

Special Studies Program Procedure

Section 1 - Introduction

(1) This procedure supports the [Special Studies Program Policy](#) and must be read in conjunction with the Policy.

Section 2 - Program Implementation

Institutional Priorities

(2) Institutional priorities for SSP are approved by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Vice President and listed on the [SSP application form](#).

Budget/Staff Allocation Requirements

(3) The central SSP budget supports SSP related allowances as defined in Section 9. It is set at an institutional-wide level with the aim of ensuring there is an equitable process for funding SSP across Colleges.

(4) Costs associated with time release and teaching that arise from a staff member's SSP are borne by the local area and must be accounted for in the annual planning cycle.

(5) Allocation processes for SSP are set by this procedure and by any directives of the Chief People and Culture Officer not inconsistent with this procedure or the Policy.

General Principles of the SSP

(6) SSP will generally be for a maximum period of 6 months, with a continuous period of two months or more away from home. However, the offer of a period of SSP will be flexible to allow for the needs to the applicant and the University, and shall take into account any reasonable requests for flexibility including matters such as:-

- a. SSP of less than two months overseas may be considered with the approval of the Pro Vice-Chancellor;
- b. Staff involved in teaching on a trimester basis will not be disadvantaged.

(7) Where forms are set and published for application, determination of and appeal of decisions for SSP, then such forms are the prescribed forms, and provided they are not inconsistent with this procedure, must be used to administer the SSP.

(8) The use of SSP for support for the completion of a PhD will be limited to a single SSP period and this should typically be towards the end of the staff member's candidature unless otherwise agreed, and be accompanied by a statement of support from the applicant's principal supervisor for their PhD studies.

(9) Normally, the location of the SSP will be outside the University of Newcastle. In exceptional circumstances, and with the approval of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, some or all of the SSP may be taken at the University of Newcastle.

(10) In the following circumstances, arrangements other than SSP are more appropriate:

- a. Where a staff member is to participate in a conference or meeting or to undertake academic or community service (e.g. as an examiner, adviser or consultant).
- b. Where a staff member is seeking time to write up work, develop new coursework, pursue degree study, creative work or research that might reasonably be considered within a normal work allocation. A Head of School may rearrange a staff member's duties to allow adequate uninterrupted time to engage in these activities.
- c. Where the staff member is to work for an institution or organization which they visit for a significant period of time and for which salary and/or reimbursement of costs are available. In these circumstances leave without pay for part or all of the period may be appropriate. Alternatively, secondment arrangements may be possible.
- d. Where it can be arranged between individuals or Schools and all affected parties agree, staff exchanges are possible. In this case each individual remains on his or her home institution's payroll while fulfilling a full range of duties and responsibilities for, and defined by, the host institution.

Section 3 - Application

Eligibility

(11) All full-time or part-time academic staff with continuing appointments or with fixed-term appointments exceeding three years will be eligible to apply for SSP.

(12) Part-time staff will become eligible to apply for SSP following three calendar years of academic service.

(13) Full-time or part-time academic staff with consecutive fixed term appointments of three years or less will become eligible to apply for SSP when they have completed three years continuous service and are reappointed to an academic position without a break in service at this University.

(14) Full-time or part-time academic staff with continuing appointments or fixed term contracts must have completed probation before commencing SSP.

(15) Staff appointed to senior management positions (e.g. Head of School, Pro Vice-Chancellor, or President of Academic Senate) will not normally be permitted to be absent on SSP during the period of their appointment. However, in recognition of the need for such a person to regain currency in their academic discipline/profession, a period of SSP may be granted following such appointments with the approval of the Vice-Chancellor.

Accrual

(16) Eligibility for SSP will accrue for full-time staff at the rate of six months for three years of academic service.

(17) Eligibility for SSP will accrue for part-time staff on a pro-rata basis.

(18) Under special circumstances and with the approval of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Vice President, SSP eligibility can accrue up to a maximum of twelve months for six years service.

(19) SSP eligibility does not accrue during a period of absence on either SSP or Leave Without Pay.

