

DISCUSSION PAPER

ACADEMIC CALENDAR

April 2024



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why do we need to consider our academic calendar?

'Equity and Excellence' is the foundation of our University's approach to education; specifically we seek to create excellence in students' academic achievement regardless of background. From this, stems one of Australia's most diverse student populations. Within this context, there has been considerable change in the university education environment over the past 10 years, especially in financial sustainability and student expectations, and this is likely to continue, at an accelerating rate. Our University may reap considerable rewards if we effectively adapt to these changes.

As the nature of academic work continues to evolve across the sector, we need to ensure that academic staff's teaching can be scheduled in ways that allow for contiguous blocks of time for quality research. Overlapping teaching sessions in the existing academic calendar do not currently serve this need.

It is therefore beholden on our University to continuously reassess the ways in which it structures and delivers its education services to students. The academic calendar – the way in which we structure and schedule the delivery of learning to our diverse student body – is a core consideration. Foreseen in our 2020-2025 Strategic Plan 'Looking Ahead', the University of Newcastle committed to develop a flexible academic calendar. Our overarching strategic goal is to create an:

1. 'Outstanding Student Experience',
2. 'Serving our Communities', in a
3. Financially sustainable way.

A preliminary consultation review in October 2023, involving over 200 staff and student leaders, confirmed resoundingly that the current academic calendar is suboptimal on all three counts above. The question is, however, what would an improved alternative academic calendar look like?

The purpose of this Discussion Paper is to commence a co-design process for an alternative academic calendar involving our University's community – students, staff, and the industries and communities we serve. The paper explores the key issues and opportunities for our University's current and potential future academic calendar, and opens a codesign process to seek broad input from stakeholders into the key issues which should be considered. This process will be followed by the design of 1-2 alternative academic calendar options for further consultation, leading to a final decision.

The major themes from this Discussion Paper can be summarised in four key points, outlined below.

1. An alternative academic calendar can provide greater education opportunities to both current and future students.

Newcastle's primarily semester-based academic calendar has served our University (and many others) well for many decades. However, our University now has one of Australia's most diverse student populations with more indigenous, enabling and students with a declared disability, than any other university, and over 50% of students are first in family. Furthermore, over 65% of our commencing students do not come directly from secondary education, and 70% of those who change to part-time study cite work and financial reasons as the cause, with the average undergraduate student studying less than 0.75FTE, and considerably less in the latter years of their

degrees. Similar reasons are cited for not commencing university study or leaving the University. Our fastest growing academic programs are stackable postgraduate study and diplomas.

Concurrent work and study, and a need to organise study around 'life', are increasing trends. Within this context, there are opportunities to better serve students' needs which may be realisable through an alternative academic calendar:

- Improved flexibility can support students to spread out their learning across a longer period of time, if this fits better with their lifestyle and learning needs, or alternatively accelerate their learning, completing their degree faster.
- A more flexible and diverse academic calendar can also enable improvements to pedagogy and deliver better student learning outcomes. Innovations in higher education delivery, such as focussed periods through 'block mode', may be better enabled through an alternative academic calendar.
- In order to best serve future students, Newcastle needs to embrace trends such as 'on-demand' commencements and a 'carousel' calendar, which enable students in certain courses to start very quickly after being offered a place at the university and complete at their own pace.

By moving to an alternative and more flexible academic calendar, we are more likely to capture these opportunities for improvement and growth.

2. An alternative academic calendar could align learning periods, better utilise the full year calendar and reduce administrative inefficiencies, especially timetabling challenges.

The current academic calendar with multiple and misaligned semesters, trimesters and summer and winter teaching periods, along with different schedules for our international and domestic pathways programs, leads to extraordinary complexity. This is evidenced in the academic timetable where the extraordinarily complex alignment of teaching staff, student schedules and teaching spaces leads to sub-optimal outcomes for all parties.

An alternative academic calendar can:

- improve scheduling and hence course availability and progression for students,
- increase our ability to cross teach into postgraduate, undergraduate and enabling programs,
- ease administration complexity and effort,
- make better use of staff teaching and research time, and
- enable more effective utilisation of physical space.

These improvements, enabled by a new academic calendar, would strengthen organisational and financial sustainability, which is a key strategic priority for our University.

3. The co-design of an alternative academic calendar for our university will be based upon a set of draft principles.

The purpose of this stage of the co-design process is to confirm the principles upon which an alternative calendar will be framed. These principles will ensure the calendar meets the unique needs of our University and its community.

A draft set of co-design principles have been created to act as 'guardrails' in the design of an alternative calendar and we are seeking feedback. These design principles are:

- Student-centred,

- Staff supportive
- Community and industry serving, and
- Strategy enabling

More detail on these draft design principles is provided below. These principles are draft, and input is sought to ensure they reflect strategic priorities and stakeholder needs.

4. An optimal alternative academic calendar should be shaped by the kind of University we aspire to be.

Whilst many more traditional institutions continue to maintain a semester-based model, others such as Deakin, Griffith, Macquarie, and James Cook University have successfully moved to alternative academic calendar models to offer more opportunities for their current and future students. These examples are provided, not as specific alternative models, but rather demonstrating successful transitions of universities' academic calendars. Similarly, UNSW is an example of an academic calendar change that has been challenging, and lessons should be learned from this experience.

An alternative academic calendar for Newcastle needs to reflect the distinctive features which signify our aspirations as an academic institution; one which provides opportunities and an outstanding student experience to a distinctive and diverse student population, supports our aspirations to serve our local community, and as a dynamic high growth and sustainable institution.

Newcastle is known as an innovative University, closely linked to its student and wider community. As such, it is expected that an alternative calendar will be different to that of other universities who operate in different circumstances and environments.

Existing alternatives such as trimester, the quarter term model or block model can serve as a guide, but our University can implement its own variation on one of these designs, or leverage aspects from these designs and tailor its own, fit for purpose calendar. We could also consider supplementary academic calendars for specific course offerings and student cohorts, where this makes sense. This could include options such as a carousel model or “on-demand” commencements for high-demand fee-paying postgraduate programs. Again, it is important to consider these options within our context and ensure the calendar is aligned to the design principles and realises the target benefits.

