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## **SPECIAL STUDIES PROGRAM (SSP) Procedural Guidelines**

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### **PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

This document sets out the procedure academic staff must follow when applying for Special Studies Program (SSP). It also provides guidelines for financial assistance arrangements available to academic staff on approved SSP.

The Dean is the approving authority and can only approve a program which, in their view, would result in a significant benefit to the staff member's research or other scholarly activities beyond that which would occur in the course of her/his normal University activities.

This document should be read in conjunction with the UNSW Special Studies Program (SSP) Policy.

### **DEFINITIONS**

**Special Studies Program (SSP)** - a period of release for academic staff from normal duties to engage in research or other scholarly work.

**Internal Release** - SSP based on the staff member's home campus, which is normally for a minimum period of six (6) weeks. This may include completion of a PhD.

**HR14 Form** - Application to Undertake a Special Studies Program (SSP).

**HR16 Form** – Application for SSP Grant/Half Salary in Advance.

### **PROCEDURE**

#### **Application**

An application for SSP or Internal Release must be submitted on the HR14 form, together with any supporting documentation as prescribed by the faculty. Each faculty is responsible for establishing requirements for additional documentation on which the Dean can base his/her decision.

Note that applications will not be considered if the report from a previous program has not been submitted.

An application should be submitted to the Head of School who will assess eligibility, consider the application within the context of the School's teaching requirements, and make a recommendation to the Dean.

Once the Dean has considered the application the applicant and the Head of School will be advised in writing of the outcome (whether approved or not). There is no mechanism available to appeal against a decision by a Dean not to approve an application for SSP or internal release.

#### **Method of Debiting Eligibility**

Where SSP or Internal Release covers all the teaching weeks in a session the SSP eligibility will be reduced by six months. Where an SSP or Internal Release covers only some of the teaching weeks and where such an absence does not prevent the normal teaching program in the School being carried out, the eligibility will be reduced on a pro-rata basis. Where an SSP or Internal Release covers only some of the teaching weeks and where such an absence does prevent the normal teaching program in the School being carried out, the eligibility will be reduced by six

months or by twelve months where the normal teaching program of the School cannot be carried out in two sessions.

Care should be taken when staff members apply for SSP in excess of six months. For example ten or eleven months SSP eligibility is insufficient to cover an SSP absence for the whole of session 1 and session 2 in a calendar year. In such cases an accrued SSP eligibility of 12 months is required.

### Leave

Recreation Leave and/or Long Service Leave accrued during the SSP should be taken in conjunction with the approved SSP period. Approval of SSP may be conditional upon the staff member reducing their leave accruals (eg. where the staff member's recreation leave accrual is greater than 40 days). Applications for leave must be submitted for approval via *myUNSW* prior to commencement of the SSP

### Outside Remuneration Whilst on SSP

Outside remuneration during SSP is subject to standard UNSW policy on paid outside work. Any remuneration which is negotiated after the granting of SSP must be notified to the Head of School and Dean who may alter SSP arrangements accordingly.

While full salary is normally paid if the approved program is adhered to, the University reserves the right to pay less than the full salary to a staff member who, while undertaking an SSP, will receive substantial outside remuneration. This is particularly the case where the net amount of such remuneration (after allowance for any expenses connected with the SSP) might be expected to exceed 25% of the normal salary. On return from the SSP the member of staff may, on submission of a detailed statement of actual earnings and expenditure, apply for an adjustment of salary previously withheld.

### Acceptance of Teaching Position Whilst on SSP

In order to offset the costs of undertaking an overseas SSP or to work with a particular expert in the subject area or at a leading institution, an applicant may wish to accept a teaching position during the SSP. This is normally acceptable provided that the teaching responsibilities account for no more than 30% of the period of SSP. In circumstances where the approved program relates directly to teaching methods, this 30% limit will not apply.

## GUIDELINES

### FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR STAFF ON SSP

All financial assistance for staff on SSP is funded by the staff member's business unit. The following rates for financial assistance are therefore provided **as a guide only**. The head of the business unit has the discretion to vary the amount of financial assistance provided to staff for SSP. However any variation from the rates provided below should be communicated to all eligible staff in the business unit prior to application.

<b>SUGGESTED RATES FOR SSP FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE</b>					
	AIRFARE (\$)	GRANT TOWARDS LIVING EXPENSES (\$) (calculated in weekly increments)	AIRFARE (\$) SPOUSE *	AIRFARE (\$) CHILD *	TOTAL (Based on 6 months SSP+ Spouse + 1 child) (\$)
Overseas Placement	2,860	1,000 per month (pro rata at \$250/wk)	1,500	1,500	11,860
Domestic Placement (outside NSW/ACT)	1,000	400 per month (pro rata at \$100/wk)	1,000	700	5,100

\* Spouse and child financial assistance will normally only be paid if SSP is for 8 weeks or more in length. The Dean may approve full or partial financial assistance for shorter periods of SSP in exceptional circumstances, for example, carer/family responsibilities.

### **Airfares**

Payment of the staff member's airfare is not shown on their Payment Summary.

Travel must be arranged in accordance with the UNSW Travel Policy and Procedures. Further information is available at: <http://www.proc.unsw.edu.au/travel>

For further information about School procedures, please contact the School Administrator.

