

LTC14D221

Title: Revisiting the Rationale for Reading Weeks
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Issue

A paper on the use and future function of Reading Weeks

Recommendation

LTC members are asked to consider and approve the recommendations contained in the paper.

Resource Implications

If the recommendations are approved, they are likely to result in a change in practice in some schools, with academics using what are currently terms Reading Weeks in different ways to support student learning.

Risk Implications

Minimal risks to the business of the University, but there will be a need for clear communication of the changes to staff and students.

Equality and Diversity

It is not envisaged that any of the recommendations contained in the report will impact on groups with protected characteristics.

Timing of decisions

This recommendations would be implemented from 2015/16 onwards.

Further Information

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Background

A practice has established itself in some schools of using 'Reading Weeks'. These normally constitute a break in the delivery of module content. Some information on the use of Reading Weeks across the University is contained in **Appendix A**. This information is based on responses from key academic contacts in Schools, but probably fails to capture the full complexity and granularity of practice across the University. Information contained in Appendix A is detailed enough to demonstrate that this is an area which would probably benefit from more consistent planning and coordination.

Given the implementation of the New Academic Model which is focused on building enhanced student engagement and improved coherence of academic programmes, it is timely to consider whether the use of Reading Weeks should continue. This paper sets out some of the pros and cons of Reading Weeks and contains a brief summary of the views expressed by Taught Programmes Policy Group. The report concludes with some recommendations for LTC to consider and approve.

Current practice

As can be seen in **Appendix A**, the timing of reading weeks varies considerably across the University. The most common timing is weeks 6/7 in each semester, but in Schools like HSC with less 'standard' academic years, some programmes (e.g. ODP) use a week in Dec, April and July. Some schools only have Reading Weeks in undergraduate programmes, but DEV and AMA/LDC also have them in postgraduate taught programmes (PGT). IN HUM schools like FTM, AMA and ART the Reading Week is effectively used as a period of intense tutorials (and is termed a Tutorial Week). In PPL there is variable practice with a Reading Week common in PSI, but absent in PHI and LCS. In SSF some schools have Reading Weeks (e.g. PSY) but others do not (e.g. SWK). LAW has them on PGT, but not UG programmes. In some schools certain degree programmes use them, but not all, whilst in others it is far from unusual for the date of Reading Week to actually vary between modules within the same programme. In certain schools (e.g. ENV) staff are being encouraged by their equality and diversity committee to use Week 6 since this coincides with school term dates and is more convenient for staff and students with school-age children. In NBS week 7 of the autumn semester is used as an employability week and students are expected to engage with a varied programme of employability-related activities. In SCI Faculty Reading Weeks are less common – BIO, CHE and PHA appear not to use them at all, whilst some modules in CMP do have Reading Weeks and in ENV MOs are being encouraged to use Week 6 consistently across the School. In MTH a 'half reading week' is utilised which varies in terms of timing between Year 1 and Year 2/3.

Pros

The advantages of having Reading Weeks are as follows:

- Provides academic staff with a break in the delivery of modules in which to develop additional module teaching and learning support materials etc, mark formative and/or summative work and undertake research, engagement and/or enterprise activities.
- When Reading Weeks coincide with school holidays this can be helpful to students/staff with caring/family commitments.
- Provides students with a break in lectures/seminars/lab sessions etc, which enables them to focus on preparing coursework, reading, and (if necessary) a chance to return home or engage in an intensive period of paid employment.
- In some schools, this break in module delivery provides a natural focus for the delivery of a range of other learning support and career development (employability) activities – e.g. intensive period of tutorials, advising sessions, careers-related workshops etc. Having a week-long break in delivery enables staff and students to engage in other activities of equal value but of a different nature.

Cons

There are a number of concerns associated with the use of Reading Weeks which TPPG should be aware of:

- Given the introduction of tuition fees and other costs of study, it is now problematic to justify the use of Reading Weeks purely on a 'value for money' basis – unless the time is used for 'other' activities (e.g. employability, tutorials etc).
- The 30 weeks that form the standard academic year at UEA (and in most other HEIs) are increasingly 'precious' and the value gained from each week needs to be maximised in order to ensure a high quality student experience and to give our students an 'edge' over others in a competitive global jobs market.
- Under the NAM we will re-claim 2 weeks from the Exam Period from 2016/17 onwards, and we also need to ensure that every other week is used to maximum effect. The considerable effort required to reclaim 2 weeks is undermined if we then build in 2 weeks of unofficial 'holiday' where, in some cases, no activities or support is provided with regard to student learning or development.
- The 30 weeks of the academic year are precious and maximising the impact of each week is equally important across all programmes irrespective of subject.
- The variations in timing of Reading Weeks is problematic – in some schools they coincide with school holidays and in others they do not. This has implications for

equality and diversity since student carers/parents are treated differently even, in some cases, in different modules in the same degree programme.

- The terminology used is inconsistent and so are the activities used in these weeks when there is a break in module delivery – when combined with variations in the timing of these weeks, the potential to thoroughly confuse students on Joint degrees and students taking defined choice modules outside their home school is very considerable indeed.

