

# Manager Briefing Pack – Voluntary Separation Scheme (VSS)

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## Overview of the Voluntary Separation Scheme

**Purpose of the VSS:** The Voluntary Separation Scheme (VSS) is being offered to align workforce needs with the organisation's strategic objectives. It provides employees with an opportunity to exit the organisation voluntarily under specific terms, enabling workforce restructuring where necessary. The scheme aims to support cost-saving measures, organisational realignment, and improved workforce agility.

Further information can be found at the VSS [Website](#).

**Eligibility Criteria:** Only **continuing staff** can submit an EOI. EOIs from non-continuing staff will not be considered.

Whilst we will value every EOI, we must also carefully assess the impact on the University's future. Each expression of interest will need to be considered in the context of our ongoing strategic and operational needs, ensuring that we can accommodate the reduction of the relevant position in your function. This means that, while we appreciate all applications, not every request will be supported. Your input is crucial in assessing feasibility.

### Key Dates:

- Tuesday 25 February 2025 – Expressions of Interest **open**.
- Friday 14 March 2025 – Final date to submit an EOI (applications **close** at 11:59 PM).
- **Tuesday 18 March 2025** – Final date for **supervisor assessment submissions** (late EOIs only)
- Wednesday 26 March 2025 – Recruitment Approval Committee (RAC) makes **final determinations**.
- Monday 31 March 2025 – EOI **outcomes communicated** to requesting staff and their leaders.

## Manager responsibilities

Managers play a crucial role in supporting employees considering the Voluntary Separation Scheme (VSS) by offering guidance, addressing concerns, and providing necessary information.

Managers have a particular responsibility around:

- **Request assessment;**
- **Process guidance; and**
- **Communication.**

A key responsibility embedded in all three of these areas is the need for managers to understand and address **WHS hazards and obligations**. Each responsibility is further explained below.

## Assessment Criteria

Managers will need to make a balanced assessment whether the role is essential to the team's ongoing success or if business needs can still be effectively addressed without it. We've developed criteria to help you make this assessment that includes key questions and rating scales spanning the future need for the role, workload redistribution options, impact of skill or knowledge loss and financial viability of a separation.

The form will take you through these questions, but below is some additional information to assist you in completing this:

Core Assessment Categories	Key Questions to Consider
Whether the position is essential to current and future needs.	<p>Does this position align with the University's evolving priorities?</p> <p>Can the duties of this role be absorbed by other roles without diminishing efficiency or performance?</p> <p>How will long-term operational or strategic needs impact the necessity of this role?</p> <p>Will the loss of the role negatively impact educational programs, research activity, or student experience?</p>
How the workload reduction could be accommodated.	<p>How will the tasks and responsibilities of this role be redistributed or cease?</p> <p>Is the redistribution reasonable and sustainable for remaining staff?</p> <p>Is the redistribution aligned with relevant academic workload models (where applicable)?</p>
Whether the employee has essential skills or knowledge that cannot easily be replaced.	<p>Does the staff member have unique skills or knowledge critical to strategic initiatives, academic projects, or other key University activities?</p> <p>What knowledge gaps would emerge if this employee were to leave, and how would they impact operational continuity?</p> <p>What risks exist if this expertise is lost, and are there strategies to mitigate them?</p>
Assess potential cost savings or budget adjustments from reducing the position.	<p>What are the potential cost savings or budget adjustments from this position's removal?</p> <p>How does this align with the University's financial strategy and long-term sustainability?</p> <p>Could this staff reduction impact income through student fees, research funding, or government grants?</p> <p>Would the VSS allow the University to recruit in new intellectual directions to in turn attract more students?</p>
Additional Considerations	Key Questions to Consider
Does the position have legal, regulatory, or contractual obligations?	<p>Does this role have compliance obligations that must be maintained (e.g., WHS, ethics approvals, student support)?</p> <p>Are there contractual or grant-funded requirements tied to this role, and what are the implications of removing it?</p> <p>Would the loss of this role impact the University's ability to meet regulatory or accreditation requirements?</p> <p>What are the potential risks of non-compliance, and how can they be mitigated?</p>
Could adjustments other than VSS better address workforce or financial needs?	<p>Are there alternative ways to achieve cost savings without removing this role?</p> <p>Are there opportunities for redesigning the role to align with future needs while retaining the staff member or could their skill set be redeployed?</p>
Ensuring key stakeholders are consulted.	<p>Have I consulted with relevant stakeholders about the need for services relating to this role to assess unintended consequences?</p>

## Communicating transparently

Approach discussions openly, with empathy and support. Be conscious of tone, clarity and timing of conversations. If you're uncertain about a question, don't hesitate to take time to consider your response, seek advice from your own manager or a People and Culture Business Partner, and follow up with the staff member when prepared.