(20) Where a staff member has held an appointment in another Australian higher education institution, or a comparable international institution, immediately prior to taking up appointment at the University of Newcastle, some credit for eligibility may be granted subject to the following provisions:-

- a. no more than two months has elapsed between the cessation of employment with the releasing institution and commencement of work at this University;
- b. the category of previous employment was one for which the staff member would be eligible for SSP at this University;

- c. the staff member has completed their probation and served continuously for a period of three years at this University; and
- d. the maximum SSP eligibility awarded in recognition of eligible prior service is six months.

(21) Generally, staff will serve continuously for at least three years after a period of SSP is taken before becoming eligible to apply for a further period.

(22) When a period of SSP has been taken, eligibility for future SSP will begin to accrue from the date on which the staff member returns to normal duties.

Timetable

(23) Applications for SSP are called for in the first half of the year for SSP to be taken in the following year.

Lodgement

(24) Eligible staff seeking approval to undertake SSP must apply by completing the [Special Studies Program Application Form](#).

(25) Staff must forward their [SSP Application Form](#) to the Head of School prior to the closing date.

(26) The applicant's Head of School must indicate their support or otherwise for all SSP applications in their school and provide all applications submitted, with a prioritised list, to the Pro Vice-Chancellor and College SSP Committee.

(27) The Head of School must advise the applicant of their support or otherwise for the application providing reasons in the case where support is not given.

Late Applications

(28) Late applications may be lodged only in exceptional circumstances and with the written approval of the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor.

Section 4 - Allocation

College SSP Committee

(29) The College SSP Committee will normally consist of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, the Heads of School within the College, and at least one other academic staff member of the College.

(30) The College SSP Committee will be chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor.

(31) The College SSP Committee composition must meet the University's policy on [gender inclusive membership of University committees](#).

Criteria for Approval

(32) An application can only be approved if it would result in significant benefit to the staff member's teaching, research and/or other scholarly activities beyond that which would occur in the course of the staff member's normal University activities.

(33) The College SSP Committee must be satisfied that the following criteria have been met:

- a. The staff member is research active or there is a valid reason to exempt the staff member from this

requirement.

- b. The staff member has participated in the Performance Review and Development Process and the proposed SSP activities are consistent with outcomes of the process.
- c. The proposed SSP activities are academically sound and essentially concerned with research, teaching, the advancement of a higher degree, and/or other relevant scholarly activities.
- d. The location(s) for the SSP is/are well suited to the proposed activities and the period requested is appropriate.
- e. The proposed program will enhance the contribution of the staff member to scholarly teaching and/or research with significant benefit to the School, College and the University.
- f. The proposed program is aligned with the institutional priorities specified for SSP.
- g. The staff member has the capacity to make effective use of the opportunity, having either a proven and sustained record of productivity in research, teaching and/or scholarship or having considerable potential for such achievement.
- h. The staff member has the support of the Head of School and the SSP is consistent with the School and College's needs and plans.
- i. The staff member has successfully completed any similar activities previously undertaken, including submission of reports.
- j. Satisfactory arrangements have been made with regard to the staff member's teaching, the supervision of postgraduate students (including the appointment of an alternative supervisor) and other administrative duties.
- k. Consideration has been given to the health, safety and wellbeing of a staff member in geographical areas identified as posing potential danger or high risk. Travel to restricted areas will be governed by the University's Policy on travel and by the travel advisories of the [Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#) (DFAT) and [International SOS](#) (ISOS).

Exceptions

(34) Dependent upon the level of funding available in a College and/or the College's ability to sustain the absence of all eligible applicants, some applications that have met the criteria may not be able to be approved. However, schools with small or emerging disciplines should ensure there is equity of access for all staff in terms of SSP participation and should make appropriate plans to allow eligible staff to participate in the SSP.

(35) In cases where a College SSP Committee cannot recommend approval of all applications that have met the above criteria, applications should be considered on their merit and priority given to proposals based on their alignment with institutional priorities.

(36) Where an application is not approved the applicant should be provided with appropriate advice on how to improve the application in the future, including any appropriate recommendations as to the timing of future application.

Variation to an Approved Program

(37) A request for variation to a SSP must be made in the form provided, be recommended by the Head of School, and submitted to the SSP Officer.

(38) SSP may be deferred to the following calendar year with the approval of Head of School and Pro Vice-Chancellor. Any further deferrals require a re-submission of the SSP application for consideration.

