

LTC14D220

Title: Semester dates and the shape of the academic year
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Issue

To determine the shape of the academic year with the New Academic Model.

Recommendations

Recipients are invited to consider the following recommendations for the academic year 2016/17 onwards:

- 1) That the Autumn semester be of 12 weeks duration, including induction activities.
- 2) That the Spring semester be of 14 weeks duration; with
 - a) Week 7 being used for transition, employability and course and module consolidation activities with Advisees having meetings with their Advisers to review progress.
 - b) Week 14 being used for a similar set of activities plus revision and examination preparation activities.
- 3) That courses with no examinations extend their timetabled contact delivery into the assessment period.
- 4) That reading weeks with no timetabled content cease to be a feature of modules/courses.
- 5) That Congregation be scheduled for the third week in July.
- 6) For 2015/16 – introduce Week 14 activities as detailed below into Week 13 immediately prior to the interim 5 week assessment period.
- 7) For 2016/17 - introduce the pattern 12-14-4 with Weeks 7 and 14 as detailed below and in order to create a useable teaching period after the Easter break in 2017 move this break from the previously agreed four weeks commencing 10th April to the four weeks commencing 27th March in order to give 10 weeks before and 4 weeks after the Easter break.
- 8) For 2017/18 – introduce the 12-14-4 pattern leaving the Easter break as previously approved so giving 9 weeks before and 5 weeks after the Easter break.
- 9) Dates for 2018/19 through to 2021/22, as set out in Appendix D and which have not been previously considered, noting that there are two options presented for 2020/21.

Resource Implications

There are no major resource implications as the academic year conforms to a 30 week period which has been the case at UEA for over the last 10 years and the recommendations concern how the 30 weeks are used. However, it is clear from the debate initiated by the previous paper that there are resource allocation issues in relation to the balance of activities undertaken by academic staff and in particular the balance between research and teaching and these are rehearsed below.

Risk Implications

The risks of change are being mitigated by this wide consultation exercise which has already highlighted the risks of moving to a 13 week Autumn semester and consequently have contributed to the current proposals. TPPG, Faculty LTQCs and the Employability Executive have indicated a desire for further input and have been sent a version of this paper for discussion. All comments received will be brought forward to the LTC meeting on the 24th June so they can be taken into consideration during the discussion of this paper.

The risks of not setting the dates in a timely manner would have consequences if our partner colleges set their dates such that pathway course dates did not dovetail with our own start dates.

Equality and Diversity

There are no equality and diversity issues in setting the dates as the basic pattern of the academic year is familiar with all staff and students. The determination of the semester dates will enable all staff and students and applicants to have good notice of the academic year and be able to plan accordingly.

Timing of Decisions

It would be helpful to conclude discussions this academic year to enable decisions to be taken into account during the forthcoming 2016/17 Course and Module update process this Autumn.

Further Information

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Background

The recent LTC paper: Semester Dates, LTC14 D189, has been widely consulted upon and helpful feedback has been received. A link to the paper is given below.

<https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/8985662/ltc14d189dividerf.pdf/fbe8576a-5905-4838-b851-5e971210d276>

Feedback can be broadly summarised as relating to:

- the underlying decision to move from a 6 week to a 4 week assessment period
- the earlier start date for the academic year
- the additional workload on academic staff
- the prospect of reviewing the timing of the re-assessment period.

A four week assessment period

The underlying decision to move from a 6 week to a 4 week assessment period has been questioned. This decision was made in April 2011 following a wide ranging consultation exercise and as part of the whole suite of decisions made in formulating a new approach to teaching and learning at the University and which is referred to as the New Academic Model. A summary of the key features of the New Academic Model can be found in Appendix A. A paper by Professor Graham Gibbs written for UEA provides helpful background (see link in Appendix C).

The New Academic Model was approved by LTC and Senate in Spring 2011 and it was determined to roll it out gradually. The first intake was in 2013/14 and so this year we have 2 years being taught under the NAM philosophy and next year will be the first year when, with a few exceptions the whole UG population will be studying on NAM degree profiles and under the regulations which were developed to run alongside the NAM – known as the Bachelor's and Integrated Master's (BIM) degree regulations. Consequently the University has yet to experience the full benefits of the New

Academic Model and has actually been working in a complex environment concurrently running two different degree structures and degree regulations. The first graduating cohorts, whose entire course were constructed using the NAM philosophy, will congregate in July 2016.

