



ACT
Government

ACT Health

Studies Assistance Guideline

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Introduction

ACT Health Directorate (ACTHD) is committed to investing in learning and development by providing opportunities for employees to undertake learning and development that will assist to increase the efficiency of the ACT Public Service (ACTPS), job satisfaction and the adaptability of its employees.

Studies Assistance encourages employees to undertake formal courses of study at tertiary and higher education institutions, and vocational education courses. Support provided to students can include approval as a student, paid or unpaid Study Leave and/or Financial Assistance, subject to the approval of the delegate.

Application

This guideline provides direction to employees, managers and delegates, and should be read in conjunction with the Studies Assistance documents available through the [OneGov Service Centre](#).

Approval of Studies Assistance is discretionary and is not an entitlement.

Employees who are eligible to apply for Studies Assistance in the ACTHD include:

- permanent officers
- temporary employees with fixed term contracts of 12 months or longer.

This policy does not apply to temporary employees with contracts less than 12 months (unless special consideration is given) or casual employees, cadets, trainees, contract staff, apprentices, or employees on probation as these employees are generally not eligible for Studies Assistance.

At the discretion of the delegate, special consideration may be given to employees who do not meet the eligibility criteria.

Some ACT Public Service [Enterprise Agreements](#) contain a *professional development or study leave* provision:

- **ACT Public Sector Health Professional Enterprise Agreement 2021 – 2022**

Professional Development Support and Leave entitlements are outlined in N3 and Q10 respectively. The entitlement to Professional Development Support and Leave **does not replace** the entitlement to study leave under the Public Sector Management Standards.

- **ACT Public Sector Medical Practitioners Enterprise Agreement 2021-2022**

Training, Education and Study Leave (TESL) entitlements are outlined in Part 5, Section M, 109.2 A full-time Specialist or Senior Specialist is entitled to 160 hours of TESL each year, this leave accrues on a daily basis. The entitlement to TESL **replaces** the entitlement to study leave under the Public Sector Management Standards.

- **ACT Public Sector Nursing and Midwifery Enterprise Agreement 2020- 2022**

Professional Development entitlements are outlined in part 141. The Professional Development Leave **does not replace** study leave provisions under the Public Sector Management Standards.

Considerations

Approval for a Studies Assistance application can only be granted by an applicant's cost centre delegate, in accordance with ACTHD [delegations policies and procedures](#).

Delegates must consider the following when assessing an employee's application for Studies Assistance.

Considerations

In addition to an employee's reasons for wanting to access Studies Assistance, delegates should consider the following operational factors before approving an application:

- Employment status
- Length of service
- Work environment and tempo
- Previous study and development approvals and support provided
- Alignment with priorities agreed in personal performance and development discussion
- Access and equity
- Relevance of study
- Availability of budget

Each application should be assessed on a case-by-case basis and will need to be reapproved for each individual study period.

Levels of Assistance

The Studies Assistance delegate has the authority, within their budget, to approve Studies Assistance in any one, or a combination of the following options.

Approval as a Student

Approval as a Student must be obtained before Study Leave or Financial Assistance can be approved.

Approval as a Student entitles employees to:

- take paid leave to sit examinations (including travel time) even if no other leave is granted
- be considered for Study Leave and Financial Assistance
- be covered by worker's compensation while attending classes or examinations, and when travelling between work and study activities.

Study Leave (paid or unpaid)

Study Leave provides the approval for an employee to take leave (paid, unpaid or a combination of both) from the workplace to undertake study or other related activities which are essential to the successful completion of the course.

Financial Assistance

Financial Assistance allows ACTHD to reimburse an employee for the recognised cost of a course of study. The level of financial assistance provided is dependent on the delegate's decision in accordance with the principles contained in this guideline and is paid out of the approving area's allocated budget.

Assessing Hours of Study Leave

In assessing an application for Study Leave, the delegate shall consider the number of hours required by the course of study (whether face-to-face or home study) and the time required to participate in other activities related to the course of study (for example, research).

Study Leave, with or without pay, may be approved for classes or other activities during the student's normal hours of duty. Approved leave may include reasonable travel time.

A reasonable allocation of leave for a full-time employee studying two units might be up to 5-6 hours of study leave per week plus travel time (if relevant) giving a total of up to 8 hours per week. These amounts are a guide only and not a direct entitlement. The delegate should consider operational requirements and equity amongst staff before determining the appropriate number of hours.

Allocations may also be adjusted for part-time employees or where the application is for a different number of units. Unused approved Study Leave hours do not accrue.

Consideration should also be given to reasonable adjustments that could be made to provide equitable access to study.

Study leave may also be approved as a block release arrangement to undertake study-related activities which may include study towards a thesis, examination or other assessment, or attendance at a residential program. Study leave as a block release may be granted with pay or without pay.

