Special Studies Program Procedure

Please note: the Special Studies Program has been placed on hold. Please contact AskHR if you have any questions in relation to this – email askhr@uq.edu.au; telephone (07) 3365 2623.

Section 1 - Purpose and Objectives

(1) This Procedure enacts the Special Studies Program Policy and describes the benefits, conditions, application process and reporting that apply to Special Studies Programs.

Section 2 - Definitions, Terms, Acronyms

Term	Definition
Authorised Officer	The officer authorised to exercise the relevant Human Resources (HR) power or function in accordance with the Human Resources Sub-delegations Schedules.
Chief Investigator	The investigator with overall responsibility for the research project or grant.
SSP Leave	Leave provided to eligible staff to undertake an approved Special Studies Program.
Head	Head of School or equivalent level.
Key areas of academic activity	Research/creative work, clinical innovation, scholarship of teaching.

Section 3 - Procedure Scope/Coverage

(2) This Procedure applies to academic staff across the four academic categories - Teaching and Research, Teaching Focused, Research Focused or Clinical Academic - who meet the eligibility criteria.

Section 4 - Procedure Statement

(3) Staff on Special Studies Program (SSP) can receive financial support in the form of a basic allowance and a weekly allowance, specified in the 'Financial Assistance' provisions in Section 7. A staff member cannot apply for SSP without having prepared an Academic Portfolio and completing an Annual Review. As detailed below, staff applying for SSP must ensure their proposed program meets certain conditions, submit an application, have that application assessed against set criteria, and report on their completed SSP.

Section 5 - Accrual and Taking of SSP Leave

Accrual of SSP

(4) SSP leave is accrued at the rate of 44 working days per year over the period the eligible staff member undertakes service at the University. Those on less than full-time appointments, but at least a 50% fraction, accrue SSP leave at a

rate equivalent to their appointment fraction.

(5) The maximum amount of SSP leave that may accrue is 264 working days (equivalent to 12 months).

(6) No SSP leave accrues during an SSP program or a period of leave without pay greater than three months.

Years of Service	Working Days of SSP Accrued
1 year	44 days
2 years	88 days
3 years	132 days – equivalent to 6 months
4 years	176 days
5 years	220 days
6 years	264 days - equivalent to 12 months

Taking of SSP

(7) To take a program of the duration in the table below, the applicant must have accrued at least the corresponding number of days, as outlined under clauses 4 to 6, which will be reduced in whole or in part according to the duration of the program taken.

Duration of Program	Accrual used
0 – 2 months	2 years (88 days FTE)
2 – 6 months	3 years (132 days FTE)
6 – 8 months	4 years (176 days FTE)
8 – 9 months	4.5 years (198 days FTE)
9 – 10 months	5 years (220 days FTE)
10 – 11 months	5.5 years (242 days FTE)
11 – 12 months	6 years (264 days FTE)

Section 6 - Application and Approval Process

Part A - Applying for SSP

Application Process

(8) An applicant for Special Studies Program must:

a. complete “Form A - Academic Portfolio of Achievement”, including Folio 8 which describes the proposal for the Special Studies Program and outcomes from the previous SSP, and “Form B - Achievements and Objectives” which are discussed with their Supervisor at Annual Review;
b. discuss the proposal with their Head (if this is not their Supervisor);
c. submit the completed Form A, Form B and the “Recommendation and Decision - Special Studies Program” to the local Human Resources Manager or Consultant. Refer to clauses 15 to 17 for submission dates.

(9) The Head will collate a list of applications and the nature of the program proposed across the School/Institute, taking into consideration each staff member’s period of service since their previous program, the number of staff

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seeking to undertake SSP at the same time, and other issues they consider relevant. The Head will provide this list and their recommendations to the Authorised Officer.

(10) After the Authorised Officer has made a decision on the application, they will forward the completed documentation to the local HR Consultant or Manager and provide a copy to the applicant.

Information Provided

(11) An applicant must provide the following information:

a. in Folio 8 - details of the proposed SSP and the work (including work not connected with the program) to be carried out during the period of the program, including an itinerary of locations that will be visited;
b. in Folio 8 - a description of the significant benefits expected to accrue to the University through the enhancement of the individual's contribution to key areas of academic activity, and the principal outcomes for the proposed program;
c. in Folio 8 - where the applicant has had an SSP previously, a statement of the outcomes from that program (particularly peer reviewed outputs), assessed against the plan approved for that program;
d. any other information required by the Executive Dean or Institute Director.

