who work in a central area of the University, rather than a School, will be assessed and approved by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Industry Engagement), with input from the Chair of the OSP Committee.

(40) An applicant for OSP is expected to submit their best and most complete application by the due date. The OSP Committee will have the discretion to request additional information from applicants in cases where there are minor aspects requiring clarification, but not for major revisions.

(41) Applications which are submitted in an incomplete state, or lacking sufficient details, will not be open to re-submission. Late applications will not be accepted.

How to lodge an Application

(42) Prior to preparing an application intending applicants should consult with their Dean to determine the feasibility of submitting an application at this time. The Dean will provide preliminary advice to the applicant in light of the operational needs of the School and the individual's development goals and career stage.

(43) Applications will be called once each year, normally in March, for programs to commence in the following year. Applications will be considered and evaluated on a competitive basis.

(44) In exceptional circumstances consideration may be given to an application received out of session.

(45) To lodge an application:

- a. applicants must complete the OSP Application form available on the [OSP intranet](#);
- b. the applicant's line supervisor will seek agreement from appropriate replacement supervisors and/or subject coordinators to cover their workload;
- c. applications must be endorsed with comments and a recommendation by the Dean (who will consult with the supervisor and/or senior academics of the discipline regarding the merit of the proposed program).

(46) The Dean's recommendation for approval will attest that:

- a. the applicant's workload can be covered;
- b. HDR supervision can be covered by an appropriate alternative supervisor who has agreed to provide supervision; and
- c. outcomes of any previous OSPs have been considered in assessing the current application.

(47) The applicant sights the comments of the Dean and has the opportunity to make further comment. The applicant then submits the completed application to the OSP Committee via the School OSP contact.

(48) The Outside Studies Programs Committee's recommendation for approval and the Provost's approval for a program may be withdrawn if subsequent events mean that resources are not available to cover the period of OSP.

Report on a Completed OSP

(49) Within two months of return from an OSP the staff member is required to present a report through the Dean to the OSP Chair. After consultation with the staff member, the Dean will provide an assessment and evaluation of the success of the program in meeting the original objectives.

(50) Reports will be scrutinised closely by the OSP Committee Chair to ensure that the objectives of the program have been achieved.

(51) Unless exceptional circumstances intervene, failure to submit a satisfactory report may result in the OSP Chair deciding that a future application for an OSP not be considered for a specific period of time and/or a refund of all or part of the financial grant be made by the staff member.

(52) Following return from an OSP the staff member will normally present a seminar in the school on the research completed during the OSP, as part of the expected dissemination of outcomes described under 'Criteria' above.

Guidelines on Preparation of Report

(53) The report on a completed OSP will include the following:

- a. a brief statement of the purpose of the approved program. Where objectives were not achieved or a marked variation occurred to the approved program, reasons are to be included in the report;
- b. a description of the actual research and other academic activities undertaken is to be detailed under the following headings:
 - i. Nature of research or teaching-focused activities undertaken;
 - ii. Nature and extent of discussions held with learned colleagues, who are to be named;
 - iii. Universities or institutions at which research or other work was undertaken, including the names of specific departments;
 - iv. Attendance at seminars or conferences, and presentation of papers;
 - v. Any teaching assignments undertaken;
 - vi. Any courses undertaken;
 - vii. Periods spent in each city or country visited;
 - viii. The status of any written work arising from the program, even if that work was part of a larger project. Written work will be designated 'in preparation', 'submitted', 'forthcoming' or 'published'.

(54) The staff member is to assess, where practicable, the degree to which the program has assisted research, teaching or other academic interests and the extent to which it was of benefit to the individual and to the University.

(55) The staff member is also free to comment on other matters, not necessarily related to their field of work, that are of value to the University.

Part C - Outside Studies Programs Committee

(56) There will be an OSP Committee to consider applications for OSP. Membership of the OSP Committee will comprise:

- a. Provost or nominee (Chair)
- b. Deans

(57) Gender balance must be maintained wherever possible.

(58) Other members, such as immediate past Chairs of OSP Committees, may be co-opted onto committees for their expertise.

(59) In attendance, but not voting:

- a. Administrative officer (secretariat)
- b. Executive Director, Operations or nominee (adviser).

(60) The role of the Outside Studies Programs Committee will be to:

- a. consider applications from the Schools;
- b. provide recommendations to the Provost to approve applications;
- c. scrutinise and provide feedback on reports on completed OSPs;
- d. oversee and consider matters relating to OSP including the development of rules and standards relating to OSP.

Part D - Travel and Financial Assistance

Approval for Overseas Travel

(61) Approval for an OSP which includes a component of overseas travel is contingent upon University approval to travel to the destinations listed in the application.

