

## **Synopsis**

# **Academic Year Review Green Paper**

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## Executive Summary

The University Executive commissioned a review of the academic year with the intention of moving to a trimester system. A Green Paper presented to the Executive on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012 considered the implementation of the trimester system in universities in Australia, the UK and the US. Four Australian case studies were examined in detail: Charles Sturt University, Deakin University, The University of Canberra and the University of New England. This synopsis summarizes the main findings from those case studies together with broader issues and recommendations arising from the review. The Flowers Committee Enquiry into the Organization of the Academic Year in the UK was particularly instructive in recognizing the potential flexibility and choice for both students and staff in the context of greater institutional efficiency and effectiveness in resource management.

This report identifies the key advantages and disadvantages of the adoption of a trimester system and additionally considers the learning from the process of implementation in the Australian case study universities. Converting to a trimester system has been a tailored experience with some universities such as Bond, Canberra, Central Queensland, New England and Southern Cross Universities all running in full trimester mode while others such as Curtin and Western Australia are more selective in conducting their postgraduate business courses in that mode. Deakin runs all courses in trimester mode with the exception of the Medical School. See **Appendix A** for more detail.

Some key advantages that have been identified by universities that have made the conversion are: the provision of accelerated pathways through degree programs; the opportunity for students to make up missed or failed subjects; better utilization of facilities and physical resources; improvement in the positioning of the diversity in the international student market-place and, allowing students to have greater flexibility to combine their university work with periods of fulltime employment.

As with all systems change, there have been some disruptions to the 'normal' order of things and some potential disadvantages have been identified. One of the arguments that has been put forward against full implementation of a trimester system is the idea that undergraduate students would not be mature enough to cope with the intense rhythm of a trimester and they would not get enough time to read, reflect and absorb. Other arguments suggest that there would be: a very tight turnaround for the provision of examination results and enrollments between semesters; greater need for staff offices and facilities due to increased usage and an increased expense of maintaining university facilities because of constant use.

Regardless of the model that is implemented, it is important that sound assessment practices and sequential learning structures are maintained; that teaching periods allow sufficient time for depth in student learning and maturation; and, that academic staff research time and opportunities are protected especially in areas of excellence.

Two key implementation issues are the critical importance of staff and students' consultation together with the need for detailed planning. Deakin University experienced serious problems with its implementation of the trimester model because of weaknesses in those areas resulting in major re-engineering of its original design and significant adverse publicity and reputational damage.

There would be internal and external risks to be managed by the University in moving to a three term academic year. In particular, there needs to be a sound understanding of the possible impacts of a trimester system on retention and completion as well the implication for student support services. The experience of Australian universities has clearly demonstrated the importance of an implementation that is properly worked through and includes detailed information and consultation with staff and students. However, with appropriate management of these issues and careful and considered configuration of the academic year, many advantages in terms of the optimization of student throughput, efficient uses of resources and flexibility for student pathways which are positive features of a trimester system would present UWS with significant opportunities at this time.

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May 30, 2012

## Introduction

Calendars change as situations change. There are examples of variations in the calendar system in many universities from those who advertise a semester system but have summer and/or winter schools to those who offer courses on a quarterly system.

UWS, with its distinctive mission, is at a crossroad in its growth and development. The University's founding Act of Parliament directs it to 'have particular regard to the needs and aspirations of residents of Greater Western Sydney', and this is reflected in its mission and other aspects of its Strategic Plan. The University of Western Sydney began operating as a single multi-campus university in 2001 and has been providing higher education opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds since then.

The University has been commended for the focus it places on advancing its mission by the former Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), who recognized that:

There is no doubt that UWS does have a significant impact on the region, through its education and training programs, research, community engagement activities of many types, and as one of the region's largest employers. UWS is leading the way in developing programs for engagement with an urban region with areas of low socio- economic status (SES). UWS clearly remains a 'university of the people', as it was described in AUQA's 2007 Audit Report.

(TEQSA 2011, p.3)

The Vice Chancellor in a recent address reiterated the mission of UWS by stating that she "...believes strongly that everyone with the passion and drive to succeed should have the chance to go to university".

The University is currently reviewing its strategic directions in response to the 'demand-driven' higher education policy environment and investigating ways by which it can provide high quality service and opportunities for the anticipated growth in the student body.