Branches will be requested to provide to information on studies assistance in February and August of each year to coincide with academic terms.

Assessing the Level of Financial Assistance

The level of Financial Assistance is determined by the applicant’s cost centre delegate, taking into consideration the operational resources and the degree of relevance of the course to the business unit and the ACTPS.

Delegates should be guided by the following table in assessing the appropriate level of financial assistance:

| Tier | Criteria | Reimbursement |
|--|--|-------------------|
| Tier 1 – Mandatory or legislated training that is required for applicant’s current position. | A required course of study to be able to perform the role, for example, an industry requirement. Participation is at the request/direction of the employer. A specific, mandatory skill set that is not possessed within the work area. | Up to 100% |
| Tier 2 – Study which is of direct relevance to the applicant’s current work area and responsibility. | Course is directly related to the applicant’s current work area and will develop the applicant’s and work area’s capability. Recognised as a required skill to be able to advance within the work area or Directorate. | Up to 75% |
| Tier 3 – Study which is relevant to the skills and knowledge needs of the ACTPS and directly contributes to the applicant’s career development and/or | An area of study that would be of benefit to the wider ACTPS but may not directly relate to the applicant’s current role. In determining the level of reimbursement, consider the contribution the course would have on the applicant’s current skill set and | Up to 50% |

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| capacity for mobility within the ACTPS. | career. This should not be used for complete career realignment. | |
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The above table is provided as a guide only to ensure a level of equity and consistency across the directorate. The level of Financial Assistance is ultimately at the discretion of the delegate.

Financial Assistance is only available for compulsory course and enrolment fees. This does not include:

- student amenities fees
- books, journals and newspapers, including subscriptions
- late fees or disciplinary fines
- fees for subjects not successfully completed (except in extenuating circumstances)
- student association or union fees
- study costs for any periods of study that commence after an employee leaves ACTHD to work in another directorate
- travel and accommodation expenses incurred while attending residential components
- local travel expenses
- equipment, stationary, access to internet
- postage and telephone calls
- childcare expenses
- library joining fees
- graduation fees
- parking fees and fines.

Fringe Benefits Tax

Please note that the reimbursement of this study expenditure may incur Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT). Generally, FBT is payable by the Directorate when the reimbursement relates to a Commonwealth subsidised course.

For example, Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) courses and Certified Practising Accountant (CPA) modules are not subsidised by the Commonwealth and therefore would not attract FBT. Only university courses are subsidised by the Commonwealth. Reimbursements of employee HECS-HELP charges are subject to FBT. The University Invoice will include words such as "HECS-HELP", "COMSUPPORT" or "COM-xx", where xx is the financial year.

If you are unsure as to whether the reimbursement of the course fee will attract FBT, please contact ACTHD [Strategic Finance Branch](#).

Procedures

Applying for Studies Assistance

Application

A new application is required for each period of study either via term or course and should be emailed to the employee's immediate manager for consideration at least 3 weeks prior to the commencement of the course.

Employees must provide the following documents with their application:

- A completed [Studies Assistance Application Form](#)
- Proof of enrolment
- Proof of course costs (if applying for financial assistance) and proof of payment prior to claiming costs after successful completion of study

Recommendation

The employee's manager will then provide a recommendation to the delegate for consideration (where the immediate manager is not the delegate), including:

- whether studies assistance should be approved
- the level of assistance to be provided.

Where a recommendation is for studies assistance to not be approved, the manager should provide justification for this recommendation.

This recommendation will be provided to the delegate within one week of the manager receiving the application.

Approval

When the delegate receives a form for approval, they approve or not approve the application and email the signed form back to the manager, employee and People Strategy and Culture Branch. They may choose to approve or not approve the manager's recommendation in whole, or in part, including varying the levels of support.

Approved Study Leave counts as service for all purposes. There is no need for Study Leave to be recorded in the pay system, however employees must record all Study Leave on their attendance sheets or diaries.

Results

On completion of each study period, employees must provide their manager with a copy of their results for the period. Records must be managed in accordance with the *Territory Records*

Act 2002 and ACTHD policy and procedures. A copy must also be forwarded to ACTHD People Strategy and Culture Branch to support broader strategic reporting purposes.

Financial Assistance

Employees who have been granted approval for Financial Assistance should refer to [Study Assistance - How to Claim Financial Reimbursement](#) on the Shared Services Customer Service Portal.

Reimbursement of fees cannot be sought until the end of the study period and is conditional upon the employee passing each unit of study. ACTHD will not reimburse fees for units of study in which the employee has not achieved at least a 'pass' grade, except in extenuating circumstances.