Summary of Discussion at TPPG

When discussed at TPPG on 10 June 2015, some level of consensus emerged in relation to the following:

- Having a formal 'gap' in module content delivery was felt to have considerable value for staff and students alike. They offered, for example, the potential for adding value by creating a change of 'tempo in the delivery of the module, or offering blended learning.
- Schools which do not use them should not be pressured to do so. Schools that do use them should be allowed to continue to do so, as long as there is a clear vision of their academic purpose in relation to the personal and professional development of students and/or support of student learning. Rather than structured 'compulsory' activity, students could be guided towards what was being offered.
- A range of activities actually were going on during Reading Weeks in many schools – e.g. tutorials, advising sessions, employability-related events and workshops, laboratory work, guided study, online learning, self-directed study, independent learning tasks set by staff etc.
- The name was, however, felt to be inappropriate and some suggestions for alternatives were offered included 'Self-Directed Study Week'.
- There was little appetite for a prescriptive 'one size fits all' approach but it was agreed that there should be a consistent approach in terms of the timing and use of this 'gap' in module delivery at the level of the School or at the level of the degree course.
- The importance of a coordinated approach to the timing and use of Reading Weeks was felt to be particularly important in Schools and Faculties where Joint Degree students were located, and where (as in HUM) defined choice was extensive, with students often taking modules outside of their home school.

Recommendations

In the light of discussions at TPPG, the ADTP would like to propose the following recommendations to University LTC for its consideration and approval:

- 1) Schools that currently do not use Reading Weeks should be free to continue current practice.
- 2) School that do use a Reading Week should ensure that:
 - a. The timing is consistent at the level of the School or at the level of the course, whichever is felt to be in the best interests of students.
 - b. The nomenclature employed should reflect the range or focus of activities that occur within it. The term Reading Week should not be used when the actual focus or purpose of the gap in module delivery is directed to a different purpose than simply allowing 'space' for students to read. Schools might wish to use the terms 'Self-directed study week' or 'Transitions Week'.
 - c. Its purpose extends beyond just allowing space to read. It is assumed that students read all the way through their degree studies, so allowing a week in the middle of a semester for this does not represent an effective use of a hugely precious resource (a week of the academic year).
 - d. The 'break' in module delivery should include properly coordinated activities that support academic learning or the wider development of students – these might include
 - Assessment-related tasks – e.g. developing a draft of a formative assignment
 - Laboratory work

- Independent study tasks designed and set by academic staff
 - Online learning exercises –e.g. tests or quizzes, or exercises available via the VLE
 - Transitions-related work (e.g. looking forwards to the challenges associated with the next academic year and what students can/should do to prepare/equip themselves)
 - Face-to-face activities such as individual or small group tutorials
 - Advising sessions
 - Skills workshops
 - Employability workshops (e.g. CV development, cultural awareness or diversity training, exploring the concept of 'professionalism' etc).
- e. The kinds of activities and tasks associated with the 'gap' in module content delivery should be partly determined by the School's expectations of whether students should remain on campus/digs, as opposed to studying from their home base (i.e. using online resources such as the VLE).
- f. The purpose and aims of the 'gap' in module delivery should be clearly conveyed to all students in the school or on the degree course in question – e.g. if the emphasis is on employability-related activities (i.e. personal and professional development) then the objective of the activities should be made clear to students.
- g. It should be clear what 'value' the students will gain from engaging with the activities (i.e. in terms of their skills, personal and professional development or their academic learning) and also what the expectations are in terms of student attendance.

A final note from the ADTP: 'Transitions Week'

In a separate item within Section A of the June 2015 LTC the ADTP has provided a report on the Review of Induction and Transitions Support. In this a number of different kinds of 'Transitions' are identified, and any breaks or gaps in module delivery either in the autumn or spring semesters in future could legitimately be termed 'Transitions Week', with the emphasis on a range of activities (some provided at school, or Faculty level, some provided by central services such as Careers and DOS) which focus on the following categories of transition:

- Transition from dependent to independent/autonomous (HE) learner
- Transition into digital learner (digital literacy)
- Transition into collaborative learning – learning in groups (Belbin etc)
- Transition into project work and dissertation research (Research ethics, project design etc)
- Transition to becoming a reflective practitioner – What is reflection, how does it work, and what value can it have in your professional development?
- Transitions into the 2nd Year (Level 5)
- Transitions into the 3rd Year (Level 6)
- Transition into 4th Year (Level 7 IM Courses)
- Transitions into Year Abroad & return to UEA
- Transitions into Semester Abroad
- Transitions into Placement
- Transition in Year in Industry and return to UEA
- Transition from UG studies into Post-graduate Taught (PGT) Programmes
- Transitions into research degrees (e.g. PGR)
- Transitions into employment – CV workshops, interview techniques, mock selection tests, etc
- Transitions into entrepreneurship – students 'pitch' to a panel of staff for prizes to fund a new business venture.