It is also recognised that the achievement of our University's education goals will be accompanied by other changes, such as changes to course and program structures and delivery modes, in addition to an alternative academic calendar.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Our University has a distinctive, diverse and changing student population. It is also operating in a dynamic and increasingly competitive education and economic environment. Together these drive an ambitious (and imperative) vision for our education model, including ensuring contemporary delivery offerings, content, modes, and accessibility. These forces require an academic calendar that supports this strategy, whilst enabling organisational efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability.

In its 2020-2025 Strategic Plan 'Looking Ahead', our University committed to evaluate options to develop 'a more flexible academic calendar' that better meets the needs of our student and staff community, and of future student cohorts. We recognise that the modern student's expectations of university education are continuously adapting, and like other institutions, would likely benefit from consideration of an alternative academic calendar that can support the needs of a diverse current and future student base.

We have the opportunity to empower and inspire our people to enhance multidisciplinary collaboration aligned to our strategic engagement priorities. We can design new teaching, learning, and research models that enable achievement of our vision of equity and excellence in our students, staff, and community. Most importantly, we can serve our students and communities. The academic calendar is a key enabler to meeting our ambitious strategic goals.

The purpose of this Discussion Paper is to inform staff of the processes and timelines for co-designing an alternative academic calendar. This paper is a precursor to formal consultation opportunities, which will be staged throughout the project as detailed in the timelines below. We invite any immediate questions or feedback to be directed to DVCA-projects@newcastle.edu.au however we will open a feedback capture mechanism via a project specific SharePoint site shortly.

PROJECT APPROACH, STAGES AND TIMELINES

The purpose of this project is to co-design a prospective alternative academic calendar for the University with student, staff, and community stakeholders. The goal is to create an academic calendar which supports the educational aspirations of our University, is fit-for-purpose, dynamic and responsive to the diverse and changing needs of our students and staff, both current and future, and supports the financial sustainability of our University. The project is being run through the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic and reports to a Working Group chaired by the DVC Academic. There will also be a Reference Group established, ensuring views from all relevant impacted areas of the university are considered throughout the design phase.

The project will run in three stages:

1. Following the circulation of this Discussion Paper, student and staff consultations will be undertaken to confirm the design principles and their relative importance.
2. The Working Group will consider all feedback, financial impacts and risks, and develop 1 or 2 alternative academic calendar options which will be outlined in an Options Paper set to be released in June 2024;

3. Following an additional round of consultation with students and staff, the Working Group will put forward a preferred alternative, academic calendar model for the University, before final Academic Senate approval in July.

The below table outlines the key project activities, with indicative timelines.

TABLE 1 - ACADEMIC CALENDAR REVIEW TIMELINES

Key Dates	Activity
9 April	Consultation Launch <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All-staff Town Hall - SharePoint site opened - Discussion Paper released
Early April	Receive consultation feedback from broader community on Discussion Paper
Early April – late April	Hold first round of staff consultations (two academic, and one professional) via webinars
Mid April	Capture early student design input through survey
Late April – Early May	Undertake school and PALS consultations
Mid May – Mid June	Working Group led detailed design and modelling phase
End May	Establish Reference Group to share feedback findings, hear impacts on various areas and determine deep dive options
Late June	Release Options Paper, with preferred 1-2 options and status quo outlined
Late June	Open consultation period commences, where staff and students are invited to make written submissions
Late June	Student focus groups are held to test impacts of preferred option/s on specific cohorts
Early July	The change is summarised into a Proposal Paper which is released after another staff forum
Late July	Subject to approval of the Academic Senate, implementation planning commences

ASSESSMENT OF OUR CURRENT ACADEMIC CALENDAR

OUR CURRENT ACADEMIC CALENDAR (OR CALENDARS)

Currently, semester, trimester, trimester Singapore, summer, and winter teaching periods are utilised to varying degrees across enabling, undergraduate and postgraduate, and non-award programs. Key characteristics of Newcastle's current academic calendar include:

- The teaching periods are misaligned and asynchronous, creating challenges for teaching allocation, research focus and workloads;
- The majority of students (85%) study courses in semester teaching periods, while only 12% are enrolled in trimester courses (7% onshore, 5% offshore)¹;
- 92% of undergraduate students study in semesters, while postgraduate is split 44% and 49% across semester and trimester courses, respectively¹;
- All Colleges are predominately semester-based;
- Some programs require simultaneous enrolments in overlapping semesters and trimesters, causing complexity for students, academic staff and administrators, poor student experience and considerable challenges with timetabling; and
- Both domestic and international pathways programs, and the Singapore campus operate on additional different calendars.

KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

There are several perceived issues with the current academic calendar which the University seeks to validate and address with an alternative model. Any potential alternative must clearly deliver measurable benefits for our University, its staff, and students. These are summarised in the below three areas:

1) Create greater opportunities for diverse current and future student cohorts

Acknowledging the unique needs of Newcastle's diverse student cohorts, and the changing expectations of learners in the digital age, the academic calendar must meet the growing diversity of needs of our student base. Further, the academic calendar must support student success, progression and retention, and timely completion. A more effective calendar should drive improvements to effective pedagogy and student learning outcomes.

