



SPECIAL STUDIES PROGRAM (SSP)

POLICY

September 2017

SCOPE AND INTRODUCTION

UNSW's aspiration is to be "Australia's global university, improving and transforming lives through excellence in research, outstanding education and a commitment to advancing a just society." (UNSW Strategy 2025).

The Special Studies Program (SSP) is recognised as a valuable mechanism to achieve this aspiration by enabling the university to achieve the following objectives:

- Build and maintain knowledge and expertise in pursuit of research and educational excellence;
- Attract and retain academic staff;
- Facilitate collaboration between UNSW staff and the best in their fields globally;
- Develop and advance industry, research and community linkages; and
- Enhance its brand and reputation globally

In order to ensure alignment with these objectives, SSP projects are expected to evidence:

- The pursuit of research and/or educational excellence above and beyond what could be achieved within UNSW
- Alignment with the research and/or education strategic goals of both the University and the academic's Faculty
- Clear benefits to both the University and the academic – benefits that would not be possible if the SSP were not granted
- A clear rationale (relevance and benefits) for the location(s) of the proposed SSP based on the activities proposed to be completed within the SSP (i.e. not just brief visits to a number of places)
- For research-related SSP projects, activities which are likely to result in publications, to attract grants from outside sources for research, or to involve outside professional bodies
- For education-related SSP projects, activities which are likely to enable staff to develop leadership capabilities, innovate, and improve the design, delivery or assessment of educational content
- Alignment with UNSW's values

All SSP applicants must provide sufficient detail to ensure the proposal can be assessed (including place/s where SSP is intended to be pursued). The Dean is the approving authority for all SSP applications submitted in their Faculty.

DEFINITIONS

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

Participation - SSP is **not an entitlement** but is based on the needs of the Faculty, the nature of the proposed project and the capability of the staff member to make effective use of the opportunity.

Exclusions - SSP is not normally extended to academic staff on fixed-term contracts of less than four years, nor normally given to a member of staff who is within two years of the date of intended retirement.

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.

GUIDELINES

Period of SSP

SSP applications (other than Internal Release) would normally be for a period of three to six months. A longer period of SSP would only be approved in exceptional circumstances. The duration of each SSP proposal will be assessed based on the project's scope, location(s), potential benefits to the academic and University, and impact to educational activities and higher degree research supervision.

Location of SSP

An SSP (other than Internal Release) may not be located at UNSW, nor may it, except in special circumstances and with strong justification, consist merely of a series of brief visits to a number of institutions or sites.

If a staff member wishes to remain at UNSW it may be appropriate to request a period of Internal Release (see Definitions above).

ELIGIBILITY

All academic staff (research focussed, education focussed, and teaching & research combined track) may apply for SSP however the following principles will generally apply:

1. The academic must have demonstrated:
 - (i) consistent performance above the midpoint of their current level of appointment;
or
 - (ii) a strongly rising performance trajectory.

2. In exceptional cases, SSP may be used to rebuild a research profile in previously high-performing academics after an extended period in a significant administrative or executive role at UNSW.
3. For subsequent SSPs, the academic must have demonstrated that their previous SSP achieved or exceeded agreed aims and resulted in an improved performance trajectory. All other eligibility requirements and conditions of approval apply.
4. SSP shall commence no sooner than three years after commencing employment at the University. Prior service at another eligible Australian university may count towards this minimum period.
5. SSP eligibility accrues at the rate of two months for each full year of service completed, up to a maximum of 12 months.
6. SSP eligibility does not accrue during absence on SSP or leave without pay.

Internal Release

There is no eligibility for **Internal Release** if the staff member does not hold equivalent SSP eligibility.

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

Approval to undertake SSP or Internal Release will normally be granted only where educational programs can be carried on without serious disruption and without additional cost. In each case, the Faculty and applicant must ensure that educational activities can continue with minimal impact during the SSP – this includes coordination / participation in course delivery. The supervision of higher degree research students must also be managed.

An SSP or Internal Release approval carries with it the condition that the member of staff undertakes to resume full normal duties in the Faculty on completion of the period allowed for the SSP or Internal Release and to continue in those duties for a time not less than the period of absence; in default, repayment of salary and allowances received during the period is to be made to the Faculty on a proportional basis.

A staff member who has completed a period of SSP must submit a report on the SSP no later than three (3) months after completion of the SSP. The Head of School will be invited to provide feedback on the report and especially on the extent to which the aims of the approved program have been achieved as part of the normal academic performance management process. A copy of the report should be sent to the Faculty HR Consultant for placement on the SSP file.