

Special Studies Program Procedures

Section 1 - Overview

(1) These procedures are for the guidance of the academic staff of the University of New England in complying with the University's [Special Studies Program \(SSP\) Policy](#) and must be read in conjunction with that policy.

Section 2 - Scope

(2) This procedure applies to continuing academic staff who hold a balanced workload of teaching, research, and service.

(3) SSP is should not be perceived as an entitlement. SSP is intended to provide academic staff with the opportunity to:

- a. undertake a sustained period free from teaching and administrative duties;
- b. for research or scholarship, engagement with professional programs and development activities, or teaching and administrative/service expertise, aligned with the strategic directions of their School , Faculty, and the University; and
- c. develop, maintain and improve professional networks nationally and internationally in order to contribute to the [UNE Strategic Plan](#).

(4) It is expected that SSP will lead to tangible research, scholarship and/or engagement outcomes, as agreed at the time of approval.

Section 3 - Procedures

Eligibility

(5) SSP is a privilege earned by track record and demonstrable prospective outputs. It is not an entitlement granted due to the effluxion of time. Eligibility for SSP means 'eligible to apply for an approved period of SSP leave'.

(6) UNE staff eligible to apply include:

- a. continuing academic with no less than three years of equivalent full-time unbroken service;
- b. staff appointed to fixed-term positions subsequently appointed without a break in service to a continuing position;
- c. staff appointed in a part-time capacity (on a pro-rata basis).

(7) A staff member will only be granted SSP where:

- a. they have met the SSP merit, relevance and output criteria;
- b. their Faculty or Directorate has certified that the resources needed for SSP, including the cost of teaching and work replacements, are available.

(8) SSP will accrue at the rate of two months for each full year of service. At no time will any accrual or period of SSP exceed twelve months. These timeframes might be extended from time-to-time to account for career interruptions.

(9) Periods of long service leave, leave without pay, or SSP will not count as service for the purpose of determining SSP eligibility.

Assessment of Application

(10) Applications for SSP will normally be called bi-annually, and must be submitted to the relevant Executive Dean on the SSP Application Form available from the [Special Studies Program \(SSP\) website \(UNE login required\)](#). Applicants are encouraged to consider incorporating an element of annual leave into proposed SSP itineraries but must ensure that the leave request adheres to the requirements of the Travel Procedures where relevant.

(11) An application for SSP will be considered comparable in quality to that expected of a peer-review publication, or major grant application, with a particular focus on outcomes from the anticipated investment of University resources.

(12) Applicants should discuss their SSP plans with their Head of School or supervisor as part of their annual Performance Planning Development And Review (PPDR) process.

(13) Once endorsed by the Head of School or supervisor, applications will be assessed by the Dean of the Faculty for submission to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for approval. Only those approved at Faculty level will be considered by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

(14) SSP outcomes must be aligned to the applicant's current level of appointment as outlined in the Academic Profiles Document or to the relevant components of UNE's Core Capability Framework.

(15) SSP applicants must provide evidence that the proposed SSP Program will, where applicable:

- a. produce demonstrable results that contribute to furthering the objectives of the [UNE Strategic Plan](#);
- b. generate activity and experience that cannot be achieved without an SSP period;
- c. generate tangible ERA ranked research outcomes;
- d. engender career-enhancing professional development outcomes that will further the mission of the relevant organisational unit and the University; and
- e. provide reports from two previous SSP periods that have been appropriately acquitted.

(16) The Executive Dean is required to certify that:

- a. School teaching and administrative commitments will be met without the appointment of additional staff, or that there is funding relief available;
- b. all tasks relating to teaching responsibilities (eg. marking, unit revision, and preparation) for the trimesters both before and after the SSP period will be discharged;
- c. adequate provision has been made for the supervision of all postgraduate students for whom the applicant is responsible;
- d. it is in accordance with discussions between the applicant and the Head of School during the annual PPDR process;
- e. there is sufficient evidence that supports the likelihood of the program of work being achieved, and that the funds applied for meet the guidelines.

(17) Where the Head of School or Executive Dean does not support an application, they must indicate, in writing, the reasons why and provide feedback.

(18) The applicant is required to submit the final version of the application with Head of School endorsement and

Dean's approval to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for consideration.

Endorsement and Approval

(19) The DVC - duplicate will assess applications that have been endorsed by the Head of School and approved by the Executive Dean, with reference to the academic merit of the application and its alignment with the relevant Faculty and the University's strategic priorities.

(20) The Executive Dean Deputy Vice-Chancellor will be mindful of the applicant's:

- a. demonstrated capacity to undertake and produce the planned outcomes including sufficient evidence that supports the likelihood of these being achieved;
- b. track record of achievement (including outcomes from previous SSPs)

(21) The DVC - duplicate will advise applicants in writing whether the application:

- a. receives unconditional approval;
- b. is endorsed with specified conditions which must be incorporated prior to the commencement of SSP;
- c. is not endorsed, but the applicant be granted an opportunity to revise and resubmit their application in the next round; or
- d. is rejected outright.