By predominately concentrating unit offerings across two semesters, our University does not offer flexible options for students who want to accelerate their learning, or alternatively spread out their learning load across more of the calendar year. Further, some programs can require simultaneous enrolments in overlapping semesters and trimesters, causing complexity for students who risk falling up to a year behind in their program due to the rigidity of the model and their program. Our

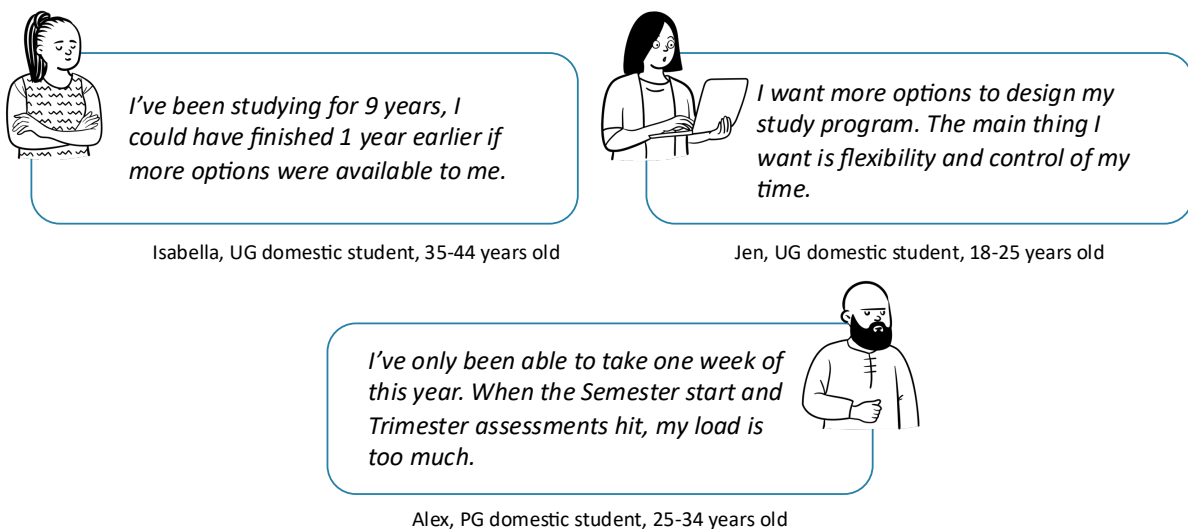
¹ University of Newcastle Student Load Data and Timetable Data

University's non-peak teaching periods have very low utilisation, with only 1.5% of unit enrolments occurring in these periods.

The semester-based calendar makes University of Newcastle's education offering unattractive for key student cohorts who have an increasing array of options to choose from. University of Newcastle has struggled to attract fee-paying domestic postgraduate students, who are increasingly seeking 'on-demand' commencements and flexible timetables. From 2017-2021, University of Newcastle's student enrolments across high-growth fields of education (IT, Business and Society & Culture) declined by 21%, counter to the national trend which saw significant enrolment growth (20%)².

This is consistent with recent student feedback on needs of the academic calendar, as seen below.

FIGURE 1 – UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE STUDENT FEEDBACK, JULY 2023



2) Reduce complexity and administrative burden leading to ineffective timetables

There are opportunities to leverage an alternative academic calendar to reduce the burden on staff, and academic leaders managing staff, across misaligned asynchronous calendars. In addition to operational, scheduling and workload complexities, running multiple academic calendars reduces the opportunity to jointly teach undergraduate, postgraduate and pathways classes – a key opportunity of diverse academic programs to suit future students. Lack of alignment between semesters and trimesters currently results in only 4% of activities being jointly taught (UG/PG) in 2022 and 2023³ – significantly less than comparable institutions. Additionally, there is considerable workload in coordinating and managing multiple, misaligned exam periods, and difficulties aligning timetables to student and staff preferred learning times. Balancing academic teaching schedules to ensure contiguous blocks of time for enhanced research productivity is also challenging.

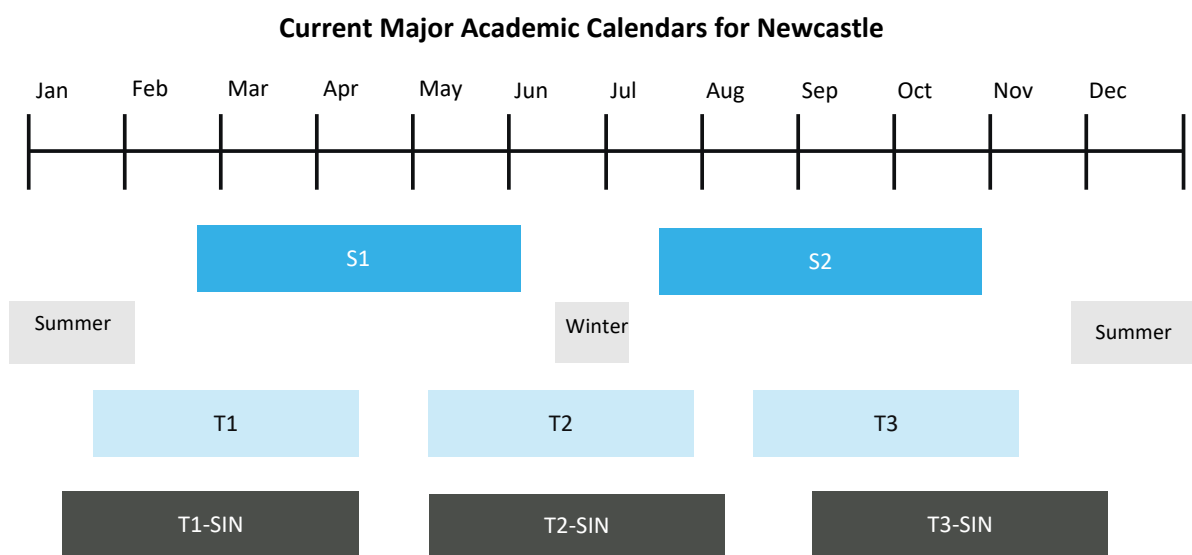
² DoE 2021 Pivot Table Student Enrolment – Commencing and Continuing (2017-2021)

³ University of Newcastle Student Load Data and Timetable Data

The administration required to maintain the current calendars is disproportionate to the small trimester load (7% of course enrolments in onshore trimesters, 5% in offshore trimesters)⁴. This complexity is most felt by staff who are required to teach across multiple periods simultaneously, such as in the College of Human and Social Futures, and for those disciplines with programs offshore who have misaligned trimesters. Further, some students are required to take courses in overlapping semester and trimester periods, which adds considerable complexity and pressure, ultimately negatively impacting the student experience.

