



Subject Research sabbatical guidelines
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Rationale for drafting guidelines for research sabbaticals

Based on previous insights and recommendations from staff surveys, the European HR logo 'Excellence in Research' and Leiden University's change vision on 'Recognition and Rewards', attention is being drawn to the need of academic staff¹ for more time for research and societal relevance and less time spent on teaching and leadership tasks. This appeal concerns the issue of 'career balance', and achieving a better balance requires greater attention to recognition, inclusivity and teamwork. While teaching is one of the main responsibilities for most academic staff members, appointments, promotions and grant applications often place greater emphasis on research achievements. Moreover, academic staff are expected to ensure that their research has societal relevance and to take on administrative roles. This leads to the undervaluation of certain tasks. In addition, there is a high workload, as academics feel pressure to perform across all areas, in a context of underfunded academic education – particularly within non-STEM disciplines. This is further exacerbated by the significant cuts in academia resulting from the current Cabinet's general agreement. Potential negative effects of this include an increased workload due to application and competitive pressures and the stifling of academic ambition to achieve a better balance² in careers.

Nevertheless, there are opportunities at the faculty to channel such tensions productively, for example by focusing on excellence in teaching and research, adopting a benefits strategy, maintaining financial health and successfully implementing the cultural change programme.

Research question

In light of the above, the Faculty Board – on behalf of the department chairs – has asked the HR department how a research sabbatical could serve as a viable and workable intervention in the navigation process described above, in such a way that a better career balance can be achieved.

This memorandum does not address what the faculty, and the university more broadly, can do to promote the use of and satisfaction with the sabbatical leave scheme as laid out in the Collective Labour Agreement for Dutch Universities (CAO NU).

In line with the above, this memorandum briefly explores the distinction between a research sabbatical and sabbatical leave as a type of leave in the CAO NU. It then presents concrete proposals for establishing faculty-level guidelines for a research sabbatical.

Research sabbatical versus *sabbatical leave*: What's the difference?

Research sabbatical

A research sabbatical provides dedicated time for research in the form of a defined time block. This block allows for a period free from teaching duties, including committee work and, as far as possible, thesis supervision, for each member of the academic staff. The aim is to enable the initiation, execution and/or

¹ In Leiden University's Guidelines for the Appointment and Promotion of Academic Staff, academic staff are defined as academics appointed to the positions of assistant professor, associate professor and full professor. In these academic roles, the integration of research and teaching is ensured, along with the provision of research-driven education.

² The desire for balance is essentially about *what* is valued, and *how* it is valued.



completion of substantial research programmes and projects (such as writing a grant proposal or completing a book). This can be a maximum of one academic year³, potentially extended with teaching-free periods in the summer and/or after the Christmas break.

An example of a suitable approach here is *'smart clustering of teaching duties'*.

Currently, it is possible – in consultation with their manager and the Director of Teaching and Learning – for a staff member to request their teaching duties be clustered into specific periods. This may result in a period during which the staff member has no teaching obligations.

This is not an absolute entitlement, but rather a principle that will be sought if an employee wishes to do so.

Sabbatical leave

A period of sabbatical leave, as defined in Article 4.23 of the Collective Labour Agreement for Dutch Universities (CAO NU), provides for an extended paid and/or unpaid period of leave during which an employee may focus, in general or with a specific purpose, on their own employability⁴. The employer may grant such extended leave at the employee's request. When granting a sabbatical leave, the employer and employee must, as a minimum, make arrangements regarding:

- 1. The manner in which the leave will be taken and used;*
- 2. The duration of the leave;*
- 3. Whether the salary will continue to be paid, whether pension contributions will continue and whether the employee will use saved holiday hours (as defined in Article 5.5 of the CAO NU) for part of the leave period. If the employee uses saved leave for a period of sabbatical leave, the employer may make a contribution provided the employer deems there to be an organisational interest as well.*

The decision to grant such a contribution or full compensation for a sabbatical leave raises the question of what constitutes 'organisational interest'.