Appendix A

Summary information on the existence and use of Reading Weeks

Hub	Contacted	Faculty	School	Reading week / Tutorial Week (Y/N)	No of weeks	Dates / rationale (if applicable)
EFB	Sarah Browne (UG) Clare Cooper (PGT)	FMH	MED	No		
ECB	Amy Leach (UG) Clare Cooper (PGT)	FMH	HSC	Yes - see ODP No tutorial weeks. No tutorial or reading weeks in PGT.		Nursing: dissertation reading week for year 3. Operating department practice: 3 reading weeks, in December, April and July.
Arts	Audrey Richardson (UG) / Louise Davison (PGT)	HUM	AMA	Yes - Tutorial Weeks	one per semester	UG - Week 6 Autumn, Week 6 Spring. PGT – Week 6 mainly (some lectures still take place in FTM and AMS)
Arts	Audrey Richardson	HUM	FTM	Yes - Tutorial Weeks	one per semester	UG - Week 7
Arts	Audrey Richardson	HUM	ART	Yes - Tutorial Weeks	one per semester	UG - Week 6
Arts	Christina Jeffrey	HUM	HIS	No official reading weeks		
Arts	Christina Jeffrey (UG)	HUM	LDC	UG - No official reading weeks		
Arts	Louise Davison (PGT)	HUM	LDC	PGT - Yes	one per semester	Week 7
Arts	Dawn Goff (UG)	HUM	PPL	UG - No official reading weeks.		UG - Reading weeks more common in Autumn between week 6-8
Arts	Louise Davison (PGT)	HUM	PPL	Yes - Varies		PSI - Week 7 PHI - none LCS - none
Arts	Dawn Goff	HUM	HUM-UG	No official reading weeks.		Reading weeks more common in Autumn between week 6-8
EFB	Karin Goodby	SCI	BIO	No		
EFB	Danny Turner	SCI	CHE	No		
EFB	Catherine Harris	SCI	PHA	No		
EFB	Alex Ponka	SCI	CMP	Yes - some modules have reading weeks	one	CMP undergraduates, week 7 is treated as a reading week in some modules. However, other modules lectures are not held in week 11 instead to allow students more time to focus on their lab work
EFB	Karin Goodby	SCI	ENV	No official reading week – School considering using Week 6.		Email sent to all Module Organizers: From: Rachel Snow (SCI) On Behalf Of Env HoS PA Sent: Wednesday, May 13, 2015 11:44 AM To: ENV Faculty Subject: Message from ENV E&D Athena Swan Committee To all module organisers: The ENV E&D Athena SWAN committee (EDASC) would like to ask all module organisers of Autumn semester units, that have a reading week, to consider adopting “Week 6 as the reading week”, to coincide with the schools’ half-term. This is a recommendation from the EDASC committee and will likely benefit both staff and student parents. Best wishes, Aldina Franco Chair of the EDASC committee

Zicer	Karen Bezants	SCI	SCI-PGT	No		
EFB	Alex Ponka	SCI	MTH	Yes - half reading week in autumn for UG modules.		MTH UG have half reading week in autumn. Years 2-4: Thursday and Friday of Week 6. Year 1: Friday Week 6 and Monday Week 7.
Arts	Audrey Richardson (UG) / Louise Davison (PGT)	SSF	DEV	Yes	one per semester	UG - Week 6 Autumn, Week 6 Spring. PGT – Week 6
Arts	Kerry Mcconnell (UG) / Louise Davison (PGT)	SSF	ECO	No		
Zicer	Theresa Armes (UG)	SSF	EDU	UG - Yes.	one per semester	Week 7
Zicer	Jeffrey Davison (PGT)	SSF	EDU	PGCE, Counselling and P/T courses: No reading week.		
Zicer	Jeffrey Davison (PGT)	SSF	EDU	MA Education: about half of the MOs have a reading week in Week 7.		Week 7
Arts	Kerry Mcconnell (UG)	SSF	LAW	UG – No		UG – breaks in teaching on some modules may occur on an ad hoc basis
Arts	Louise Davison (PGT)	SSF	LAW	PGT – Yes		Week 7
EFB	Kelsey Keeler	SSF	NBS	Yes - rebranded as an Employability Week	one	Week 7, Semester 1 Email sent on 14 th October 2014: Dear all NBS Employability Week will take place in Week 7 (November 3rd – 7th) . During this week the Business School has arranged a variety of careers-focused events to help you develop your employability skills and awareness of the tasks involved in winning the job you want. The School expects students to attend at least 3 sessions during the week. You can book into events by visiting the web page: https://mycareercentral.uea.ac.uk/students/events/detail/423511 Once you have booked into your chosen Employability Events, the sessions that you have chosen will be scheduled on to your individual eVision timetables and will be available to view on eVision from week 6 onwards.
Zicer	Julie Winner (UG)	SSF	PSY	UG - Yes	one per semester (UG)	Week 6
Zicer	Clare Cooper (PGT)	SSF	PSY	PGT - No		
Zicer	Julie Winner (UG) Clare Cooper (PGT)	SSF	SWK	No		