Furthermore, there is an increasing need to blend courses delivered to pathways, undergraduate and postgraduate programs to create flexible and stackable degree structures to suit future student and workforce needs. This is a considerable challenge with our current academic calendar.

FIGURE 2: CURRENT MAJOR ACADEMIC CALENDARS FOR UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE



3) Enable student load growth and better utilise the calendar year

The growth of online providers, and the rise of digital education models in general, has created an expectation of “on-demand” education. Remaining competitive and growing our student base is key, and the academic calendar can support this. Further, there may be an opportunity to align key teaching periods with target market international student cohorts, to differentiate from competitors.

The utilisation of non-peak teaching periods (e.g. Summer/Winter term) is very low compared to competitor institutions. Currently, Summer and Winter term combined represent just 1-2% of University of Newcastle’s course enrolments with 3,747 course enrolments (~450 EFTSL or 1.5% of

^{4,5} University of Newcastle Student Load Data and Timetable Data

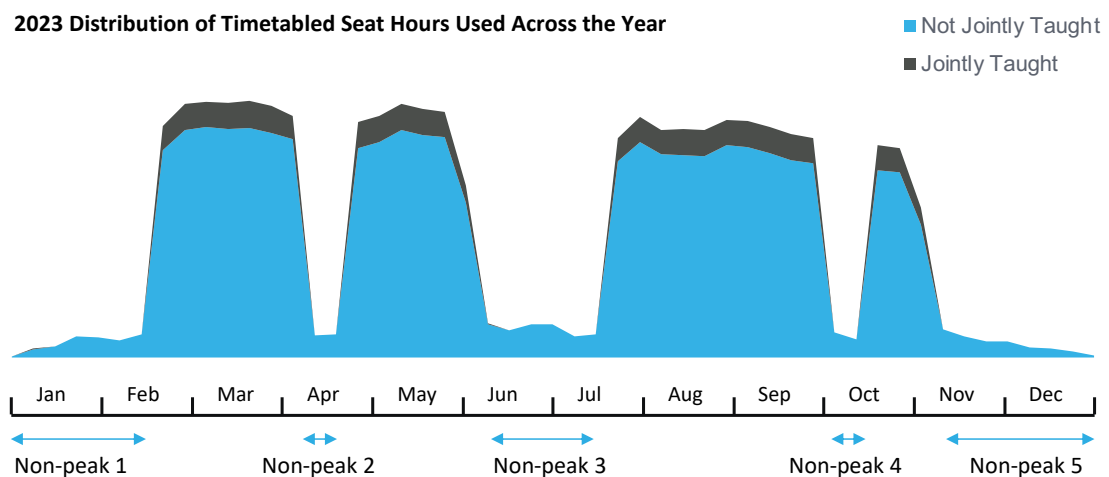
total course enrolments⁵). By way of contrast, Deakin University offers approximately one third of all courses in its summer equivalent (trimester three – an *optional* trimester).

This low utilisation means that University of Newcastle has fewer intake opportunities, which reduces its competitiveness. This also negatively impacts on student progression and retention, as well as space utilisation, with University of Newcastle’s space utilisation currently well below higher education benchmarks.

This is significantly driven by the low utilisation across five identified non-peak periods, clearly illustrated in the distribution of timetabled seat hours across the year, see Figure 3 below. This has negative flow-on effects to the financial viability of businesses which provide services such as cafes and food outlets that provide a key component of campus life.

For example, in-semester space utilisation has averaged 40% over the last 2 years, whereas whole-year utilisation is around 22%. Both are well below the higher education utilisation benchmark of 75%⁶.

FIGURE 3: ANNUAL DISTRIBUTION OF TIMETABLED SEAT HOURS, 2023⁷



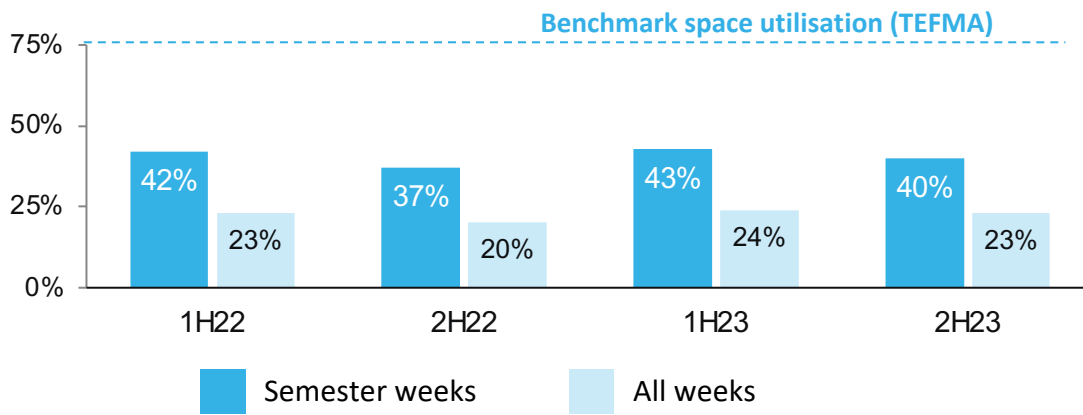
⁶ University of Newcastle Annual Report Income Statements

⁷ University of Newcastle Student Load Data and Timetable Data

FIGURE 4: UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE AVERAGE SPACE UTILISATION 2022-23

Average space utilisation, all spaces 2022-23

(Standard hours only, 8am-5.30pm, Mon-Fri)



EXAMPLES OF ALTERNATIVE ACADEMIC CALENDAR MODELS

Australian universities and new private entrants to tertiary education are increasingly shifting away from the traditional semester model, opting for calendars with more flexibility, additional intake opportunities, and increased utilisation of the calendar year.