(22) The Deputy Vice-Chancellor may consider rebuttals against a decision of a Head of School or Dean concerning the academic merit of an application and will determine whether the application should be reconsidered for approval.

(23) An application is only considered approved, once authorised by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

Financial Assistance

(24) Staff on SSP will be entitled to financial assistance as determined by the University.

(25) The funds available for SSP will be determined in advance as part of the annual operating budget of the University, and will be administered by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

(26) The following allowances are available for staff on SSP. The budget included in the application form should be in line with these allowances:

- a. Travel allowance (not for local daily travel):
 - i. \$1500 for travel within Australia, OR
 - ii. \$3500 for travel overseas.
- b. Accommodation allowance
 - i. An accommodation allowance is available to assist with the costs of accommodation and are calculated on the period spent outside of Armidale. Periods of leave within the SSP program do not attract an accommodation allowance.
 - ii. \$800 per month (or \$200 per week)
 - Calculate the total time spent outside Armidale as indicated in your travel itinerary in the SSP application form and multiply by the allowance. For example, if you will be away for three (3) months, your allowance will be \$2400; or if you will be away for one (1) month and three (3) weeks (ie. seven (7) weeks x \$200) you will be eligible for \$1400.

(27) No additional allowance is provided for staff travelling with dependants.

(28) The number of applications approved in a calendar year may be limited by the funds available in the University annual operating budget and determined by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor taking into account the nature of the applications received and the capacity of the School to maintain normal teaching/administration operations.

(29) Schools may choose to allocate funds in their annual operating budget to supplement SSP beyond that provided for centrally, with the Executive Dean having responsibility and discretion in the allocation of these funds.

(30) If a staff member and partner are both employed at the University and both apply to undertake an SSP in the same round, they shall be treated as separate applicants for financial assistance.

(31) Approved funding for SSP will be transferred to the staff member's academic pursuit fund (APF) account.

(32) Staff members must book their travel and accommodation in line with the current [Procurement Policy](#) and its associated [Travel Procedures](#). The cost code in that booking will be the APF account.

(33) Where the staff member does not return to normal duties as required under clauses 45 and 46 of these procedures, the staff member may be required to repay to UNE any SSP financial assistance (or appropriate proportion thereof, as determined by the Executive Dean and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor).

Additional Financial Support

(34) Staff may utilise other University funds to which they have access, such as research grants, in order to contribute towards travel and accommodation expenses not covered by the travel grant or accommodation allowance, provided they comply with University policy and the conditions of expenditure of such funds.

Taxation

(35) All applicants are referred to Australian Taxation Office (ATO) rulings or their tax advisor regarding matters including: claiming appropriate expenses, compliance with any substantiation provisions for travel or other work-related expenses, maintenance of a travel diary.

Prior to Commencement

(36) At least four weeks prior to the commencement of SSP, staff members who supervise postgraduate research students must submit the required form, advising of the arrangements that have been made for the supervision of their postgraduate students, through the Dean of the Faculty, to Research Services.

(37) Applicants should note the FBT requirements with respect to personal leave days, which are days on which staff members do not undertake Official University Business.

Variations to Approved SSP

(38) A variation requiring substantial change to the focus of the SSP must be submitted to the Head of School and the Dean for endorsement, and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for approval.

(39) A variation that is made before SSP commences that does not involve substantial change and does not impact on the approved financial assistance does not require approval, but the Head of School and the Dean must be notified of the final arrangement prior to the commencement of SSP.

(40) Variations required following commencement of SSP and/or variations that result in a change to financial assistance, must be approved by the Dean and submitted to the office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

(41) It is the responsibility of the staff member to ensure that their travel insurance remains valid after the variation.

Unforeseen Interruptions in the SSP Period

(42) The University may direct a staff member to postpone or interrupt a period of SSP.

(43) While on SSP, and only in cases of extreme urgency, a staff member may be asked by the University to assist in a specific situation. In these circumstances, appropriate expenses will be paid.

(44) Where more than five consecutive working days are lost to the SSP for unforeseen interruptions, such as sick leave, the staff member may apply to extend the SSP period or to have the days re-credited (although no additional financial assistance will be provided for re-accredited days).

Return to Service

(45) Academic staff undertaking SSP are required to return to normal duties for a period of time equal to the period of time spent on SSP.

(46) Where a staff member resigns from UNE while on SSP, he/she will be expected to return to UNE within one week to resume normal duties for the duration of the term of notice.