(39) The relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor will consider any request for variation to SSP and either approve or reject the request.

(40) A variation to an approved SSP will only be permitted if formally approved.

(41) Employees should note that variations to an approved SSP may result in the need to repay funds to the University.

Section 5 - Conditions

Leave

(42) Staff are required to discuss their annual leave plan with their HOS in conjunction with their SSP application.

(43) Staff must notify the SSP Officer of periods of leave taken while on SSP.

Conference Attendance

(44) A staff member must obtain approval if they wish to attend any conference(s) in addition to those included in the approved SSP application.

(45) Staff are not entitled to claim expenses for conferences attended while on SSP that were not part of the approved plan for SSP.

Outside Earnings and Intellectual Property

(46) The University policy on [Outside Work](#) and its policy on [Intellectual Property](#) apply to any outside work undertaken while on SSP.

(47) Staff may not undertake teaching at the University of Newcastle, or via any controlled entities of the University, while on SSP.

(48) Teaching carried out at other institutions must be consistent with the SSP work approved by the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor.

Reporting on Completion of SSP

(49) On return to duties following SSP staff are required to:

- a. within one month of their return, provide a written report to the Head of School, who should if approved provide a copy of the report to the SSP officer for recording on a central database.
- b. within three months of their return, make a presentation to colleagues and/or students as appropriate on their research and/or scholarship undertaken during SSP.

(50) The report should provide:

- a. A 500 word synopsis suitable for publication for promotion of the University and for reporting of SSP activities;
- b. sufficient detail to identify the key outcomes of the staff member's SSP;
- c. an evaluation of whether the SSP has led to a development, maintenance or improvement of work related skills, knowledge and competencies;
- d. an explanation of the reasons for changing a program where the proposed program has been altered.

(51) Staff may be asked by the Head of School to resubmit their report if it is deemed unsatisfactory.

(52) A copy of the report will be sent to the SSP Officer in Human Resource Services for placement on the staff member's file. Future applications for SSP will be considered in the light of previous reports as well as other information provided with the application. Staff should retain a copy of their report.

(53) An application for SSP will not be considered if the report from a previous SSP has not been submitted or if the report from a previous SSP has been deemed by the Head of School to be unsatisfactory.

(54) If a report is not provided or if the outcome of a staff member's SSP is found to be unsatisfactory by the Head of School the University's provisions for unsatisfactory performance may be followed.

(55) If a report is not provided or if the outcome of a staff member's SSP is found to be unsatisfactory by the Head of School the staff member may also be required to reimburse the travel and living expenses amounts paid by the University.

Period of Duty to be Served After Return From SSP

(56) SSP is approved on the condition that the staff member undertakes to resume normal duties at the University on completion of the SSP period for a period at least equal to the period of the SSP.

(57) Staff who do not return to duty at the University following SSP, or who leave before fulfilling the equal period of return requirement, will normally be required to repay any SSP Allowance paid by the University. In exceptional circumstances, this requirement may be varied by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Vice President.

Extension of Time

(58) Staff who have accrued sufficient entitlement and wish to extend the period of SSP beyond six months must meet at least one of the following criteria and obtain written approval from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Vice President:

- a. it is the staff member's first period of SSP at this or any other university and is for the purpose of establishing his or her academic standing; and/or
- b. the intrinsic nature of the work proposed to be conducted during the SSP requires more than six months; and/or
- c. the staff member has held a senior management or governance position (e.g. Head of School, Pro Vice-Chancellor, President of Academic Senate) and needs to redevelop research and scholarship.

Taxation

(59) Approved financial support paid by the University towards participant travel costs is paid as a reimbursement without deduction of taxation instalments.

(60) Approved financial support for travel by eligible accompanying family members is paid by the University as a component of salary with deduction of taxation instalments as required by Australian taxation law.

(61) Approved financial support for living expenses is paid by the University as a component of salary with the deduction of taxation instalments as required by Australian taxation law.

(62) The participant is responsible for all taxation implications of the payment of travel costs and living expenses and should seek their own advice from the Australian Taxation Office or their accountant in relation to SSP and taxation.

Section 6 - Support

Funding

(63) There are no University sources of financial support for SSP other than those outlined in this Procedure.