Expenses relating to Studies Assistance should be coded to the following account codes:

- Account Code 711503 - Approved Study/HECS
- Account Code 711504 - Study reimbursement - non HECS

Changing Work Areas/Directorates

Where an employee who has approved Studies Assistance is changing work area within ACTHD, they should initiate discussion about study arrangements with their new manager. Where an employee has approved Studies Assistance moves to another ACTPS directorate, they should consult their new directorate's Studies Assistance policies. A new work area has no obligation to match current Studies Assistance arrangements.

For employees changing work areas, the following processes should be followed:

Notification

If the new work area agrees to continue the employee's Approval as a Student and/or provide the employee with any form of Study Leave, the employee will need to complete the [Studies Assistance Amendment Notification Form](#) and email it to their new manager, along with their original approved Studies Assistance Application Form and any supporting documents.

Recommendation

The employee's manager will then provide a recommendation to the delegate for consideration (where the immediate manager is not the delegate).

Where a recommendation is for the amendments to not be approved, the manager should provide justification for this recommendation

This recommendation will be provided to the delegate within one week of the manager receiving the notification.

Approval

When the delegate receives an amendment form for approval, they will then:

- approve the amendments and email the signed form to the manager and applicant or
- email the manager and applicant to state they do approve the amendments and why.

Financial Assistance

If the employee's move to another work area, whether within ACTHD or to another ACTPS directorate, occurs midway through an already approved period of study and the employee had already been granted approval for financial assistance for that study period, the financial assistance should be paid for out of the approving area's (i.e. the original work area's) allocated budget.

Financial assistance for any subsequent study periods would then be subject to the new work area's approval and would be payable from the new work area's allocated budget.

Reviews

Where an employee is dissatisfied with a decision taken by the delegate, they should in the first instance speak with the delegate regarding the decision. If the matter is unable to be resolved, the employee should then refer to the Internal Review Procedures outlined in Section I of the [Enterprise Agreements](#).

Responsibilities

There are several people who have responsibility under this policy. Along with adhering to the general principles and associated supporting documentation, employees, managers, and delegates should be aware of the following specific responsibilities:

Applicant

Applicants have the responsibility to:

- consult with their immediate manager in advance of submitting a [Studies Assistance Application Form](#). Discussion should include information about the level of assistance being sought and the relevance of the study
- submit and maintain a current and accurate application for study in line with all guiding principles, including advising their manager if study circumstances change during the study period and completing a Studies Assistance Amendment Notification Form
- record all study leave absences within standard hours on a flex sheet or, where a flex sheet is not used, in a separate record/diary (this ensures employees are covered for worker's compensation purposes)
- complete all required coursework with a view to passing each unit of study
- keep electronic records of applications in accordance with the *Territory Records Act 2002*.

Manager

Managers have the responsibility to:

- promote Studies Assistance ensuring equitable access
- ensure that study is aligned with the employee's individual performance and development discussion
- ensure the delegate has the correct delegation to approve the Studies Assistance application
- ensure records are maintained detailing hours of the study leave taken and retain a copy of the employee's application for Studies Assistance.
- keep electronic records of applications in accordance with the *Territory Records Act 2002*.

Delegate

Delegates have the responsibility to:

- approve or not approve Studies Assistance applications from employees in their cost centre in writing, and provide justification/reasons for their support or otherwise
- respond to requests from applicants to review their decisions
- ensure records are maintained detailing hours of the study leave taken and retain a copy of the employee's application for Studies Assistance.
- keep electronic records of applications in accordance with the *Territory Records Act 2002*.

People Strategy and Culture Branch

The People Strategy and Culture Branch will:

- administer the ACTHD Studies Assistance Guidelines
- provide Studies Assistance data when and where required
- keep electronic records of applications in accordance with the *Territory Records Act 2002*.

Strategic Finance Branch

The Strategic Finance Branch team will:

- provide advice to applicants, managers, delegates and People Strategy and Culture Branch on finance issues, including Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT).

References

[ACT Health Directorate Delegates empowered to Approve the Expenditure and Payment of Public Monies](#)

[ACT Health Directorate Financial Delegations induction information](#)

[ACT Public Service Enterprise Agreements](#)

[Australian Tax Office Gross-up Rates for Fringe Benefits Tax](#)

[Instructions for Completing the Studies Assistance Application Form](#)

[Public Sector Management Standards 2016](#)

[Studies Assistance Amendment Notification Form](#)

[Studies Assistance Application Form](#)

[Studies Assistance - Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Studies Assistance - How to Claim Financial Reimbursement](#)

Further Assistance

Please contact People Strategy and Culture Branch by email at HDHR@act.gov.au for further information and assistance.

Version Control

| Version | Date | Comments |
|---------|------------|---------------|
| 1 | 10/01/2023 | New guideline |

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