Requests for voluntary separation can be challenging staff members, and often **concerns are raised** about the process, potential outcomes, or reasons for the request. It's important to foster an environment where employees feel comfortable voicing their questions and concerns, allowing them to fully explore their options. Show a willingness to listen by asking thoughtful questions and demonstrating openness to discussion. Additionally, it is essential to reassure employees that any information shared will be handled **sensitively**.

Equally, managers to be transparent and clear about the **process**. Employees understand that some requests will be supported, others may not. **Avoid making commitments** about the final outcome. Providing clear communication above all possible outcomes, particularly the possibility that role may still be required is essential in managing expectations and preventing confusion.

The FAQs below outline common challenges and provide guidance on how to navigate them effectively.

In summary:

- **Be transparent and clear** – Set realistic expectations and avoid making assumptions or promises.
- **Acknowledge the impact** – Recognise that this process can be emotional and challenging for employees.
- **Maintain open communication** – Encourage dialogue and create space for employees to ask questions.
- **Offer support and resources** – Direct employees to relevant support services such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- **Be available for ongoing conversations** – Follow up and remain accessible for further discussions.
- **Stay positive and forward-focused** – Help employees consider their future options constructively.

## Understanding WHS Hazards and obligations

Managers are responsible for ensuring staff health, safety, and well-being, particularly when handling VSS-related changes that may affect workload, team dynamics, and emotional stress.

To manage risks:

1. Use the [Psychosocial Hazard Matrix](#) when assessing VSS EOs and queries.
2. Identify potential hazards from positions becoming redundant, or from the process, and implement strategies to eliminate or minimise these risks.

This approach not only supports WHS obligations but also ensures a safe and supportive environment for staff throughout the VSS process.

**Additional Support:** Consult with [Safety and Wellbeing \(S&W\)](#) for further advice on WHS issues, and your [HR Business Partnering team](#) for VSS process issues.

## Process Guidance and Support

As a manager, you play a critical role in ensuring the VSS process is conducted fairly, transparently, and in alignment with business needs. Your responsibilities extend beyond simply communicating the opportunity – managers are key to helping employees navigate the process, understand their options, and make informed decisions.

Ways to support staff through the process:

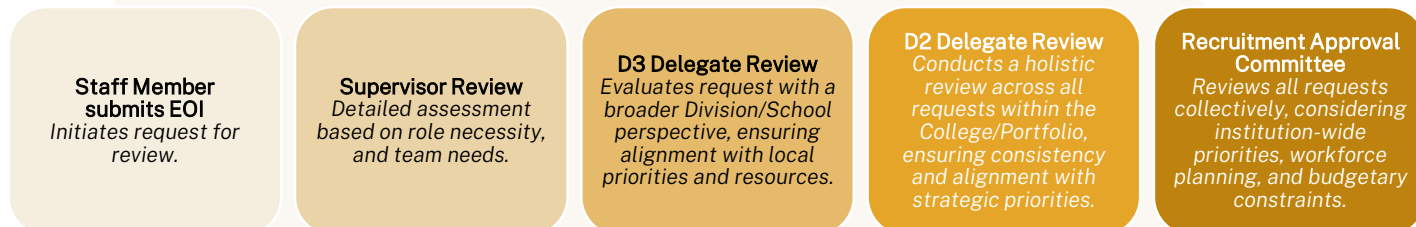
- **Clarifying the process** – Ensure employees understand the steps, timelines, and decision-making criteria.
- **Considering preferences and options** – Be open to alternative solutions, such as exploring the possibility of reducing to part time hours.
- **Clarify decision-making authority** – Employees should understand that while managers provide input, the final decision rests with the RAC. The RAC reviews all EOs from a **university-wide perspective**, and even if a manager supports a request, the offer may still be deemed unviable based on broader business needs. Decisions are driven by operational requirements, not personal preference.
- **Provide Guidance on Next Steps** – Support employees in understanding what happens if their request is approved or declined, including transition timelines.

## The Process

The Voluntary Separation Scheme (VSS) is designed to be fair, transparent, and aligned with the university's strategic needs. To ensure that all requests are carefully evaluated, they undergo a multi-level review process.