The New Academic Model was designed to address a number of issues:

- Academic engagement issues – seen in degree outcomes and a disparity between the quality of our student intake and good honours outcomes
- Retention was an issue and our year one dropout rate and non-completion rates were a concern
- Employability was also a concern with fewer students gaining graduate level jobs than our competitors.

A key element of the plan was to change the assessment strategy to intensify academic engagement. There was a recognition that we were over-assessing our students and consequently there was the drive to reduce summative assessments, both exams and coursework, and increase formative work so that students can be provided with more feedback on their work and performance. The definition and transparency of Course level outcomes is the new focus to improve students' employment prospects. The reduction in the number of examinations would facilitate a shorter exam period and enable the University to undertake more useful activities with the two weeks released including revision time, opportunities for employability related activities, skills training, or activities which prepare students for the transition to study in the following academic year.

In December 2012 LTC endorsed (LTC 011M 002 Minute 21)

that the shape of the academic year should be 12 + 12 + (2) + 4. The function of the two week period will be to provide a combination of revision time, opportunities for employability related activities, skills training, or activities which prepare students for the transition to study in the following academic year.

This was reported to the Senate in January 2012. The current debate centres on when the two weeks should be scheduled.

It should be noted that a number of other Universities have assessment period of less than 6 weeks: Durham, York, Lancaster, and Nottingham have 3 weeks, and Exeter has 4 weeks of examinations. (Details of some other Universities' exam arrangements are at Appendix B).

Earlier start date

An earlier start date to the academic year was proposed to accommodate 13 weeks prior to a Christmas break. The feedback coalesced around a number of themes:

- admissions concerns and allowing sufficient time between Clearing and the start of term to handle late applicants and maximising the time for International students to get visas;
- a concern about being out of step with competitor Universities;
- a concern that the earlier start date would coincide with some Research Council grant application deadlines and research conferences.
- the adverse impact 13 weeks continuous study may have on students' ability to learn.

Having examined the academic year start dates for a number of other Universities a start date in mid-September would indeed make us one of the earliest starting Universities.

In response to this feedback it is proposed that we retain a 12 week semester prior to Christmas.

Additional workload on academic staff

Some of the feedback appears to suggest that with a move to a four week examination period staff would be asked to do the same amount of assessment and teaching as now and that the activities undertaken in the new two weeks would be additional activity.

Whilst the activities in the two new weeks would indeed be new activity envisaged to enhance student outcomes, the standard undergraduate academic year remains at 30 weeks and the New Academic Model envisaged changes in course design and course assessment strategy, including having fewer exams, which would lighten academic workloads in other respects. It is accepted that the nature of the work envisaged for the two weeks is different in nature to that necessitated by examinations but it should not be additional to current workloads.

When considering academic staff workloads this change should not be viewed in isolation. It should be noted that the last five years has seen considerable investment in academic staffing with growth in staff numbers exceeding growth in student numbers. The University's SSR has improved from 18.1:1 in 2007/08 to 13.7:1 in 2013/14. This is a net increase of some 400 academic staff. There has also been considerable growth in numbers of ATS staff as a result of strategic decisions by Faculties to invest in staff with a focus on teaching and learning. (Some 246 of the net additional academic staff are ATS).

In addition there is on-going activity to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our course offer with efforts to reduce the size and complexity of our portfolio of courses and to reduce the number of modules running with low student numbers following discussions of the University's performance at Senate (SEN13 M001 Minute 4 and SEN 13M003 minute 29 respectively). Both of these courses of action should result in a reduction in the administrative overhead on teaching and an increase in academic capacity.

Re-assessment period

The suggestion that the timing of the reassessment period be reviewed has generated lots of feedback and a concern about Athena Swan. A thorough examination of the requirements will be undertaken and consulted upon in due course.

Discussion

Are the reasons why we adopted the New Academic Model still valid?

Student performance, good honours, retention, and employability remain key performance indicators for Universities and drive league tables which we know are so critical to our student recruitment. As such the vision of the New Academic Model remains valid. Due to the gradual roll out it will not be until next year that we will start to see the full benefits of the New Academic Model with its philosophy running through all years of study. Some benefits have already been achieved through the roll out of other actions in the 2012-16 Corporate Plan but there are further performance improvements anticipated once the roll out of the New Academic Model is complete.

LTC is monitoring the impact of the New Academic Model and the associated BIM regulations. A first report was considered by LTC in May 2015 and a further report will be produced in the Autumn. See

<https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/8985662/ltc14d187dividerd.pdf/971a08aa-c81c-41da-b735-e6c2df5b8772>

Consequently, it is not proposed that we deviate from the current plan of moving towards a four week examination period in 2016/17 with a five week assessment period in 2015/16 as an interim step.