### **Grant Money Towards Living Expenses**

An application for a grant is made by completing the **HR16** form. This form should be forwarded to Human Resources **six to eight weeks prior to departure**.

Grants paid are shown on the staff member's Payment Summary for the tax year in which they are paid. They are not taxed at source but are assessable for tax purposes and shown under the heading "Allowances" on your Payment Summary. They should be substantiated by evidence of costs incurred during SSP when tax returns are lodged (excluding expenses of family members).

1. All grants will be restricted to a maximum of two every six years. Staff members will be able to take shorter, more frequent SSPs when appropriate, but only the first two in each six year period will be supported by a grant.
2. Grants will be rescinded when net earnings exceed expenditure on a dollar for dollar basis.
3. Staff members will be required to sign a statutory declaration in relation to grants for themselves and for their family.

### **Assistance for Academic Staff with Disabilities**

UNSW has established the Travel Assistance Fund as part of its commitment to academic staff members with disabilities. When they are travelling on approved voluntary activities such as conferences or SSP, the Fund will contribute to additional travel costs incurred because of the disabilities.

Further information on the Travel Assistance Fund can be found at:  
<http://www.hr.unsw.edu.au/employee/acad/raqssp.html>

### **Salary Whilst on SSP**

A member of staff may elect to be paid fortnightly during their SSP at half the normal rate with the remaining portion payable in advance. The half-salary advance may be released within six weeks of departure. Staff members who wish to receive a half-salary advance free of tax are required to provide the University with an [Application for Variation of Amounts Required to be Withheld under PAYG Income Tax Withholding Form 2036](#) approved by the Australian Tax Office.

If the Tax Office grants a tax exemption, the half-salary advance will be shown separately on the staff member's Payment Summary under the heading "Allowances". Amounts shown under this heading will be deemed to be assessable for taxation at the end of the relevant tax year. If tax exemption is not granted, the half-salary advance will be included in the salary aggregate for the relevant tax year.

It is left to academic staff to claim expenses incurred during their SSP as deductions against the half-salary and SSPAC grant. This requires the academic staff member to comply with the substantiation provisions for travel or other work related expenses in the *Income Tax Assessment Act*. You must be able to substantiate your claim with written evidence. This involves obtaining receipts or documents from the supplier of goods or services showing the name of the supplier,

nature of goods or services, amount in the currency in which expense incurred and date of the expense.

If a half-salary travel advance has been drawn for overseas travel and the period of overseas travel is subsequently shortened or cancelled, the staff member will need to adjust personal income tax payments.

It is important to note that this information is not intended to replace advice from taxation advisers. A staff member should seek their own taxation advice if they have any further queries on this matter.

Responsibility allowances (other than those applying to the applicant's substantive position) are not normally payable during the period of SSP/Internal Release. For example, this includes Associate Dean, Acting/Deputy Head of School or Director allowances.

### **PAYG Income Tax Withholding/Variation Application**

Although UNSW does not provide tax advice, if a staff member wishes to receive a half-salary advance free of tax for part or all of their SSP period:

- Contact any Australian Taxation Office to request an application form (*Application for Variation of Amounts Required to be Withheld under PAYG Income Tax Withholding Form 2036*).
- Complete and return the form to the Australian Taxation Office (see below).
- The Australian Taxation Office assesses the application and advises the applicant and the Salaries Unit of outcome.
- Human Resources process the half-salary advance accordingly.

Please be aware that the application procedure may take up to two (2) months. If a staff member has further queries in regards to the above matters they should contact the Australian Taxation Office.

### **VARIATIONS TO APPROVED DATES OF SSP**

Applications for any variation to the approved SSP dates (minor variation) must be endorsed by the Head of School. Applications for significant alterations to the approved program (major variation) should be forwarded through the Head of School, who will make a recommendation to the Dean for consideration for final approval or non-approval. The staff member will be advised of the outcome (whether approved or not).

Examples of major and minor variations follow:

#### **Major Variations:**

- Change of Session or Term for dates of SSP
- Substitution of a different project for approved project
- Substitution of location to another country
- Additional location in another country
- Attendance at extra conferences (ie. over 2 weeks in total)
- Substitution of different type of location (ie. Industrial rather than tertiary institution)

#### **Minor Variations:**

- Change of commencement and conclusion dates without changing Session or Term in which absence falls
- Inclusion of visits to additional institutions and countries
- Attendance at further conference under two weeks in total
- Cancellation of proportion of program
- Change of location to similar type location within same country (e.g. University of Oxford to University of Cambridge)

## **INSURANCE**

The University will automatically cover staff members for SSP who are out of the country for periods of less than 12 months under the UNSW Travel insurance policy. Any travel period over 12 months must be notified in advance to the Risk Management Unit.

Staff members should carefully review UNSW insurance information, including policy and claims details via the Risk Management website: <http://www.riskman.unsw.edu.au/insurance> (Unipass required) and seek further advice from Risk Management in advance of their travel if required.

### **Associated Documents**

Special Studies Program (SSP) Policy

Application to Undertake a Special Studies Program (SSP) - HR14

Application for SSP Grant/Half Salary in Advance – HR16

SSP Report Template