(62) Travel to places where a DFAT warning against travel is in place will not be approved unless a convincing reason is provided to indicate that the travel is essential.

(63) Applicants whose OSP includes overseas travel should refer to the [OSP How-to Guide](#) and the University's Guide on [Booking and managing travel](#).

Financial Assistance

(64) There are two types of financial assistance that may be available to a staff member travelling on OSP:

- a. a grant may be payable to assist with overseas, interstate, or intrastate travel expenses;
- b. a staff member may be able to claim a salary advance for travel purposes.

Financial Grant

(65) For staff members travelling overseas, interstate or intrastate on OSP, a grant may be payable to assist with expenses. The amount of the grant is the same for full time and part time staff members. For overseas and interstate travel it is based on the length of time to be spent overseas/interstate, with a minimum component of one month. Staff members who receive an overseas grant will not be eligible for an interstate or intrastate grant.

(66) In addition to the grant payable to staff travelling overseas an allowance for up to three dependents will be paid, subject to evidence that they are travelling with the staff member.

(67) Financial grants apply only to the period of OSP and not to any long service leave, excess recreation leave or leave without pay taken in conjunction with an OSP.

(68) For further information on financial grants, including amounts payable, please refer to the [OSP How-to Guide](#).

Salary Advance

(69) A staff member may claim half their normal salary for the period of overseas study in the form of a salary advance for travel purposes, subject to Australian Taxation Office rules. Refer to the [OSP How-to Guide](#) for further information.

(70) An alternative mechanism for a salary advance is provided in the [La Trobe University Enterprise Agreement 2023](#); with four weeks' notice, a staff member will be entitled to payment in advance for periods of paid OSP in excess of two (2) weeks up to a maximum of 12 weeks. Enquiries may be directed to Human Resources.

Part E - Variations to Programs

(71) Variations to approved programs must be submitted to the OSP administrator in advance.

(72) The University's online travel booking and leave request systems must not be used to alter a previously approved OSP and associated recreation leave or long service leave.

(73) Where a staff member requests a postponement of the commencement date for a period not exceeding six months from the commencement date of the approved OSP, and this is approved by the Dean, no further approval will

be required.

(74) Where a postponement is for a period greater than six months from the commencement date of the approved OSP, the staff member must resubmit the application.

(75) Where a staff member requests a substantial change to a program, full details of the changes must be submitted for the approval of the OSP Chair, through the Dean. Any change which involves the elimination of an overseas component will be automatically regarded as a substantial change.

(76) Where the Dean or OSP Chair considers that a changed program is of insufficient merit, approval for all or part of the program may be withdrawn by the OSP Committee on the recommendation of the OSP Chair.

(77) Variations to approved programs involving an extension to, or addition of, an overseas or interstate component may be approved, but normally no further grant will be provided.

Part F - Unsuccessful Applications

(78) The decision not to approve an application will be based on the quality/merit of the proposed program and/or on the resources available within the School.

(79) The OSP Chair will provide unsuccessful applicants with brief written advice outlining the reasons why their applications were not approved.

(80) Where the decision was based on the quality/merit of the proposed program the letter will include advice on areas that would need to be strengthened before a future application was submitted. The OSP Chair is encouraged to meet with the applicants individually to discuss this further.

(81) It is suggested that applicants use this advice, in consultation with their supervisor, when revising their workload and performance development plans.

Appeals

(82) Applicants will have the right to appeal against the decision in relation to their applications. Appeals can only be made on the grounds that the procedures outlined in this document were not followed by the OSP Committee in reaching its decision.

(83) An appeal is to be lodged with the Provost via email to OSPC@latrobe.edu.au within one month of the applicant's receipt of advice on the outcome of the application.

(84) Any appeal against the decision made by the Provost in relation to an appeal should be made to the University Ombudsman and only on the grounds of failure to follow the procedures pertaining to the submission and consideration of an appeal.

Part G - Authorities/Delegations

(85) The OSP Chair is responsible for:

- a. overseeing the number of programs a school could offer in any one year;
- b. approving programs, with the advice of Deans in consultation with the professor(s) of discipline.

(86) Reports on completed OSPs:

- a. The OSP Committee will scrutinise and approve reports through the Dean and OSP Chair.

Section 7 - Definitions

(87) For the purpose of this Policy and Procedure:

- a. Relative to opportunity: relates to acknowledgement of what a staff member can and has achieved given the workload allocation and opportunities available. Personal circumstances that could affect opportunity may include family responsibilities, a temporary or permanent disability, and periods of part-time work and/or absences due to ill-health or injury.

Section 8 - Authority and Associated Information

(88) This Policy is made under the [La Trobe University Act 2009](#).

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	15th November 2024
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Responsible Manager - Policy	Robert Pike Provost
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