(64) Approved financial support for airfares will be paid as a reimbursement to the Staff Member on presentation of receipts to the SSP Officer.

(65) Funding amounts (refer to Section 9) will be reviewed every three years by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Vice President.

(66) Where costs exceed approved funding, staff members will be required to bear the excess costs.

(67) A separate fund managed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Vice President will be reserved for discretionary use in cases involving serious hardship, personal disability, and other equity considerations.

Airfares and Travel Costs

(68) The University will contribute towards an economy class, advance-purchase return airfare up to the amount contained in Section 9.

(69) Staff should apply for airfare/travel cost contributions six weeks ahead of the proposed departure date. Travel must be arranged through the University's preferred provider.

Living Expenses

(70) Staff members may be provided with assistance towards living expenses up to the amount shown in Section 9 for overseas and outside New South Wales.

Support for Family

(71) The University may contribute to the economy class, advance-purchase return airfare up to the amounts contained in Section 9 for a partner and eligible dependent children (ie children under 18) accompanying the staff member on SSP of 2 months or longer.

Supplementary Funding of SSP

(72) Staff members are permitted to supplement their SSP funding through other appropriate funds within the University, such as those associated with consulting and research, where such use is supported by the funding body.

(73) Approval to use supplementary funds from any source within the University must be obtained from the Head of School.

(74) To obtain approval the staff member must submit to the Head of School:

- a. a budget detailing the extra costs envisaged;
- b. the cost centre(s) where the supplementation is to be charged; and
- c. a signed statement that the costs are additional to those provided for in this procedure and relate directly to the staff member's approved SSP.

Insurance

(75) Any staff member who sustains an injury while participating in SSP should contact the University's Workers Compensation Officer immediately for advice regarding entitlements, procedures and any related processes.

(76) The University's Corporate Travel insurance provides travel insurance for staff travel associated with the SSP for the agreed dates of SSP, as recorded with HRS, for the participant only. Spouses, partners or dependents accompanying University staff on SSP are not covered by the University's insurance policy.

(77) The participant must contact Risk Services as soon as reasonably practicable to arrange extended insurance cover should the SSP exceed 180 days.

(78) Information regarding the travel insurance and emergency assistance available whilst travelling, as well as details on how to contact the emergency assistance provider, can be found on the [Insurance Website](#).

(79) Insurance cover is not provided for any private or personal travel in conjunction with University business or SSP.

(80) Insurance cover is only provided for the duration of the agreed SSP dates, excluding any periods of annual leave.

(81) The approval of SSP and the arrangement of travel through the University's preferred provider are sufficient to effect insurance cover.

(82) All travel insurance is null and void if a University traveller:

- a. travels against medical advice;
- b. travels to a destination rated as "Do Not Travel" by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade or International SOS; or
- c. uses a ticket issued in someone else's name.

Section 7 - Appeals

(83) Applicants will have the right to appeal against the decision in relation to their application on the grounds that the Policy or these procedures were not adhered to.

(84) An application for appeal should be lodged with the Chief People and Culture Officer, outlining in writing the basis on which they believe they have grounds to lodge an appeal, and the Chief People and Culture Officer shall direct the appeal to an officer of the University one level higher than the officer or committee that made the original determination, and ask them to consider the appeal.

Section 8 - Roles and Responsibilities

(85) Please refer to the [Special Studies Program Policy](#).

Section 9 - Financial Support

(86) Eligible staff may apply for financial support in the form of a contribution towards travel expenses and living expenses. This support is not guaranteed and is subject to approval of the College SSP Committee.

(87) The following amounts provide a guide for the level of financial support, depending on location and duration of the program.

Type of Financial Support	Amounts Per SSP
Support for airfares/travel costs for staff member travelling for SSP purposes, normally for a continuous period of two (2) months or more.	i. Up to A\$1,000 for travel in Australia, the Pacific and South East Asia; or ii Up to A\$2,800 for travel elsewhere overseas; or iii For other forms of travel within Australia reimbursement or payment of costs may be made up to A\$1,000.
Support for living expenses where the staff member is travelling for SSP purposes and is living away from home, normally for a continuous period of two (2) months or more.	Up to A\$800 per calendar month, for overseas and outside New South Wales to a maximum A\$4,400 per SSP period.