This concept can be interpreted in several ways. From an administrative perspective, organisational interest might refer to attracting funding from a research organisation. In practical terms, multiple interests may apply at the faculty level, such as:

- Improving the quality of education in the long term, when academics are able to invest in their own expertise;*
- Reducing workload for staff, thereby contributing to a healthier working environment.*

Either way, the sabbatical leave scheme as laid out in the CAO NU ranks relatively low in staff surveys compared to other provisions such as part-time work, flexible working hours and remote working – among both academic staff and non-academic staff (OBP). Beyond the lack of clarity around terms such as 'employability' and 'organisational interest', the scheme is also partially perceived by employees as a case of 'giving with one hand and taking with the other' (Who gains, and how much?). At the same time, supported by the change vision on 'Recognition and Rewards', there is growing momentum to create a working environment in which both academic and non-academic staff can perform their roles in a healthy, sustainable and safe way. In this context, vitality becomes embedded in day-to-day work, and well-being becomes a consistent topic of dialogue between employees and their managers.

³ Following the reform of the curricula – currently being carried out by a Taskforce chaired by Alex Geurds – our programmes will become more streamlined and efficient. The aim is that, as a result, colleagues will only teach in three out of the four blocks. If this proves successful, our research sabbatical policy will evolve towards granting colleagues release from teaching duties for not just one block, but two blocks.

⁴ Employability is a broad concept and is not further defined in Article 4.23 of the CAO NU. However, this broad concept is further elaborated in Article 9.14 of the CAO NU, in the context of a reorganisation as referred to in Article 9.1 of the CAO NU. From the perspective of Article 4.23, it is desirable to interpret employability as the ability to remain employed with the current employer or to obtain employment with another employer.



In line with the previously outlined need for better career balance, it is more appropriate to focus on (some form of) research sabbatical as an alternative to sabbatical leave, rather than merely encouraging the use of the existing sabbatical leave scheme. The latter is currently accessible through the following routes:

1. Individual leave-saving (Long-term savings model under Article 5.5 of the CAO NU)

In agreement with their manager, an employee may save up to 72 additional compensatory hours annually – on top of a maximum of 76 holiday hours purchased via the Options Model – over a period of three, four or five years, to be used for an extended, uninterrupted period of leave. The saved leave must be used within one year of the end of the period in which it was saved. During the leave, the employee continues to receive full salary, and holiday entitlement continues to accrue. Participation is only possible if the employee retains the statutory minimum of four weeks' leave per year. Employees on a function-based contract (Article 4.5 of the CAO NU) are not eligible for the long-term savings model. Employees can request to take their saved leave via the system. Click [here](#) for more information. Approval is required from their manager, and – if they hold teaching duties – also from the Director of Teaching and Learning. If an employee has accrued an excessive amount of leave, arrangements must first be made to reduce this through regular leave-taking throughout the year (for reasons of vitality, rest and recovery) before the taking of saved leave can be approved. When using the long-term savings model, the employee must register their hours, with oversight from their manager. A condition here is that the employee must be present at their office for at least 60% of their working hours.

2. Unpaid leave

An employee may submit a request for unpaid leave, without continuation of pension contributions. This is only granted in exceptional cases and requires approval from the Faculty Board, the HR Adviser and the Director of Teaching and Learning. Note: the employee is responsible for paying both the employee's and employer's share of the pension contributions during the leave.

Research sabbatical in a broader perspective

The Faculty of Archaeology (FdA) seeks to protect staff from an ever-increasing workload by introducing a workload model, known as the parameter model⁵. The FdA is also willing to allocate part of its income from the first stream of funding (government funding and tuition fees) to support success in externally funded research. In doing so, we aim to prevent the FdA from becoming an even more teaching-intensive faculty, as has happened in many other faculties within the SSH domain. This strategy enables us to maintain a relatively strong research component within the duties of our academic staff. Nevertheless, as a faculty, we can do more to reduce work pressure. For example, by organising our curricula more effectively and efficiently (e.g. consolidating programme content, reducing elective options and streamlining Master's specialisations), and by providing even stronger support and direction in the research strategy – particularly by being selective in the drafting of proposals for externally funded research projects. This helps protect staff from the natural tendency to always want to do more within their own field, sometimes at the expense of their own well-being.

It is the responsibility of the Faculty Board – together with the department chairs and with support from the faculty office – to take a firmer approach in managing available capacity within teaching and research, and in

⁵ When applying for a research sabbatical, teaching replacements are considered at the departmental level, using the parameter model and in consultation with the Director of Teaching and Learning. A shift in teaching duties from permanent to non-permanent staff is not applicable here, as these guidelines apply specifically to the job categories of Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Full Professor in permanent positions. The principle is that Assistant Professors, Associate Professors, and Full Professors support each other in providing a teaching-free block for the applicant. The parameter model serves to protect individuals from excessive teaching loads by capping the teaching duties per job category.



mitigating excessive workload. This must be done within the context of the faculty's budgetary framework, quality standards and personnel policy.

