

Special Studies Program Procedure

Section 1 - Summary

(1) This document outlines the application process and other requirements for eligibility for the Special Studies (SSP) Program, and must be read in conjunction with the [Special Studies Program Policy](#).

Section 2 - Scope

(2) This Procedure applies to all matters associated with the application and approval of SSP applications to eligible staff.

Section 3 - Definitions

(3) Nil.

Section 4 - Policy/Regulation

(4) [Special Studies Program Policy](#)

Section 5 - Procedures

Part A - Summary of Roles and Responsibilities

Roles	Responsibilities
Staff Member	Ensure the application for SSP is submitted before the closing date.
Supervisors	Provide advice during the planning stage and agreement to the proposed SSP once it is finalised.
Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor	Accountable for content, compliance and adherence to this procedure.
Director, Capability and Culture	Responsible for the operational implementation of this procedure.

Part B - General

Purpose

(5) The Special Studies Program releases a staff member from normal duties for periods of one month up to a maximum of six months in order to pursue planned projects/activities which:

- a. clearly benefit both the University's national and international scholarly reputation and/or community service/engagement,
- b. align with the individual's VU Develop plan, and,
- c. benefit the individual's work performance and career development.

(6) These projects/activities can be pursued under one or more of the following themes:

- a. Learning and Teaching, including scholarship of teaching,
- b. Research, including creativity of research,
- c. Academic Citizenship and Engagement, including service to the University and engagement with industry or the community,
- d. Productivity Enhancements (professional staff only).

(7) The granting of SSP is merit based.

Eligibility

(8) Academic and professional staff at level HEW 9 or above who;

- a. are currently employed on a 0.5 time fraction or greater,
- b. have completed their VU Develop Plan in the preceding year,
- c. have completed at least two years of service (or its equivalent in broken periods of service) at Victoria University, and,
- d. have a contract which extends at least one year from the date on which the application for SSP is made should they have a fixed term appointment.

(9) Applications from professional staff below HEW 9 may be considered in exceptional circumstances where a persuasive case is made.

(10) Staff members on pre-retirement contracts or formal performance management plans are ineligible to apply for SSP.

(11) SSP leave is accrued at the rate of one month for half a year of service and up to six months after three years of service.

(12) A subsequent period of SSP will not normally be considered until at least twelve months has elapsed after resuming normal duties following the conclusion of any previous SSP period.

(13) A request to postpone an approved SSP application is subject to the College Dean's approval or the relevant Senior Executive Group member in the case of professional staff.

Part C - Conditions of SSP

(14) A staff member on approved SSP is expected to resume full normal duties at the University for a time not less than the period of the SSP, on its completion.

(15) If the staff member does not comply with this requirement, repayment of salary, allowances and an amount equal to the employer superannuation contribution paid during the period, or a pro rata proportion of the amount, is to be made to the University within one month from when the breach occurred.

(16) A staff member who has completed a period of SSP must submit a report on the activity/project no later than six weeks after the completion of the period, using the SSP Report template located on the People and Culture intranet

site.

(17) The report must contain sufficient detail to enable the success of the SSP project/activities to be assessed. If the SSP as reported differs significantly from the approved program, reasons for the variation must be given. The College Dean and/or Manager will be required to sign off and comment on the report, especially on the extent to which the aims of the approved program have been achieved.

(18) The report, including the College Dean or Managers comments, which must have been seen by the staff member, must be submitted by the College Dean and/or Manager to the Vice-President, People and Culture for inclusion on the staff member's personnel file and uploading to the VU intranet for publication.

(19) Failure to submit a satisfactory report within six weeks of returning from SSP will preclude the staff member from consideration for further SSP and will be considered a serious breach of duties.

(20) The University expects high quality outcomes and the development of professional expertise from all periods of SSP. For this reason, these outcomes will normally be taken into account when assessing an academic staff member's application for promotion or a professional staff member's application for an advertised position.

Part D - Criteria for Assessment

(21) Eligible staff may apply for the Special Studies Program under any of the categories listed in clause 5 above.

(22) The SSP Committee will assess applications against the following criteria;

- a. contribution to the achievement of the current VU strategic plan,
- b. contribution to the achievement of the University's scholarly endeavours, community service and engagement and its national/international reputation in teaching and learning and/or research,
- c. benefits to the staff member's work performance and career development,
- d. the applicant's plans for ensuring that SSP outcomes are applied to the benefit of the University and to the individual on return to normal duties,
- e. demonstration of the appropriateness of the place/s where it is proposed that the activity/program be pursued. The University recognises that there may be significant advantages for an individual in basing themselves at another institution for a period of time,
- f. the staffing needs of the College/Department,
- g. relevance to the block model and alignment with the block teaching calendar for staff applying under the learning and teaching category, and,
- h. where relevant, the successful achievement of previous periods of SSP.