Both comprehensive public universities (like Deakin, Curtin, James Cook University and Macquarie) and private institutions (like Torrens), have shifted towards shorter terms, more intakes, and more intense learning provision (see Appendix A – Competitor comparison of academic calendar models). In today's digital age, students increasingly expect "on-demand" education, which may put the University of Newcastle at risk of becoming less competitive if it doesn't adapt to this trend and provide alternatives.

Moreover, there is strong evidence to suggest that certain students, especially those with low levels of academic preparedness, learn better in shorter, more intensive blocks of time. Our University's large equity cohorts often demonstrate this characteristic, due to educational disadvantages faced in their secondary education. Victoria University, for example, has seen a 16% increase in student success since implementing their block model in 2016⁸. Similarly, evidence shows that the academic performance of students who are well prepared for University is essentially unaffected by the length of study blocks.

Primary calendar models such as trimester, quarter and block all present different benefits and potential challenges (see Appendix B – Assessment of alternate models). There are also examples, such as JCU, that have successfully implemented a mixed model that incorporates a combination of both primary and secondary calendars (see – Appendix D – Mixed Model Case Study). A summary of calendar characteristics can be found in Table 2.

All the institutions in question have demonstrated a successful transition from a semester to an alternative academic calendar.

⁸ Department of Education, 2021

TRADITIONAL ACADEMIC CALENDAR MODELS: PRIMARY CALENDARS

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF TRADITIONAL ACADEMIC CALENDAR MODELS: PRIMARY CALENDARS

Calendar category	Model	Summary
Primary calendars	Semester (Current Model)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two main teaching terms (typically 13-15 weeks) • Standardised model across most Australian universities
	Trimester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three main teaching terms (typically 10-12 weeks) • Increased entry points and utilisation of the calendar year in comparison to semester model • Allows students to either expedite degrees or catch-up on failed units with (often) optional third-trimester • <i>See Appendix C – Trimester Model Case Study</i>
	Quarter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four main teaching terms (typically 6-8 weeks) • <i>See Appendix D – Quarter Model Case Study</i>
	Block	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive blocks (4-6 weeks), one-two subjects at a time (adapted to University and student needs) • Allows students to focus on a reduced number of subject areas and provides immediate assessment feedback to facilitate progression • <i>See Appendix E – Quarter Model Case Study</i>

TRADITIONAL ACADEMIC CALENDAR MODELS: SECONDARY CALENDARS

TABLE 3: SUMMARY OF TRADITIONAL ACADEMIC CALENDAR MODELS: SECONDARY CALENDARS

Calendar category	Model	Summary
Secondary calendars	Summer / Winter (shoulder)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional teaching blocks in summer and winter breaks that allow students to potentially smooth load outside of the primary teaching periods, or catch-up on failed courses • Allows universities to increase load and utilise resources during breaks
	Carousel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rolling commencements • Allows students flexibility in deciding when to commence studying and their load, as well as providing the autonomy to pause and re-commence their studies as required; this also reduces applications for adverse circumstances and attrition • Continuous model facilitates maximum load growth within existing infrastructure
	On-Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible start dates paired with self-paced learning • Maximises a university's ability to increase student load within existing infrastructure • Improves conversion as commencing students are offered multiple entry options and do not need to wait until fixed intakes • Can be applied in various ways and selectively to specific programs/courses with relevant demand

DRAFT DESIGN PRINCIPLES

To help guide this co-design we have developed a set of draft principles to guide decision making and test the effectiveness of possible alternative academic calendars. Any potential alternative calendar model(s) will be tested against these design criteria to assess fit.

These are presented as draft only, and feedback is also sought on whether these design principles are appropriate and exhaustive of key stakeholder and strategic needs.

Our draft guiding principles are:

1. Student-centred

- a. Supports improved learning outcomes for students.
- b. Meets the needs of our diverse student cohorts (high proportion of mature-age students, students with carer responsibilities etc.).
- c. Delivers an improved student experience, including the on-campus student experience through increased campus activation.
- d. Provides improved opportunity to students to study flexibly, supporting timely completion alongside other life and family commitments (for example, smoothed reduced load throughout the year or a higher load and accelerated time to complete).

2. Staff supportive

- a. Meets staff needs for flexibility around considerations such as school holidays.
- b. Supports the balanced workload of staff and the advancement of staff research goals.
- c. Supports attraction and retention of a high-performing academic and professional workforce.

3. Community and industry serving

- a. Fits with the needs of industry and community partners, particularly for Career-ready Placements.
- b. Aligns with pathway providers (domestic and international and onshore and offshore).
- c. Addresses expectations of professional accreditation bodies

4. Strategy enabling

- a. Aligns with our University's broader strategic objectives, particularly teaching and research excellence.
- b. Supports the University's growth agenda.
- c. Supports operational sustainability, maximising student load and space utilisation within existing infrastructure, and with reduced administrative overhead.

CONSULTATION SUMMARY

We want to ensure that as we progress through this review over the coming months, our students and staff have opportunities to provide their valuable and considered input. We also seek active participation in a co-design process through the identification of requirements for the model from these key stakeholder groups. It is important for us to understand what you value most, and what best aligns to the unique needs of the University of Newcastle student community.

At this point, we are keen to capture early thoughts on the academic calendar, and to understand your preferences for engagement going forward. An online form will be shared via the SharePoint site to capture this feedback, before we then dive into deeper discussion in school and department focus groups. There will be multiple opportunities to provide feedback across the duration of the project, including during the design phase and when the preferred 1-2 options are identified.

Questions for online proposal feedback

1. What are your perceptions of the current academic calendar? Are there any specific concerns or challenges that you face that are not outlined in the Discussion Paper?
2. What is your appetite to potentially refresh the academic calendar? How do you think a potential change to the academic calendar could impact your personal and academic / professional life?
3. Are there any specific activities or events that you believe should be considered when designing an alternative academic calendar?
4. What are the most important considerations to consider when designing a fit-for-purpose calendar for the University of Newcastle?
5. Are there any key benefits or considerations that are not captured in the Discussion Paper?
6. How important is the alignment of school, and other, holidays to teaching breaks?
7. Which elements from other institutions' alternate academic calendars do you think could be adopted to meet the needs of our University, and its staff and students?
8. Do you believe the design principles are correct? Is there anything you would change / add?
9. What other factors should be considered when reviewing and potentially revising the academic calendar?