The UWS student profile shows:

- The University has the largest number of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds of any university in Australia;
- over 70 per cent of students are from Western Sydney;
- 16 per cent of UWS students come through the Vocation Education and Training system;
- 33 per cent are over the age of 25; and
- 6.4 per cent are from non-English speaking backgrounds, representing 150 different nationalities, compared to 3.6 per cent across the sector.

- many of our registered fulltime undergraduate students are in paid employment because of their economic circumstances. This creates added risk of disengagement and non-completion.

According to the AUQA/TEQSA report (2011), one important aspect of UWS's mission is the contribution the University can make to raising higher education participation rates in the region, which historically has had lower rates of participation than the national average. To this end, the University has informed the Commonwealth Government that it intends to increase Commonwealth-funded student numbers by 2.5 per cent per annum in the medium term.

At UWS, it is envisaged that this expansion will reflect a steady growth from 35,000 in 2011 to 45,000 by 2015 to 50,000 by 2020. The report also argues that the proposed expansion has revealed several issues that are of great relevance to the University if it is to deliver quality programs:

- staff workload,
- the student-to-staff ratio, and
- reducing the variability of student experience.

With regard to its planned expansion, the University has implemented the following strategies:

- developed a new set of workload principles and agreements.
- been very strategic in its approach to hiring full-time academic staff to support the recent increase in student enrolment as well as the planned future growth.
- paid special attention to the quality of academic programs through an extensive quality management system (QMS) focused on numerous surveys of student and graduate satisfaction and have displayed adequate responsiveness to qualitative feedback.

Another strategy that the University is contemplating is the implementation of an extended academic year focusing on the expansion of the capacity of the University through more efficient utilization of the existing infrastructure and resources and without the requirement of major capital expenditure.

## **Higher Education Reform in Australia**

Recently, higher education in Australia has been undergoing significant reform following the Bradley Review (2008). These reforms have included: the removal of enrolment caps; student income support reforms; regional loading, international student visa review and a base funding review. The Australian government envisages that by 2025, 40% of 25 – 34 year olds will hold a Bachelor's degree, which represents a very significant increase in the number of young people accessing higher education. In the absence of additional base funding, deregulation of the higher education market and thus greater competition between universities have become the main drivers for increasing revenue. A critical consideration for higher education

institutions is that of how to reduce costs and gain efficiencies through fuller utilization of resources without sacrificing quality and service. Some universities are investigating ways of exploring new revenue opportunities together with streamlining their business processes in order to improve efficiency, productivity and profitability while providing students with a more enriching learning experience.

### **The Case for a Trimester Year**

This report presents the case for a trimester year. It contributes to the University's strategic planning activities and provides a range of insights and recommendations to the Vice Chancellor and University Executive on matters relating to the project:

- reviews of the experience of universities that have moved from semesters to trimesters and other systems in Australia, the UK and The USA.
- discussion of options for extending the academic year through adoption of a trimester model at either an institution-wide or on a more selective basis
- identification of some business process re-engineering issues.

It is important to recognize that no system is inherently good or bad. What is important is having the broader discussion "of how proposed structural changes may impact on the core activities of the university (teaching, learning and research)" (Baldwin & McInnis, 2002).

Over the past 50 years, many of the universities in Australia have offered their courses through a two semester system, generally running from early March to late November. More recently, some institutions have offered a trimester system, with others introducing summer schools from December to February and winter schools during June and July. The advantages of a trimester system for Australian Universities have been identified by Cochrane (1970, p. 20) and later Richmond and Piper (1991) as:

1. accelerated speed of degrees, saving valuable time for students who want to graduate sooner;
2. opportunities for making up missed or failed subjects in the next trimester rather than having to wait a whole year before re-takes;
3. greater choice and flexibility for students.

There are several issues to contemplate when moving from a semester system to a trimester system. For example, some universities are exploring how implementing trimesters could lead to improvements in efficiency, and growth in student revenues. Trimesters are appealing to universities who now have to compete for more students in a deregulated environment. Furthermore, the international competitiveness of Australian universities might be enhanced as, at the moment, if a university operates under a semester system in Australia, international students from the northern hemisphere generally can't begin further study until the March following their graduation

in the previous June (The Australian Financial Review, 2011). However, amongst other considerations, caution might be appropriate, if Australia follows the way of Canada in linking funding to the retention of students and not merely access to higher education (Deloitte, 2011), in the absence of robust evaluative data on the impact of trimesters on graduate completion rates.