An earlier start to the academic year?

Following the feedback provided it is proposed that we remain having a 12 week Autumn semester with 12 weeks teaching prior to the Christmas break.

How should the Spring semester be constructed to make best use of the two weeks?

It is generally agreed that having one week for revision and examination preparation sessions, sharing feedback from previous cohorts would be beneficial for students if it took place immediately before the assessment period. It should be noted that with a reduction in the number of examinations being taken by students there would be less revision required. But there might be more coursework or other transitions activities also on-going during this time. The timing of the other week has been the subject of debate.

The current proposal is to undertake the desirable transitions, revision and employability activities during Week 7 and Week 14 of the Spring semester.

The proposed UEA Academic Year			
Semester	Week	Proposed content	Observations/notes
Autumn	1	Some induction activity, synoptic at course level for all years of study plus some module content	Care will need to be taken to ensure the module contact hours are delivered over the 11 or 12 weeks set aside for this activity
	2-12	Module content	
Christmas break			
Spring	1-6	Module content	Contact time can be spread over 12 weeks
	7	A combination of course level consolidation activities, opportunities for employability related activities, skills training, and/or activities which prepare students for the transition to study in the following academic year plus meetings with Advisers to discuss progress	If ATS staff were leading on these activities ATR staff could have a week to focus on research. Module "Reading weeks" would no longer be required.
	8-13	Module content	Contact time can be spread over 12 weeks
Note: The 4 week Easter break will fall at some point during weeks 8-13 and can be timed to give variously 2, 3 or 4 weeks module content in addition to Week 14 prior to the assessment period.			
	14	A combination of revision time, opportunities for employability related activities, skills training, and/ or activities which prepare students for the transition to study in the following academic year.	If ATS staff were leading on these activities ATR staff could have a week to focus on research.
Assessment period	1-4	Assessment	For courses with no examined assessments, timetabled contact time could be spread over the entire 30 weeks rather than be concentrated on 24 and/or project work or other coursework deadlines extended into this period.

Other issues raised

- a) Contact time, timetabling and KIS data. Care must be taken in both semesters to timetable the requisite and published contact hours, within the weeks available for contact, noting that for courses without examinations timetabled contact hours could extend into the assessment period. The new CMA requirements place a greater emphasis on Universities to deliver all aspects of the course as published and so care will need to be taken with timetabled contact hours to ensure compliance, including in relation to reading weeks.
- b) Reading weeks. A review of reading week activity has revealed a very mixed picture of activity with no uniform pattern across the University. In some modules, in some areas, there appears to be one week, usually mid semester, when no new content is introduced and work covered to date is consolidated in some shape or form. The timetabled contact time for such modules tends to vary from normal patterns during this week, with some having no lectures but seminars, and some having no timetabled contact hours.

It is considered that there will be limited scope for modules to have “reading weeks with no timetabled contact hours” during the Autumn semester as in some cases timetabled teaching contact hours will already be condensed into 11 weeks. It is considered that in the Spring semester any such module and course consolidation should take place during Week 7.

Recipients are invited to comment on whether a common University-wide approach to reading weeks along these lines would be helpful? TPPG will be discussing this issue on 10th June.

- c) Deadlines. This year there has been concern expressed by students about dissertation and other coursework submission deadlines during the assessment period. These have usually been set by Module Organisers wanting to give students the maximum time possible to complete such projects or other coursework. The introduction of Week 14 will allow more time for such pieces to be completed and so may alleviate this issue. TPPG will be giving consideration to this issue on 10th June 2015.

Feedback from TPPG, FLTQCs and the Employability Executive in response to these proposals will be presented at the meeting.

Conclusions

The academic year must enable the University to work as a business delivering both research and teaching. It is considered that the above plan will achieve this and recipients are asked to consider the above recommendations.

Appendix D demonstrates how the pattern might look over the next few years.

The dates for 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 were reported to LTC in October 2013, see links below.

<https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/7728212/ltc13d023.pdf/23f4a2f7-943a-4615-bec2-a636348dea19>

<https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/7728212/ltc13d023appendix1.pdf/c4d2fdb4-1eb8-4b58-a18b-b0349c9703a0>

These dates were proposed and approved working on the basis of a 12-12-6 academic year. Considering each year in turn it is proposed that we

- a) For 2015/16 – introduce Week 14 activities as detailed above into Week 13 immediately prior to the 5 week assessment period.