There is currently no university-wide policy on research sabbaticals; whether or not such a policy is implemented is at the discretion of the individual faculty. A quick scan reveals that only a few institutes across different faculties currently have some form of research sabbatical in place.

Building blocks for faculty guidelines on research sabbaticals

1. Apply the following criteria:

- a. Tailored arrangements between the department and applicant, aimed at research: temporary exemption from (part of the) teaching duties, including committee work, in order to free up time for research. Applicants must be part of the academic staff, in permanent employment for at least five consecutive years, and must not have previously been granted a research sabbatical.
- b. The duration of a temporary exemption is limited to one block per academic year⁶, **supplemented by a teaching-free period in the summer and/or after the Christmas break.**
- c. Each eligible academic is in principle granted a research sabbatical once. The underlying assumption is that, if necessary, colleagues are willing to take on teaching duties (teaching replacement) for those taking a sabbatical, and vice versa. In some cases, smart timetabling may eliminate the need for substitution. This makes consultation with the manager and the Director of Teaching and Learning essential, especially to ensure alignment with the parameter model.
- d. Teaching replacement is not a buy-out, but constitutes a temporary reduction in teaching duties, including the supervision of current and new theses. In the case of thesis supervision, this should, as much as possible, be planned in *timely consultation* with the department chair and *especially* the Director of Teaching and Learning⁷. If possible and desired, and only for the supervision of a limited number of theses, postdocs⁸ may be called upon under the direction of the main supervisor.
- e. Budget allocation is possible if the sabbatical is aimed at acquiring funding via a research organisation.
- f. Employees also have the right to use their individual savings model (responsibility lies with the employee).
- g. The justification for an application must align with the faculty's strategy and support the purpose of a research sabbatical, i.e. facilitating the initiation, execution and/or completion of a substantial research programme or project. This may involve: submitting a funding application, completing a book, writing an article, conducting a research visit, learning a new research technique or a combination thereof.

2. Apply the following procedure:

- a. The Faculty Board awards a maximum of two research sabbaticals per year, provided that teaching duties can be covered by colleagues or managed through efficient timetabling.

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⁷Taking into account planning deadlines, the Director of Teaching and Learning can easily organise the use of postdocs to supervise new theses.

⁸Only in the context of the development of this job category is partial involvement, under the direction of a coordinating lecturer with examiner authorisation, an option.



- b. The applicant must submit a written, well-founded application to the department chair (or chairs if acting as a committee) and the Director of Teaching and Learning in the month prior to the start of the academic year, for the following year⁹. The department chair(s)/Director of Teaching and Learning will provide advice – after consultation with the Faculty Board member for Research – to the Faculty Board within four weeks, and the Faculty Board will reach a reasoned decision within three weeks of receiving the advice. The applicant will be informed of the decision in writing.
 - c. The application must indicate how (partial) teaching and other faculty duties will be temporarily covered.
 - d. The application must clearly state the intended purpose (research; 1.g.).
 - e. The application must show that a substantial funding proposal is being prepared via...
 - f. In cases where the applicant chooses to use their individual savings model, the application must be submitted at least one year before the start of the sabbatical period.
 - g. Upon approval, the agreements are documented in writing and included in the GROW cycle.
 - h. The results of the research sabbatical are evaluated within the GROW cycle.
- 3.** Discuss potential risks such as:
- a. Adequate teaching replacement in highly specialised subject areas¹⁰.
 - b. The incorrect or incomplete application of these guidelines in communications.
- 4.** Consider allowing faculty administrators (department chairs and members of the Faculty Board) to be eligible for a one-month research sabbatical after the end of their administrative term, as a gesture of recognition and appreciation for their administrative work.

Finally, for the sake of consistency and transparency, it is recommended that a standard application form for a research sabbatical be developed, incorporating the criteria and procedure outlined above. This form should be attached to the guidelines and, once approved, made available internally via the faculty website and communicated through departmental meetings.

⁹ The timing for submitting a 'research sabbatical' application is crucial: theses are distributed in September, so we are aiming for August as the deadline at the start of the academic year for the following year.

¹⁰ Our faculty, and therefore our education, is not organised around narrow specialisations. As a result, our teaching is not merely a collection of specialised subjects, which significantly reduces the risk of inadequate teaching replacement in highly specialised fields.