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – COMPETITOR COMPARISON OF ACADEMIC CALENDAR MODELS

Newcastle vs selected competitors (regional and/or similarly-ranked)

University	Student load (2021 EFTSL)	Global ranking (ARWU 2022)	Avg student experience score (2022)	Primary academic calendar	Secondary academic calendars (substantially utilised)				
					Trimester	Carousel/Continuous start	Block/Intensive	Quarter	Start anytime
Curtin University	34,547	201-300	75.1	Semester	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Deakin University	41,778	201-300	81.0	Trimester	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Griffith University	49,624	201-300	79.4	Trimester	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Macquarie University	32,363	201-300	75.8	Semester with Summer term	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
University of Tasmania	20,702	201-300	75.8	Semester	Yes	No	No	No	No
University of Wollongong	23,704	201-300	78.2	Semester with Summer term	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
University of Newcastle	35,155	301-400	76.1	Semester	Yes (under-utilised)	No	No	No	No
James Cook University	18,927	301-400	76.7	Trimester (from 2024)	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Victoria University	20,159	Not ranked	75.3	Block model	No	No	No	No	No

APPENDIX B – ASSESSMENT OF ALTERNATIVE MODELS

Assessment of alternative models

Trimester, block and quarter term options come with different benefits and challenges.

ASSESSMENT OF ALTERNATIVE MODELS			
	Example of what this could look like	✓ Key Benefits:	✗ Potential Challenges:
1	<p>Model 1 – Trimester model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Deakin-style aligned trimester design with 10-week terms: T1 across Nov-Feb, with a 2-wk break for Christmas/NY. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased entry points and utilisation of the calendar year in comparison to semester model Allows students to either expedite degrees or catch-up on failed units with optional third-trimester Provides greater flexibility for students by allowing them to choose which trimesters to study in Facilitates increased load growth within constraints of existing physical infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The flexibility of the model is contingent on course availability Program and course redesign may be required to successfully implement May require process overhaul to realise key benefits associated with the model Does not directly align with calendars of existing professional placement industry partners e.g. teaching/nursing
2	<p>Model 2 – Quarter term model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8-9 week terms largely aligned with NSW school terms A UCLA-style quarter term model where students typically study 3 terms of out 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased entry points and utilisation of the calendar year in comparison to semester model Provides greater flexibility for students by allowing them to choose which periods to study in (often only 3/4 are chosen) Can accommodate both intensives or extended courses, and aligns with most external industry partner calendars and school holidays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The flexibility of the model is contingent on course availability Potential perception becoming more akin to a high-school May require program and course re-design to adapt to shorter teaching periods (6-8 weeks) May require process overhaul to realise key benefits associated with the model Newcastle would be the first institution in Australia to adopt the model
3	<p>Model 3 – Block Model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smaller teaching blocks (i.e. 6-7 weeks) increasing flexibility and intake frequency with flexibility to determine design elements i.e. length of block, class sizes, staff profile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows students to intensely focus on a reduced number of subject area and provide immediate assessment feedback to facilitate progression Reduces requests for academic dispensation and attrition Blocks and breaks typically align with industry calendars and school holidays Staff time becomes easier to segment into teaching and research intensive periods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May require program and course re-design Work experience and practical placements typically must be managed across multiple blocks Programs with rigid structures negate the flexibility of the model as students must stay on the critical program path Intensive style of learning may not be suitable for all disciplines, particularly those that require extensive deep learning



Case study: Deakin University

Deakin's trimester model was delivered through staged implementation, and has achieved improved calendar utilisation whilst underpinning strong load growth.

Situation

In response to a shift in student demand for greater control over their university degree and from academics for more flexible work patterns, in 2008 Deakin implemented a trimester delivery model institution-wide. The trimester model also responded to the university's requirement to increase student load within the capacity constraints of its existing physical infrastructure.

Approach

Deakin's trimester delivery model combined their 10-week summer teaching period with their previous 13-week semesters to make three twelve-week teaching sessions, commencing in March, July and November.

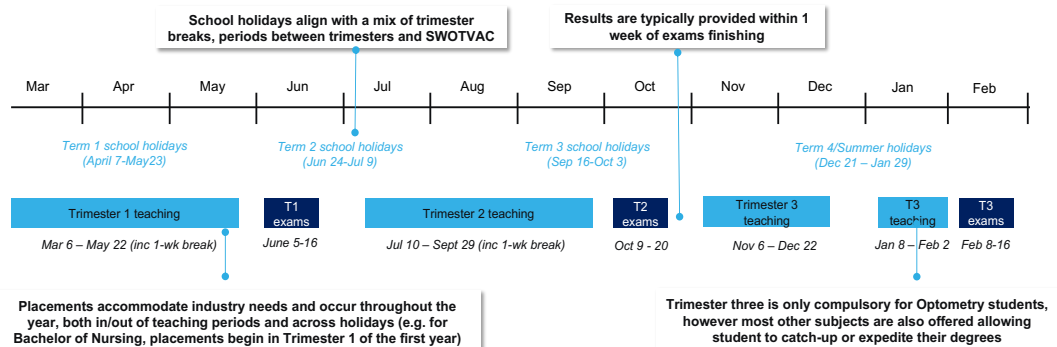
In this model, a student is considered full-time if they study three or more units (courses) per trimester and are only required to complete two-trimesters per year. This approach creates additional flexibility both for students, who wish switch between part- and full-time study, and staff, who receive longer teaching free breaks, allowing for additional research time.

A critical enabler for the successful delivery of this trimester model has also been Deakin's ability to leverage the third teaching point as an additional entry points.

