



Rationale

To promote higher education studies in religious education, theology and Catholic educational leadership, Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited (DOBCEL) will allocate specified funds annually to sponsor teachers and leaders in Catholic schools, based on identified priorities. It recognises theology and educational leadership are important elements of contemporary Catholic leadership and teaching.

Applications from Religious Institutes and Ministerial Public Juridic (RI/MPJP) schools operating within the Ballarat diocese, will be overseen by DOBCEL through a Service Level Agreement in place with these schools.

Context

Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited (DOBCEL), recognises the importance of supporting teachers and current and aspiring school leaders to pursue advanced academic studies in religious education, theology and Catholic educational leadership, to enhance Catholic identity. DOBCEL believes that support for these studies is critical and, is a responsibility shared by schools and individuals.

The financial impost of postgraduate study on the individual can be prohibitive and become a barrier to seeking out further learning. This barrier is removed by the shared contribution arrangement of costs being covered by DOBCEL and the student.

Sponsorship for accreditation (4 tertiary units over 2 years) is funded for primary teachers through recurrent grants and for secondary teachers through a professional development levy paid by each secondary college in the diocese.

Scope

The Sponsorship: Higher Education Studies in Religious Education, Theology, Catholic Educational Leadership Guidelines applies to all Principals and school teaching staff.

Supporting Documents

- Diocesan Education Vision and Mission Statements
- *DOBCEL Strategy 2035: Unleashing Greatness*
- Characteristics of a Highly Effective Catholic School (CHECS)
- Diocesan Leadership Framework
- *Awakenings* – Religious Education Curriculum
- Accreditation to Teach and to Teach Religious Education or Lead in Catholic Schools in Victoria Policy (VCEA)
- Appendix 1 – Primary Application Accreditation Template
- Appendix 2 – Secondary Application Accreditation Template

Responsible Directorate member	Matthew Byrne
Document Owner	Kate Lawry
Assigned Board Committee	Catholic Faith Community & Culture Consultative Committee
Approval Date	September 2024
Review Date	September 2027

Procedures

These procedures are to be read in conjunction with the *Sponsorship: Higher Education Studies in Religious Education, Theology, Catholic Educational Leadership Guidelines*.

Sponsorship Funding

Each year the Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited (DOBCEL) allocates specific sponsorship funds for staff pursuing academic qualifications, prioritising Religious Education, theology and Catholic educational leadership.

This sponsorship is funded for primary teachers through recurrent grants. For secondary teachers, sponsorship is funded through a professional development levy paid by each secondary college in the diocese.

Once sponsorship applications have been approved, DOBCEL will distribute funds as required upon receipt of evidence of successful completion of study.

Successful applications for sponsorship for CEB staff will be funded from GACP and distributed from DOBCEL.

DOBCEL will communicate to applicants and schools the outcome of their application for sponsorship and confirm sponsorship terms.

Funding Arrangements

- Primary teachers undertaking studies to meet VCEA Accreditation requirements will be funded two thirds from DOBCEL and one third from the school.
- Secondary teachers pursuing academic study to meet VCEA Accreditation requirements will be funded fully through the Secondary Religious Education Professional Development fund. This is designed to support accreditation and will not exceed 2 units per year.
- Where funds are available, Sponsorship funding for Catholic Education Leadership or theology courses beyond accreditation, is based on the cost of university fees per unit and will usually be provided on the arrangement of one-third from DOBCEL, one-third from the school and one-third from the applicant.
- Funding is allocated towards the funding of university academic fees.

Process for Applying, Approval and Prioritising of Applications

	ACTIVITY	STEPS
A	Notification of applications	1. Applications for sponsorship will be advertised towards the end of Term Three via the DOBCEL website and the 'All staff weekly newsletter' with closing date end of week three, Term Four.
B	Principal Endorsement	1. All applicants must have their principal's (or CEB Team Leader's) endorsement to be considered for sponsorship.
C	Preparation and Consideration	1. All applicants are required to read Sponsorship: Higher Education in Religious Education, Theology, Catholic Educational Leadership Guidelines and ensure they are familiar with the requirements.
D	Submission of applications	1. All applications to be on the appropriate form and submitted via the sponsorship portal.

E	2 nd or subsequent Year study application	1. Applications for Accreditation purposes are approved for the duration of the two-year course. However, to continue studies into the second year or subsequent years, applicants are required to confirm in writing via appropriate form, that they will be continuing with the second year or continuing further study.
F	Provision of accurate costings	1. The cost of each unit of study undertaken should be cited in the application, otherwise the minimum sponsorship allocation may be provided (not required for accreditation).
G	Provision of details of impact of study on applicant (contained in application form)	1. As part of their application, applicants need to articulate in approximately two hundred words, the impact this study will have on: • the role the applicant performs • perceived outcomes for students/staff in their school • and any other impacts on Catholic education in the applicant's context
H	Review of applications	1. A DOBCEL appointed panel will oversee sponsorship applications.
I	Approval of applications	1. The panel will process and recommend to the Executive Director of DOBCEL, eligible applicants to be considered for sponsorship.
J	Duration of sponsorship	1. Sponsorship funding is granted for one year only and may not be deferred.