Before submitting an Expression of Interest (EOI), it is encouraged that staff discuss their intentions with their supervisor. Supervisors, in turn, should engage with their D3 Delegate for further consideration. This ensures that each request is assessed in the context of both individual and team needs.

### VSS EOI Assessment process



### Final Decision

Decisions made by the RAC are final. All requests will be reviewed by the RAC to ensure fairness and alignment with the university's operational and strategic goals.

By following this review process, we ensure that every request is assessed thoroughly, with input from key decision-makers at each stage.

## Support and Resources

**Wellbeing Support:** Maintaining your health and wellness, whilst supporting the health and wellness of those around you, is important. We understand that supporting conversations with staff can be a challenging time for managers too. For staff counselling support services, contact the Adviser to Staff by emailing [staff.adviser@anu.edu.au](mailto:staff.adviser@anu.edu.au), or visit the [Employee Assistance Webpage](#).

**HR Contact Information:** If you have any concerns about yourself, or your staff and need support. Please reach out to your [local HR Business Partnering group](#) or email [vss@anu.edu.au](mailto:vss@anu.edu.au).

# FAQs

## General FAQs

Further general FAQ's can be found [here](#).

## Manager FAQs

### How to Explain the Scheme to Employees: Key Points to Cover During Discussions

- **Clear Overview:** Provide a comprehensive explanation of what the Voluntary Separation Scheme (VSS) is, including its purpose, how it works, and the eligibility criteria.
- **Benefits:** Detail the financial package, support, and any additional resources employees will receive if they choose to participate.
- **Application Process:** Outline the steps involved, such as the forms to complete, deadlines, overarching time-frame and the steps in the approvals process.
- **Transparency:** Clearly communicate that the decision to leave the company is voluntary but will still be subject to approval, depending on business needs. Focus your communication around the position, rather than the person.
- **Open Door for Questions:** Encourage employees to ask questions to ensure they fully understand the scheme and have clarity on how it could impact them.

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### Managing Employee Concerns: How to Address Fears About Job Security, Career Impacts, or Uncertainty About the Future

- **Acknowledge Concerns:** Recognise that employees may feel uneasy about the uncertainty surrounding job security and the future. It's important to show empathy and validate their feelings.
- **Reassure About the Scheme's Intentions:** Emphasise that the scheme is designed to give employees a choice and is not an immediate indication of job cuts or changes. It is about offering voluntary options, not mandatory separations.
- **Reassure that workload impact is being thoroughly considered.**
- **Maintain Transparency:** Be upfront about the company's current situation and how the VSS is a response to the organisation's needs. Make sure employees know the impact of their participation will be handled with care and consideration.

### Handling Confidentiality: The Importance of Confidentiality Regarding Employee Participation

- **Emphasise Privacy:** Reinforce to staff that any information shared regarding their intention to participate in the VSS will be kept confidential. This is essential to build trust.
- **Only Share When Necessary:** Discuss who needs to be informed within the organisation (e.g., HR, senior leadership), and ensure that employees' personal decisions are shared only on a need-to-know basis.
- **Confidential Conversations:** When discussing the scheme with individual employees, ensure that these discussions occur in private settings to maintain confidentiality and prevent any unintentional disclosure.
- **Compliance with Regulations:** Remind managers of legal and organisational privacy policies that ensure sensitive employee data, such as participation in the scheme, is protected.

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### Managing Change and Expectations: Guidance on Explaining That Some Separations May Not Be Approved and the Need to Manage Expectations About the Scheme's Outcomes

- **Set Realistic Expectations:** It's important to communicate early that not all voluntary separation requests may be approved. Reiterate that final decisions are based on organisational needs, including workload and business priorities.
- **Transparency About Selection Process:** Provide clarity on how applications will be assessed, highlighting factors like the team's needs, role importance, and overall business objectives.
- **Prepare for Disappointment:** Ensure that employees understand that the decision process will be handled fairly, but also that some applicants may not be able to leave based on operational requirements. Discuss how request declines will be communicated with respect and care.
- **Encourage Open Dialogue:** Encourage employees to express their concerns or expectations. Let them know that their preferences will be taken into account, but ultimately, business needs will guide the decision-making process.
- **Supportive Environment:** Reassure employees that if they are not selected for the scheme, there are other opportunities within the organisation and the company remains committed to their development and career growth. This includes engaging with local HR Business partners to explore other possibilities for fixed term staff.