- b) For 2016/17 - introduce the above pattern 12 - 14 - 4 with Weeks 7 and 14 as above and in order to create a useable teaching period after the Easter break in 2017 move this break from the previously agreed four weeks commencing 10th April to the four weeks commencing 27th March in order to give 10 weeks before and 4 weeks after the Easter break.
- c) For 2017/18 – introduce the 12-14-4 pattern leaving the Easter break as previously approved so giving 9 weeks before and 5 weeks after the Easter break
- d) Recommend dates beyond 2017/18 which have not been previously considered noting that there are two options presented for 2020/21.

Attachments

Appendix A – The New Academic Model

Appendix B – Examination periods at some other Universities

Appendix C – Background paper from Professor Graham Gibbs

<http://www.uea.ac.uk/learningandteaching/documents/newacademicmodel/UsingAssessmenttoSupportStudentLearningbyProfessorGrahamGibbs>

Appendix D - Table showing approved and proposed semester dates 2013/14 to 2021/22 – Semester Date planning v5

The New Academic Model

- Students are required to pass all modules in order to progress to the next year of their course.
- Students need to meet specified thresholds (minimum mark for the module of 20% at the first attempt for stage 2 and above), before being offered a reassessment opportunity.
- Stage 0 and stage 1 students to have an automatic reassessment opportunity even if the module mark is lower than 20%.
- Reassessment is by assessment item failed wherever possible. This means that where a module has been failed students will reassess in whichever item/s within that module originally failed.
- The minimum module size is 20 credits.
- Course profile option choices to contain appropriate modules as defined by Course Directors.
- Joint degrees have a Course Director from the School in which students are registered and Assistant Course Directors from other Schools contributing to the course.
- A planned reduction in the May/June assessment period from 6 to 4 weeks from 2016/17 with an interim 5 week period in 2015/16.
- Each BA/BSc (Hons) degree comprises of at least 360 credits, with at least 90 credits at level 6 and no more than 20 credits at level 4 in stage 2.
- Each Integrated Masters degree comprises of at least 480 credits, with no more than 20 credits at module level 4 in stage 2, at least 90 credits at level 6 in stage 3 and 120 credits at level 7 in stage 4.
- Modules will follow a clear progression from levels 4, to 5 to 6 to & 7, which aligns with the Higher Education credit framework for England.
- Item and module assessment marks are recorded as two decimal places throughout for precision (and to avoid losing marks). Where module, stage or award marks are up to 0.5 below a whole number, they will be treated as if rounded up to the integer.
- Assessment and classification rules to be simplified, with the use of algorithms and a reduction in the discretion available to Boards of Examiners.
- Year weightings for all UEA 3 and 4 year Honours degrees are 40:60, stage 2: final stage.
- Year weightings for all Integrated Masters degrees are 20:30:50, stage 2: stage 3: stage 4.
- All courses to have Course-level outcomes, course level assessment strategies and the ways these courses are to be assessed should be clear for all.
- All courses to make more use of formative assessment and less use of summative assessment, with the number of the latter being reduced, wherever possible, to the minimum necessary in order to differentiate between students in terms of their performance. (Note: follow up guidance was given that summative items had to be worth at least 10% of the overall assessment weighting for the module).
- All courses to indicate how feedback on formative and summative assessments will work to promote learning and how feed-forwards will operate to prepare students for their summative submissions.
- All courses to include an effective induction of students into the University's 'community of scholars' and activities to support students in transitioning from year to year and to employment.

Extract from

<http://www.uea.ac.uk/learningandteaching/documents/newacademicmodel/Main+features+of+the+New+Bachelors+and+Integrated+Masters+Award+Regulations+v4+140912> and including instructions from the NAM course development template
<http://www.uea.ac.uk/learningandteaching/documents/newacademicmodel/GuidanceNotesforCompletionofNAMProgrammeTemplate>

Examinations at Some Other Universities

Durham – 3 weeks summer

York – 3 week summer

Lancaster – 3 week summer

Nottingham – 3 weeks summer but do examine on Saturdays

Exeter – 4 weeks summer

Essex - 4 weeks summer

Manchester – 2 weeks January and 3 weeks summer

Southampton – 2 weeks January and 3 weeks summer

Newcastle – 2 weeks January and 3 weeks summer

Birmingham – 6 weeks summer

Kent – 6 weeks summer

Warwick – 6 weeks summer

Sheffield – 3 weeks January and 3 weeks summer

Bristol – 2 week January and 4 weeks summer

Sussex – 2 weeks January and 4 weeks summer