Part E - Period and Location of SSP Leave

(23) Applications for periods of SSP of between one and six months will be considered. Applicants are required to justify the length and timing of the proposed SSP, as mutually agreed with their Supervisor and College Dean, or Manager for professional staff.

(24) Periods of SSP are inclusive of public and University holidays occurring during the period.

(25) For their wellbeing, staff are expected to use any annual leave accrued during SSP within the period and indicate when it will be taken.

(26) Confirmations from host institutions must be attached to an application. Normally written confirmation from the host is required; however, an email confirmation indicating the sender's authority to make an offer (with a formal

letter to follow) will be considered where the author's name, title and institution are clearly evident. Where the appropriate confirmation is not provided, the application will not be considered.

(27) If the application includes a proposal to write a book, the applicant must provide evidence of a contract or advanced negotiations with a publisher. Where such evidence is not provided, the application will not be considered.

(28) An SSP application for accelerating the completion of a higher degree must specifically document the work to be undertaken and the outcomes to be achieved. At the conclusion of the SSP, the staff member's report must indicate the extent to which the work plan has been achieved and the contribution made to the completion of the higher degree. Any reason for not achieving the intent of the program must be clearly documented as such a failure of achievement may adversely affect future applications for promotion.

Part F - Financial Support

(29) Allowances, as outlined in clause 38 below, for approved programs will be met from the SSP fund in the case of both academic and professional staff. The number of SSP programs approved in any year will be constrained by the funds the available.

(30) SSP funding is not available to replace a staff member granted SSP. In respect of workload management it is incumbent on relevant College Deans and/or managers to consider workloads before supporting an application, and to manage any workload issues during the period of SSP.

(31) Ten percent of the salary which is payable to a staff member on overseas or interstate SSP may, at the staff member's request, be paid in advance with the remainder being paid as salary at ninety percent of the normal fortnightly rate.

(32) When an SSP allowance has been granted it will be available, on request, thirty days in advance of departure, unless earlier payment is approved by the relevant College Dean or manager.

(33) For SSP based in Melbourne - While normal base salary is usually paid if the approved program is adhered to, the University reserves the right to pay less than the normal base salary to a staff member, who while undertaking an SSP, will receive outside remuneration. A staff member will be eligible to earn up to 20% above their normal base salary only if the extra income is used to cover the costs associated with taking the SSP, over and above costs that might reasonably be expected to be incurred. Applicants must disclose any possibility of such remuneration in their application and declare it on their return.

(34) For SSP based outside of Melbourne - In order to offset costs associated with SSP, an applicant may wish to undertake some teaching, contract research or consulting during the SSP and accept remuneration for that work. In such a case the applicant is expected to make a case for the SSP under the appropriate categories and to state explicitly in their application the proportion of the total working time to be taken up by the income generating duties. Remuneration received from teaching, contract research or consulting will be considered under the terms of clause (35) below.

(35) Estimates of the proposed extra income and costs must be included in the SSP application. Upon return the staff member will be required to certify the accuracy of the estimates of extra income and costs incurred and provide a full statement of extra income and costs. Adjustments may be made to the base salary on the basis of extra income earned that was not expended on extra costs associated with the program. Decisions on adjustments to base salary will be made by the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor on the recommendation of the Vice-President, People and Culture.

(36) Paid work that is not approved as part of the applicant's SSP, other than that set out in clause (35) may not be undertaken.

(37) The savings achieved by the University in withholding a proportion of a staff member's salary shall be credited to

the staff member's organisational unit.

(38) In addition to their normal salary, members of staff granted SSP will receive an allowance as follows:

- a. SSP in Melbourne
 - i. Nil assistance
- b. SSP outside Melbourne
 - i. Contribution to economy return airfares for the staff member and accompanying dependents to the destination of their SSP to a maximum of \$1,000 in Australia and New Zealand and \$3,500 elsewhere. All airfares must be booked through Corporate Travel Management (CTM) in accordance with the University's travel policy. These traveling allowances will normally only be paid if more than 50% of the proposed SSP is spent at the location away from Melbourne.
 - ii. An allowance of up to \$1,400 towards living costs for the SSP recipient and up to \$1400 for an accompanying spouse/partner and up to \$700 for each dependent child, provided that the accompanying family members will be spending at least 50% of the time joining the recipient at the out-of-Melbourne location.
- c. Per Diems are not available for costs associated with SSP activities

(39) For staff members on fractional appointments, the allowances will be prorated.

(40) 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 any travel or financial assistance.