(12) The SSP must comply with the Policy and this Procedure and the applicant must ensure that there is a clear underlying rationale for all aspects of the program.

Quantity of Information Required

(13) The volume of information required will vary with proposals and the circumstances of applicants. The onus is upon the applicant to show that significant benefits will accrue to the University through the enhancement of the individual’s contributions to key areas of academic activity and sufficient information must be provided to achieve this end.

(14) Where a proposal is dependent upon the cooperation of a host, attainment of a grant or other external factor, the applicant may have an alternative plan as a standby. If the applicant wishes to gain approval for a program, covering all alternatives, then all those alternatives must be described and justified.

Submission Dates

(15) An application for a program must be lodged by the date provided in the annual academic application submission timetable or another specified date as agreed by the Authorised Officer.

(16) Normally, a program must be due to commence between 1 December that year and 31 December of the next, but in special circumstances the Authorised Officer may approve a program to commence at an earlier date.

(17) If the purposes and goals of the proposal are well defined, some uncertainty concerning the venue and travel dates should not deter a staff member from submitting in a particular round.

Part B - Approval Process

Authority for Approval

(18) Approval decisions are based on recommendations from the relevant Head, who provides written comment on the value of the proposed SSP and its potential contribution to the organisational unit and the wider University.

(19) The Authorised Officer may convene a Committee to make recommendations on SSP applications. In this case, the Authorised Officer will make a decision on the application after receiving the Committee’s advice. The Authorised

Officer chairs any committee convened to consider SSP issues. This committee need not be a separate committee but can be an existing suitable committee (e.g. Committee of Heads of School).

Criteria for Approval

(20) In considering applications, the Authorised Officer takes the following matters into account:

a. the relevance of the proposed program to the interests of the University and the applicant, including any impact on key areas of academic activity;
b. the academic record of the applicant;
c. where the applicant has had an SSP previously, a statement of the outcomes from that program (particularly peer reviewed outcomes), assessed against the approved plan for that program;
d. the list provided by the Head;
e. staffing and budgetary considerations, in particular the existence of arrangements to deal with teaching commitments and postgraduate supervision. It is expected that an Associate Advisor will be available on campus in cases where the academic taking SSP away from the University is the Principal Advisor. The Head must confirm in writing that acceptable arrangements are in place.

Notification of Application Outcome

(21) All applicants will receive written advice as to the outcome of their SSP application. Unsuccessful applicants will be informed that they are welcome to seek feedback on their application from the Authorised Officer.

Alterations to Programs

(22) In Faculties, the Authorised Officer has the discretion to approve minor modifications to SSP programs as required, using the “Modification to Program form”. Requests to significantly alter approved programs must be forwarded to the Authorised Officer through the Head and the Faculty HR Section.

(23) In Institutes, the Authorised Officer approves minor and significant modifications to approved SSP programs using the “Modification to Program form”.

Power to Suspend Compliance

(24) The Authorised Officer may permit a departure from this Procedure and may impose conditions when doing so.

Appeals

(25) A staff member whose application has been refused by the Authorised Officer may apply for reconsideration. The Authorised Officer will refer the appeal to an appropriate committee convened to deal with SSP matters. If the application is again rejected, the staff member may appeal to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), who will determine the matter. In the case of Research Focused staff, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) will consult with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

Section 7 - Benefits

Financial Assistance

Salary

(26) Staff undertaking SSP will receive their usual fortnightly salary payments. Loadings are retained, except for those relating to special duties discontinued during the program. Part-time staff undertaking a full-time program will receive

a salary allowance increasing it to the full-time equivalent.

Allowances

(27) Staff who have an approved SSP will receive the following additional financial assistance after submitting the "Request for Financial Assistance form".

(28) For overseas trips:

a. $3,500 basic allowance; and
b. $500 per week allowance for the first 13 weeks and $250 per week thereafter.

(29) For trips within Australia:

a. $1,000 basic allowance; and
b. $500 per week allowance for the first 13 weeks and $250 per week thereafter.

(30) A staff member may claim only one basic allowance in an SSP. Staff taking SSP within Australia will be eligible for financial assistance if they take their SSP at a location more than 400 kilometres from Brisbane. Staff taking SSP with a combination of Australian and overseas locations will receive the overseas basic allowance.