Results

- **Improved calendar utilisation:** Deakin has achieved relatively high utilisation of its summer trimester, which commences in November and concludes in February. Approximately one-third of units are offered in the summer trimester, with a significant number of commencements. Delivery is frequently online only.
- **Student load growth:** Deakin has achieved strong load growth across all student cohorts, both domestic and international. Whilst the changes to Deakin's academic calendar are only one factor among many, the ability to have accelerated student progression and more intakes has been beneficial.
- **Greater flexibility for postgraduate students developing their careers or returning to study:** demonstrated in 2010 when there was 15.15% load growth in postgraduate trimester three enrolments.

Deakin's trimester model appears to retain some characteristics of a semester model whilst making better use of the November-January period.



SUPPLEMENTARY CALENDARS

- **Start Anytime** – a number of business units are offered on a rolling monthly commencement
- **Semester** – some postgraduate Health courses are offered through a semester model
- **Intensives** – some corporate education offerings are offered as 3-4 day intensives

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

- Most students take 4 units per trimester and only study in 2 trimesters
- Trimester 3 appears to be used as an additional commencement date, with students then directed to study the primary T1/T2 cadence



Case study: UCLA

UCLA was an early pioneer of the quarter delivery model, foreseeing its benefits to both staff and students in providing greater academic experimentation and independent study

Situation

Challenging the status-quo of the traditional semester model, UCLA was an early global pioneer of the quarter-based teaching model. At its inception, Dean Franklin P. Rolfe championed this innovative approach as it would allow for academic experimentation and independent study for both students and staff.

Approach

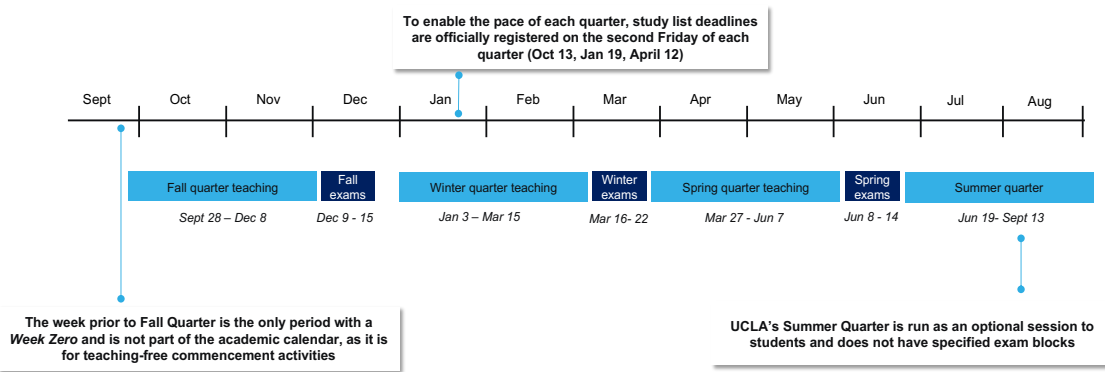
UCLA initially implemented a quarter model university-wide by introducing three Fall, Winter and Spring quarters, each of which were ten weeks in duration, contrasting from the traditional 15-week semester model that was otherwise industry standard. The calendar's fourth quarter is Summer, and students are not expected to attend. During UCLA's primary three quarters, students complete 3-4 classes through a sprint approach and are required to complete 9-12 classes annually.

UCLA's quarter system, however, did not provide the required benefits to its professional schools, with law and medicine choosing to revert back to a semester system. In addition, UC Merced, which has a mission to increase college-going rates in response to chronically low levels of education attainment in the San Joaquin Valley, maintained a semester model as it better enabled students in transferring from other institutions. These exceptions to UCLA's quarter system however were in response to the specific needs of courses and missions, with the remaining school's voting for the university's preferred calendar model and only 20% favouring a return to a semester system.

Results

- **Increased research opportunities:** UCLA's quarter model enables their faculty to spend at least a quarter annually dedicated to their research, which has supported the university in being ranked 29th globally (QS World Rankings 2024)
- **Boosts GPA:** as the quarter model increases students' ability to take more classes and explore more subject areas, there has reportedly been a direct correlation to increased results
- **Improved motivation and organisation:** by requiring students to complete their courses in a sprint approach, UCLA has reported an increase in motivation and organisation among their cohorts

UCLA's quarter model incorporates three quarters that focus on delivering teaching and a fourth predominantly dedicated to research



SUPPLEMENTARY CALENDARS

- **Semester** – utilised by UCLA's professional school's including Medicine and Law and UC Merced

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

- This model requires students to complete their annual studies and graduate approximately a month later than other US universities, creating a complexity for internships and commencement of graduate jobs



Case study: Victoria University

The block model enabled Victoria University to differentiate in a crowded competitive landscape, and whilst expensive has proved effective in improving student outcomes.

Situation

Prior to 2018, Victoria University delivered both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in-line with tertiary industry standard in Australia, through a predominantly semester dominated model. Inspired by models throughout America and Europe, VU became local industry leaders by adopting Block Mode delivery to respond to both changes in student demands and dynamic graduate work environments – with a particular focus on improving first year attrition.

Approach

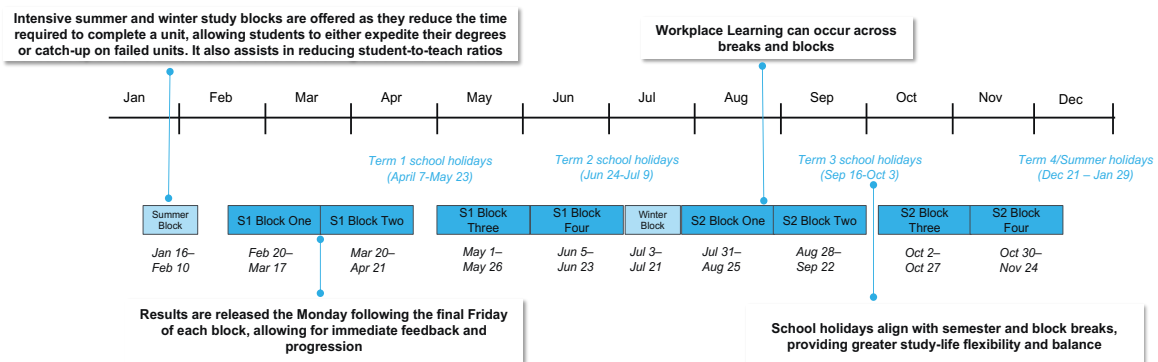
VU has implemented block mode into their academic calendar through their trademarked *VU Block Model*. With five intakes per year to promote flexibility and to convert those who do not want to wait for a bi-annual intake, full-time students complete four-blocks each semester, with optional blocks available over summer and winter to either expedite degrees or to allow failed units to be caught up on. VU also used this as an opportunity to remove low enrolment units.

