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 Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & Global) 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 College 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 College 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 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 following three calendar years of academic service at time of commencement of SSP.

(12) Staff are expected to have contributed a minimum of 20% of their time to education and 10% of their time to leadership and engagement over the last three calendar years.

(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, College Pro Vice-Chancellor, Division Pro Vice-Chancellor, or President 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 Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & Global), 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 a prioritised list of all applications submitted to the College 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 College Pro Vice-Chancellor.

Section 4 - Allocation

College SSP Committee

(29) The College SSP Committee will normally consist of the College 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 College 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 Academic Planning and Performance 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 Head of School should inform the applicant in person and provide the applicant with an opportunity to discuss 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 SSP Variation form provided, be recommended by the Head of School, and submitted to the SSP Officer. This also includes any changes to SSP travel plans.

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

(39) The relevant College 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 College 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 Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & Global).

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 Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & Global):

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, College Pro Vice-Chancellor, Division Pro Vice-Chancellor, President of Academic Senate) and needs to redevelop research and scholarship.

Section 6 - Support

Funding

(59) There are no University sources of financial support for SSP other than those outlined in this Procedure (refer to Section 9).

(60) Approved financial support will be paid as an allowance to the Staff Member in the payroll immediately prior to the SSP period commencing or, where requested by the staff member, prior to booking travel for SSP.

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

(62) Staff members experiencing serious hardship, personal disability, or other equity considerations may make a request to the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & Global) for discretionary funding assistance.

Supplementary Funding of SSP

(63) The only other University funding that may be used to supplement the staff members SSP allowance are from grant or project funds where use is compliant with the terms of the relevant funding agreement.

Insurance

(64) 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.

(65) 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.

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

(67) 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.

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

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

(70) Travel associated with SSP must be undertaken in accordance with the University's Travel Policy and Travel Procedure.

Section 7 - Appeals

(71) 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.

(72) 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

(73) Please refer to the Special Studies Program Policy.

Section 9 - Financial Support

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

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

(76) The financial support outlined below is effective from 1 January 2026 to 31 December 2026:

	Month One	Per Month 2 to 5	Additional allowance for each dependent	Maximum
Domestic (national travel outside of NSW)	$2,015	$897	$780	$6,381

	Month One	Per Month 2 to 5	Additional allowance for each dependent	Maximum
International	$4,026	$897	$1676	$9,288

(77) The financial support outlined below is effective from 1 January 2027:

	Month One	Per month 2 to 5	Additional Allowance for each dependent	Maximum
Domestic (national travel outside of NSW)	$2,102	$936	$814	$6,655
International	$4,199	$936	$1,748	$9,687

(78) The additional allowance for a dependent is paid where travel is normally for a continuous period of two (2) months or more.

(79) The allowance is not payable during periods of annual leave taken during SSP period.

(80) If the staff member does not undertake SSP or does not meet the conditions in Section 5 of this Procedure they will be required to repay the allowance regardless of whether costs have been incurred. The University reserves the right to recover any SSP associated funds from the staff members salary.

(81) The Chief Financial Officer will index the maximum financial support amounts annually to the annual Consumer Price Index (CPI) movement in the September quarter as published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The indexed value will be applied from the following January.

(82) The maximum levels of financial support are reviewed by the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & Global) will be reviewed annually and at least every three years.

Taxation

(83) Approved financial support paid by the University towards participant travel and living costs and accompanying family members travel costs is paid as an allowance. The allowance will be reported as a component of the staff member’s assessable income with the deduction of taxation instalments as required by Australian taxation law.

(84) The participant is responsible for all taxation implications associated with the allowance and claiming of associated deductions. The University cannot provide personal tax advice but encourages recipients to obtain professional tax advice in regard to allowable deductions and record keeping requirements prior to incurring any expenses.

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	10th November 2026
Review Date	18th December 2026
Approval Authority	Chief People and Culture Officer
Approval Date	9th November 2026
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Executive	Martin Sainsbury Chief People and Culture Officer martin.sainsbury@newcastle.edu.au
Enquiries Contact	Martin Sainsbury Chief People and Culture Officer martin.sainsbury@newcastle.edu.au HR Support 4033 9999

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" - A person employed as an academic staff member or appointed as an academic honorary appointee (including adjunct, clinical conjoint, visiting, honorary and conjoint appointments), but does not include persons who are employed solely as teachers or professional staff.

"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.

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

"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.

"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.

"Research" - As defined in the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, or any replacing Code or document.

"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.

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

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