(31) The amount of financial assistance calculated before the start of a program is a provisional grant which may be reviewed in the light of information provided in the report after the program and financial adjustments may then be made.

(32) Except with the approval of the Authorised Officer, financial assistance will not be available until two months before the start of a program.

Other Funds

(33) Staff undertaking SSP may access University funds over and above the normal scheduled SSP allowances. Such funds would include:

a. Research grants financed by external agencies (e.g. ARC, NHMRC). Expenses which cannot be claimed include travel expenses from Brisbane to the SSP base, subsistence expenses while at the relocated work place, or any other expenses associated with the main research activities of the program, unless the expenses have been specifically allowed in the conditions of the grant.
b. Other University funds (e.g. New Staff Research Grant, conference funds or organisational unit consulting or testing account). Approval is sought through the normal procedures.

Section 8 - Conditions for Programs

SSP and Leave

(34) Leave such as Recreation Leave or Long Service Leave may be combined with SSP. An SSP that covers a semester or more must include an appropriate amount of Recreation Leave. Approval of an SSP application may be withheld if no provision for Recreation Leave has been made. Relevant approvals must be sought from the Authorised Officer, who will take into consideration the number and duration of other absences in the organisational unit before approving such leave.

Location of Special Studies Programs

(35) SSP may be taken in overseas locations or within Australia or a combination of both. Applicants will need to show that the proposed locations for their programs are those best suited to the work to be carried out.

(36) Travel plans must be recorded on the “Travel Notification Template” for insurance purposes.

Length of SSP

(37) A program must not extend beyond one semester, and the associated University vacations, unless the extension into a further semester is supported by the Authorised Officer.

(38) Where an overseas trip is included as an integral part of a comprehensive plan for SSP of at least two months duration, it is generally expected that such a trip will be of at least two weeks duration. The staff member may request the funding detailed above in Section 7, ‘Financial Assistance’ provisions. Such a trip will be different from a short trip simply to attend a conference.

Curtailed Programs

(39) In the interests of the University, the Authorised Officer may curtail a staff member’s program with effect from a specified date and may grant appropriate financial compensation.

Requirement to Complete Approved Program and Provide Subsequent Service

(40) A program is subject to the following terms and any special conditions determined by the Authorised Officer.

(41) The staff member must pursue the program approved by the Authorised Officer, unless alterations have been approved (see ‘Alterations to Programs’ provisions).

(42) The University may require a staff member to repay:

a. salary paid to the staff member for any period of time immediately before or after the program during which the staff member was absent from the University without written approval; and
b. salary paid to the staff member for any period of time during which the staff member does not diligently pursue the program for any reason other than sickness or the written authority of the Authorised Officer. The staff member may also be required to pay a pro-rata proportion of the total financial assistance for the program (determined by the proportion of the program that was not diligently pursued).

(43) At the end of the program and any approved leave (other than Sick Leave) immediately following it, the staff member must continue in employment at the University for a period equal to the length of the program so as to requite the University’s expenditure on the program. A staff member who does not complete this service must pay to the University an amount equal to the sum of the salary received for the unrequited period of the program and a proportionate part of the financial assistance received.

(44) As well as any other rights it may have to the extent permitted by law, the University may deduct from any money otherwise payable to the staff member the amount payable under these provisions, unless the Authorised Officer permits an alternative method of payment.

Section 9 - Reports

(45) Within three months of return to normal duty, the staff member must complete the relevant section of the Academic Portfolio and the Confirmation of Completed SSP form (which includes a report) and forward them to the

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relevant Head or Institute Director for consideration.

(46) After considering the report and any further information they may have requested, the Head or Institute Director may accept the report or require the staff member to revise it. If the staff member does not revise the report, or if the Head or Institute Director does not accept the revised report, the Executive Dean or Institute Director must determine the action to be taken (including the refusal or deferment of a future program) upon recommendation from the Head as appropriate.

(47) The staff member must be advised of any critical comment the Executive Dean or Institute Director records on the report.

(48) If a staff member fails to submit a report within three months of return, there is no entitlement to accrue SSP leave until the report is received by the Head or Institute Director (unless the Executive Dean or Institute Director determines otherwise).

(49) The Faculty/Institute Human Resources Manager or Consultant will distribute a list to each Executive Dean or Institute Director, once per semester, of those staff who have produced a report on their SSP.

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