Part G - SSP Application Submission

The Application

(41) Applicants must submit an electronic copy of their signed application to ssp@vu.edu.au by the nominated closing date.

(42) Applications must be signed by the relevant College Dean/Manager.

(43) Applications must include:

- a. A completed application form (accessed via the [People and Culture intranet site](#)),
- b. A document addressing the criteria in Part B of the SSP Procedure including details of any proposed income generating activities and costs, demonstration of record/achievements/outputs/impacts under relevant category headings,
- c. A full curriculum vitae,
- d. Supporting evidence such as the confirmation from a host institution or evidence of a book writing proposal, and
- e. A copy of the report of the most recent SSP for those who have undertaken a program previously. For professional staff, a statement of previous VU supported professional development and the use made of it.

(44) Intending applicants are strongly advised to consult with their College Dean and/or Manager regarding their submission and the timing of their SSP. The College Dean and/or Manager's comment, advice and recommendation will be provided to the applicant prior to submitting their application. It is the responsibility of the applicant to enhance or amend their application as a result of any advice they receive from their College Dean and/or Manager, peers or mentor.

Part H - University Special Studies Program Committees

(45) Applications for SSP from academic and professional staff will be considered by separate University committees. The role of the committees is to decide;

- a. whether the application should be approved,
- b. the period of SSP that should be approved,
- c. the level of financial assistance to be provided, and
- d. any variation to the proposal recommended prior to approval.

(46) People & Culture may designate an officer to attend the deliberations of the Committees for both Academic and Professional staff, as an equity observer, and to have access to all documentation.

(47) The Committee for Professional staff applications will be appointed by the Vice-President, People and Culture and will comprise:

- a. Vice-President, People and Culture or nominee as Chair,
- b. a Director (or equivalent) responsible for the organisational unit of the applicant,
- c. an elected professional staff representative on the Academic Board, and
- d. the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Students or nominee.

(48) The Committee for Academic staff applications will be appointed by the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and will comprise:

- a. Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor or nominee as Chair,
- b. Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research or nominee,
- c. one internal staff member nominated by the Academic Board,
- d. Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Students or nominee, and
- e. one nominee of the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

(49) An observer nominated by the President of the NTEU VU Branch will be invited to attend any meetings of an SSP committee as per the Enterprise Agreement.

(50) It will be the responsibility of the chairs of the SSP committees to ensure that due consideration is given to discipline and gender balance in the committee.

(51) Except for the Chair, SSP Committee members for both academic and professional staff committees will serve for a period of two years and a maximum of two consecutive terms. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and/or Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Students may serve for a longer period at the Chair's discretion.

(52) Unsuccessful applicants may request verbal feedback from the Chair of the committee.

(53) The SSP committees' decisions must be justified in a report submitted to the relevant College Dean and/or Manager. The report must clearly state the committee's assessment of the merit of each of the applicant's proposed outcomes. The report to the College Dean and /or Manager should be presented within 10 working days of the meeting of the Committee.

Part I - Appeals

(54) A staff member whose application for SSP is unsuccessful may appeal against the decision in writing to the Vice-President, People and Culture, within one month of the date of notification. Applicants may appeal against SSP

decisions only on the grounds that the Panel has not followed correct procedure, that is, has failed to comply with the provisions in the [SSP Policy](#) and these Procedures.

(55) Appeals cannot be based on an applicant's disagreement with the Panel's decision or views regarding the merit of his/her application.

(56) The case will be considered by an SSP Appeals Committee appointed by the Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor and comprising:

- a. a nominee of the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor as Chair,
- b. a College Dean or Director as appropriate, who is not from the applicant's organisational unit, and
- c. a tenured, full-time member of the academic staff of the College or a member of the Professional staff of the division as appropriate, nominated by the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

(57) The SSP Appeals Committee may consult with the Chair of the University committee, or with any other person who may be able to provide information on the process followed during the initial SSP Committee meetings.

(58) The decision to uphold or reject an appeal rests solely with the SSP Appeals Committee. In the case of an appeal that is upheld, the application will be referred back to the original Committee for reconsideration.

Part J - General Advice and Support

(59) The University will provide general information to prospective applicants to assist them with the preparation of their application for SSP.

(60) Information will be available on the relevant intranet page and information sessions will be conducted on dates specified on the [SSP intranet site](#).

(61) Applicants are strongly encouraged to speak to their supervisor/manager for general advice.

Part K - Forms

(62) The application form and other specified templates/materials identified above are available from the [SSP section of the People and Culture intranet site](#).

Part L - Guidelines

(63) Nil.

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	23rd July 2019
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Accountable Officer	Marcia Devlin Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor +61 3 99196203
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