For all undergraduate degrees at VU's Victorian and NSW campuses, block mode is delivered over four weeks with three three-hour classes weekly. Class sizes are capped at 35 students and final assessments that are completed on the last Friday of the block are graded and returned to students by the following Monday to facilitate progression. VU also offers postgraduate degrees that follow similar structure (8 week blocks), although with greater options, with either one unit being completed on-campus in four weeks or online in seven, or the choice of an eight-week block to complete two units full-time or one part-time. A key enabler of VU's smaller class sizes was a shift to a more teaching focused academic workforce. This resulted in a 64% increase in teaching hours per academic, from 142/yr in 2016 to 233/yr in 2020.

Results

- **Reduced failure rate:** between 2016-17 and 2018-19, the failure rate for first-year STEM students reduced by 40% and the pass rate of all undergraduate students rose to above 90%, with 60% achieving a distinction grade or higher
- **Increased success of equity groups:** female students in non-traditional areas of studies and students from non-English speaking backgrounds recorded the greatest improvement, with failure rates requirements to repeat dropping from 36% to 9.2%.
- **Reduction in requests for academic dispensation:** decreasing by 80%
- **Reduced attrition:** especially among mature-age, low socioeconomic background or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- **Improved teaching efficiency:** increased by more than 15% after the implementation of block model

Victoria University has adapted the traditional semester model by introducing intensive blocks within each as part of its design and implementation of a teaching focused delivery model



SUPPLEMENTARY CALENDARS

- **Continuous starts:** VU has five intake periods annually
- **8-week blocks:** delivered for Postgraduates to facilitate part-time study
- **Intensive:** delivered during the summer and winter blocks

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

- The frequency and short duration of blocks allows students to pause or increase studies to suit their external commitments, without requiring academic dispensation
- Segments academic time more clearly into teaching and research periods



Case study: UNSW trimesters

UNSW's 3+ trimester model achieved significant operational benefits for UNSW, but could have been implemented differently to account for the different needs of specific student cohorts.

Situation

In 2019 UNSW implemented their 3+ trimester model, in response to rapidly growing student numbers and increasing pressure on teaching spaces. The case for introducing the new model was that it would expand campus capacity, and increase flexibility for UNSW students to choose the pace of their degree.

Approach

A number of key design features informed UNSW's approach:

- **'Compulsory' third trimester** – UNSW chose not to implement the Deakin/UTS model of an optional third trimester, believing that this would not result in a large enough shift in enrolments to free up teaching space.
- **'Stanford model'** – UNSW instead chose the Stanford model of 3x 10-week trimesters with T1 starting in early February, plus an additional 5-week optional term in January.
- **Elevating teaching-focused academic career pathway** – UNSW saw trimesters as a way to elevate the role of teaching-focused academic staff, whose roles had previously been regarded as less prestigious.

Results

- **Improved space utilisation** – UNSW's transition to a trimester model resulted in a 15% improvement in capacity space utilisation, which translated to significant capital cost savings and an ability to reinvest in research and teaching.
- **Improved flexibility for some students, but proved challenging for others** – some student cohorts, particularly domestic postgraduate students and those with caring responsibilities, as well as international students, welcomed the change, as it provided more flexibility to work around their other responsibilities. Other students, particularly domestic undergraduate school leavers, found the transition challenging.
- **Increased revenue** – the change enabled UNSW to achieved increased revenue of approximately 10%, expanding capacity by utilising more of the calendar than under a semester model.

Lessons learned and key insights

UNSW had a number of key insights and lessons learned from how it implemented the UNSW 3+ model:

- **Consultation is critical** – early consultation with staff and students is critical, but needs to take into account that different cohorts will have different needs.
- **Consider social aspects of the calendar and its impacts on students** – it's important to consider how the academic calendar may impact on student's social lives and any external commitments they may have (ie school holidays).
- **Consider the intensity of term lengths** – a 10-week calendar without a break is perhaps too intense, consider a less intensive model.

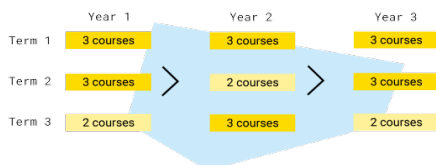


Example academic calendar: UNSW trimesters

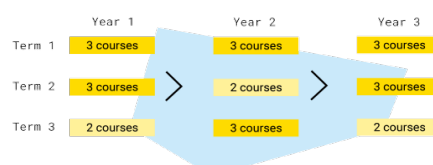
The UNSW trimester model differs from Deakin's model in that the third term is 'compulsory', with an additional optional five week term across January.

UNSW TRIMESTER MODEL – COMMON OPTIONS FOR STUDENTS

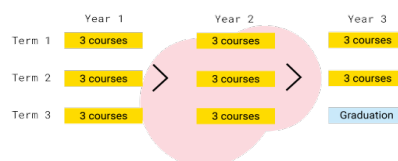
'Standard load' option



'Lighter load' option



'Early finish' option



Source: UNSW 3+ model, <https://www.unsw.edu.au/study/your-future/about-trimesters>

Example academic calendar: Mixed Mode

The JCU 2024 Academic Calendar shows structure and relationship between mixed delivery modes of trimesters, carousel intensives and semesters.