Considerations for Eligibility Discernment

	ACTIVITY	STEPS	YES /NO
A	Is it an endorsed course?	1. Courses recommended by DOBCEL as meeting the requirements for diocesan Religious Education accreditation sponsored studies and other prioritised courses will be listed towards the end of Term Three via the DOBCEL website and the 'All staff weekly newsletter'.	
B	Enrolling in course of study	1. Applicants are responsible for enrolling in the respective course of study as per university requirements (with no payment of fees required until due date).	
C	Employment requirements	1. Applicants must be employed in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Ballarat with a minimum of	

		0.5FTE for the duration of the year in which funding is awarded.	
D	Accessing additional funding	1. Applicants will not have access to any other DOBCEL funding source for the study being undertaken.	
E	Transferring positions within DOBCEL	1. If staff members transfer from one school, or office, to another within the diocese and within the year that funding is awarded, the sponsorship will need to be re-negotiated.	

Funding Release Requirements

	ACTIVITY	STEPS
A	Payment of costs	1. It is recommended that the school pay the upfront cost of the unit and then seek reimbursement from DOBCEL on successful completion of the unit. 2. Evidence of payment, or the request for payment, from the school must be presented to DOBCEL. 3. If a teacher pays costs upfront, evidence of payment, or the request for payment, must be presented to the principal/school bursar or DOBCEL (whichever applies) before funding can be released. 4. If required, the successful applicant may request financial support and a payment plan to enable participation.
B	Provision of the results of study	1. At the end of the academic semester, sponsorship recipients are required to provide to their principal/CEB Team Leader, proof of successful completion of study for that semester. The principal/CEB Team Leader will in turn notify DOBCEL. Failure to do so may result in a cessation of sponsorship payment.
C	Further funding	1. Further sponsorship will not be considered without satisfactory completion of previous units.
D	Additional applications	1. Applications for all courses including Accreditation, must be made for each year of the course.
E	Withdrawing from study	1. If a scholarship recipient intends to withdraw from a unit of study, they have an obligation to comply with university procedures to do so. Following withdrawal, DOBCEL, the Principal and Business Manager of the school or CEB Team Leader must be notified.
F	Sponsorship allocation	1. The allocation of sponsorship will vary in any given year in accordance with priorities. The Executive Director of DOBCEL has discretion to vary this arrangement in specific situations.

Mutual commitment

The support for higher education study provided in this procedure is a mutual commitment between DOBCEL, the school and the employee.

By entering into a sponsorship agreement, the applicant is agreeing that they will:

- enrol in the selected study course that has been agreed to for sponsorship
- attend sponsored study course classes, in accordance with course requirements. Regular attendance in classes is essential for academic success. It is the applicant's responsibility to understand the class schedule and requirements and ensure attendance at these classes (face-to-face/virtual) and other academic activities required for the successful completion of the sponsored study
- promptly inform the instructor/lecturer and makeup any missed work in the event of absence due to illness or other extenuating circumstances
- meet academic requirements. To successfully complete a sponsored study course, the applicant must meet the academic requirements and pass any assessments or exams as outlined in the course syllabus. If the applicant fails to meet the course requirements and does not pass, they will be responsible for paying the full fees associated with that course (unless extenuating circumstances apply)
- will withdraw from the course prior to the course census date in the event they decide not to continue with a sponsored study course. If the sponsorship recipient intends to withdraw from a unit of study, the same obligation applies to complying with university procedures to do so.
- Following withdrawal, of course or unit, DOBCEL, the Principal or CEB Team Leader must be notified. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure they withdraw within the required timeframes, or they will be responsible for paying the full fees associated with that course (unless extenuating circumstances apply).

Extenuating circumstances – in the case of an applicant failing to attend classes and subsequently not passing the sponsored study, DOBCEL and the relevant school or CEB Team Leader will take into consideration any extenuating circumstances that may have prevented the applicant from attending the classes or completing coursework.

Leaving Victorian Catholic Schools Employment

Should an employee leave employment within Catholic Education within 12 months of being granted reimbursement of fees, they shall agree to repay all, or part of the reimbursements made by DOBCEL according to the following scale:

- Up to the first 3 months 100%
- >3 months – up to 6 months 75%
- >6 months – up to 9 months 50%
- >9 months – up to 12 months 25%.