Reporting

(47) The staff member must complete and submit an SSP report to the Dean within two months of the completion date of the SSP period. A template is available on the [Special Studies Program \(SSP\) website \(UNE login required\)](#). The report will include:

- a. a short summary of achievements (200 words) for inclusion in the Summary SSP Report presented annually to Academic Board;
- b. a summary of activities undertaken and contacts established or developed;
- c. a summary of progress towards original outcomes and goals;
- d. any additional outcomes or goals;
- e. plans for publicising outcomes through peer-reviewed outlets; and
- f. a financial report providing details of any outside earnings and other assistance, including research grants, travel grants and/or scholarships, which relate to the value of travel and accommodation, received by the staff member during SSP.

(48) A staff member who accepts a position with an external body must comply with the UNE's [Remuneration and Working Arrangements Policy](#) and its associated [Private Paid Outside Work Procedures](#).

(49) The University reserves the right to seek clarification of grants and earnings received while on SSP.

(50) The Executive Dean will provide an evaluative comment on the report within four weeks of submission. The staff member will sign that they have seen the evaluative comment and submit it to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor's office and People and Culture for noting and management of accruals.

(51) A supplementary report may be submitted to the relevant Executive Dean at any time.

(52) If the report is not submitted within two months of returning to normal duties, further SSP accrual will not commence until the date on which the report is submitted to People and Culture.

(53) Where there is an outstanding report, no further application for SSP will be considered.

(54) A staff member may apply to the Executive Dean for an extension to the date for the submission of the report.

(55) Applicants must acknowledge their affiliation with UNE in all publications resulting from SSP.

Records

(56) A copy of the report will be recorded on the staff member's personal file, together with all other documentation relating to a staff member's SSP. Copies of applications and outcome letters will be held in the University's approved corporate Records Management System (RMS).

Roles and Responsibilities

(57) The Deputy Vice-Chancellors is responsible for:

- a. overseeing the development, review, and implementation of the policy, procedure, guidelines and forms for SSP;
- b. approving the SSP procedures and forms;
- c. convening and chairing an SSP Advisory Group if required;
- d. the final approval of all SSP applications; and
- e. providing unsuccessful applicants with feedback when requested.

(58) An SSP Advisory Group, membership constituted on a needs basis, is responsible for providing advice and support to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor on a determination of an SSP application when deemed necessary.

(59) Staff members approved for SSP are responsible for:

- a. abiding by the conditions of SSP;
- b. abiding by all UNE rules, policies and procedures;
- c. submitting an SSP report and a financial report within two (2) months of returning to normal duties; and
- d. maintaining contact and engagement with the University while on SSP and responding to any matters that require attention.

Appeals

(60) A staff member may appeal to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor if their application for SSP is not approved.

(61) The final decision on the academic merit and relevance of the proposal is a matter for the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

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Authority and Compliance

(63) The Deputy Vice-Chancellor as Procedure Administrator, pursuant to the University's [Special Studies Program Policy](#), makes these Procedures.

(64) University Representatives must observe these Procedures in relation to University matters.

(65) These Procedures operate as and from the Effective Date.

(66) Previous Procedures relating to the [Special Studies Program Policy](#) are replaced and have no further operation from the Effective Date of this new Procedure.

Section 4 - Definitions Specific to these Procedures

(67) Accrual of Service - the length of time identified as being available for future SSP should the applicant meet the criteria for approval.

(68) Staff means - a staff member, who is not a casual employee, and is covered by [UNE Academic and English Language Teaching Staff Enterprise Agreement 2020-2022](#), or the replacement Enterprise Agreement.

(69) Supervisor means - the role to whom a position reports.

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	11th November 2020
Review Date	11th November 2022
Approval Authority	Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Approval Date	10th November 2020
Expiry Date	To Be Advised
Unit Head	Simon Evans Deputy Vice-Chancellor dvc@une.edu.au
Enquiries Contact	Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor +61 2 6773 5050

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Normally" - Where the word 'normally' is used in a rule, policy, procedure or guideline, it means that it is the default position that must be followed unless exceptional circumstances exist that require a departure from the default position, as determined by the Rule Administrator acting reasonably.

"Dependant" - Means spouse, partner, child or other financial dependant.

"Official University Business" - Means activities directly associated with the functions of the University including but not limited to teaching & learning, research, conference, consultancy, administrative and other official duties undertaken on behalf of the University.

"Records Management System (RMS)" - The University of New England installation of HP TRIM, or equivalent replacement system, under the control of the Records Management Office.

"School" - Is an organisational unit comprising academic staff in related fields of study who are responsible for teaching and research in those academic fields together with support staff. Each School also has lead management for the design and delivery of the courses within its responsibility.

"Effective Date" - means the Rule/Policy takes effect on the day on which it is published, or such later day as may be specified in the policy document.

"University Representative" - University Representative means a University employee (casual, fixed term and permanent) contractor, agent, appointee, UNE Council member, adjunct, visiting academic and any other person engaged by the University to undertake some activity for or on behalf of the University. It includes corporations and other bodies falling into one or more of these categories.

"Faculty" - An organisational unit consisting of a group of related Schools, which is responsible for coordinating the management and quality of the teaching and research conducted by those Schools.