Type of Financial Support	Amounts Per SSP
Support for airfares/travel costs for each eligible accompanying family member travelling with the staff member, normally for a continuous period of two (2) months or more.	i. Up to A\$700 for travel in Australia, the Pacific and South East Asia. ii. Up to A\$1,500 for travel elsewhere overseas.

(88) These levels of financial support will be reviewed every three years by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Vice President.

Status and Details

Status	Historic
Effective Date	12th May 2015
Review Date	31st December 2020
Approval Authority	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Vice President
Approval Date	12th May 2015
Expiry Date	21st May 2023
Responsible Executive	Martin Sainsbury Chief People and Culture Officer martin.sainsbury@newcastle.edu.au
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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Academic Senate" - The Academic Senate of the University as described in the University of Newcastle Act 1989.

"University" - The University of Newcastle, a body corporate established under sections 4 and 5 of the University of Newcastle Act 1989.

"Risk" - Effect of uncertainty on objectives. Note: An effect is a deviation from the expected, whether it is positive and/or negative.

"Academic staff" - An academic employee holding a substantive academic position of 0.5 full-time equivalent or above where the contract length is twelve months or longer.

"Applicant" - Where referring to a student, an applicant is an individual seeking entry to a program or course offered by the University or its partner organisation/s. For all other uses of this term, the generic definition applies.

"Candidature" - The period of time between acceptance of offer and termination, withdrawal from, or completion of a higher degree by research program, including periods when a candidate is not enrolled.

"Course" - When referring to a course offered by the University, a course is a set of learning activities or learning opportunities with defined, assessed and recorded learning outcomes. A course will be identified by an alphanumeric course code and course title. Course types include core courses, compulsory courses, directed courses, capstone courses and electives. For all other uses of this term, the generic definition applies.

"Credit" - When referring to course credit, credit is the recognition of equivalence in content and learning outcomes between different types of learning and/or qualifications. Credit can reduce the amount of learning required to achieve a qualification. For all other uses of this term, the generic definition applies.

"Law" - All applicable statutes, regulations, by-laws, ordinances or subordinate legislation in force from time to time anywhere in Australia, whether made by the Commonwealth, a State, a Territory or a local government and, where the context permits, includes the common law and equity.

"Student" - A person formally enrolled in a course or active in a program offered by the University or affiliated entity.

"Disability" - As defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) (as amended from time to time, or as per any replacing legislation).

"Normal duties" - As directed or approved by a staff member who has relevant delegated authority.

"Officer" - Has the meaning given in the Corporations Act 2001 (Cth), or any replacing legislation.

"Performance Review and Development Process" - The process set by the University that is undertaken between employees and their manager or supervisor where an open dialogue takes place about performance, goal setting, and development planning.

"PhD" - Is a Doctor of Philosophy degree, referred to as a Doctoral Degree (Research) by the Australian Qualifications Framework.

"Postgraduate" - Any qualification being at the level of Graduate Certificate or above.

"School" - An organisational unit forming part of a College or Division, responsible for offering a particular course.

"Staff" - Means a person who was at the relevant time employed by the University and includes professional and academic staff of the University, by contract or ongoing, as well as conjoint staff but does not include visitors to the University.

"Supervisor" - Staff members with direct supervisory responsibility for other staff within the workplace (a Supervisor may also be member of Senior Management, with duties as an Officer as defined in the Work Health and Safety Act 2011, or any replacing legislation).

"Term" - When referring to an academic period, term means a period of time aligned to an academic year for the delivery of a course in which students enrol and for which they are usually charged fees for example semesters, trimesters, summer, winter or full-year term. The academic year for a term is determined by the academic year in which the course commences, not concludes. For all other uses of this term, the generic definition applies.

"University business" - Work that the University has directed to be undertaken which is required, essential, and beneficial for the functions of the University. This includes, but is not limited to, attending meetings, conferences or fieldwork, but does not include activity that is not location specific, e.g. email management, writing papers. University business may be undertaken by staff and non-staff.

"University traveller" - Persons travelling on pre-approved University business. Spouses, partners and dependants of the traveller are excluded.

"College" - An organisational unit established within the University by the Council.