Changes in government policy have certainly contributed to the growth in university enrollments in Australia. In addition, the slowing down in the economy during the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) resulted in many students remaining in education and training and as a result enrolment in PG courses increased over the past 5 years. IBISWorld (2012) in their paper "University and Other Higher Education in Australia" argue that "...the master's degree by coursework has become the second most popular option after Bachelors degrees with enrolments up 15.5% in 2009" (p.8). In their analysis, they "expect the postgraduate market to grow faster than undergraduate student demand in the coming years. This is due to the significant numbers of older students wishing to update their qualifications or make a career change" (p. 11). In order to support this anticipated growth, universities will probably need to consider expanding their "online educational capabilities, increase the number of external and multi-modal courses and improve the flexibility of internal courses".

The documentary analysis in the Green Paper reveals that there are considerable opportunities for growth through moving to trimesters, particularly in the postgraduate market, and these should be explored further.

## **Lessons from the Australian Case Studies**

The Green Paper considers four case studies of the introduction of trimesters at Australian universities: Charles Sturt University, Deakin University, the University of Canberra and the University of New England.

**Appendix B** provides data on those universities that coincided the trimester system with the calendar year. **Appendix C** provides data on the structure of the academic calendars of Australian universities adopting the trimester system over a non-calendar year.

The experience of implementation of the trimester system in Australian Universities indicates that staff and student involvement is essential for successful outcomes. In addition, the following lessons can be drawn:

- before moving to a trimester system there is a need for strategic clarity and consultation;
- careful planning and change management procedures are required to avoid flaws in execution;



- importance of identifying inefficiencies in the way electives are currently offered and reducing duplication;
- need to explore the option of having core units across the curriculum available in the third semester;
- ensure that there are systems in place to allow students to "flow" through the trimesters with maximum flexibility;
- having appropriate number of units or fulfilling projects in 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester;
- reviewing assessment and examination timetabling.

A special taskforce established by Charles Sturt expressed concern in the following areas, which should also feature in the discussions at the University of Western Sydney:

- The concept of a fast track degree program requires both acceptance and recognition by employers, the community, professional accreditation bodies and quality assurance agencies. A reputational risk may exist if a three-year degree offered in a fast track two-year format was to be perceived to be at two-year course and hence sub-degree level.
- The university should have access to robust market information that would assist it in predicting student response to the proposed system.
- The successful implementation of the trimester system would rely on the University's willingness and capability to pursue innovative approaches to teaching and learning and the achievement of efficiencies in key academic administration systems and processes.
- For optimum use of the third semester and of the facilities of the university in that period, the faculties would need to offer a better mix of critical core ones and popular electives.
- Many studies of the short-term outcomes of intensive courses provide strong evidence that these courses yield equivalent – and sometimes superior – results in comparison with traditional-length courses.
- It has been suggested that accelerated programs will principally attract and benefit highly motivated, older students with an instrumental view of education related to career advancement.
- The potential benefits of a trimester system need to be tested against key principles for effective undergraduate teaching and learning, moderated by the judgment of academics in the discipline, for example:
  - The curriculum should be designed to develop knowledge, skills and understandings in a sequential, cumulative and coherent fashion;
  - The design of the academic calendar should support sound assessment practices;

- Where social interaction is considered an important part of a learning experience, this is equally supported in all teaching periods;
- Where cohort information is seen as a valuable aspect of the student learning experience, this is supported by administrative structures and arrangements.
- It is essential that calendar reforms are compatible with, and support, improvements to the quality of learning and teaching.

In the Australian case studies the main issues identified by students were:

- having enough time to study;
- coping with workloads;
- extra pressure on students who supported their studies by working in the mid-term and summer breaks due to a shortening of the mid-term break and the prospect of dropping from 13 teaching weeks to 11;
- having enough time to revise before exams;
- making sure that assessments are spread out and marked fairly;
- ensuring that a wide range of units were offered in Semester 3;
- some felt that the lecturers were unprepared in the transition from a semester to a trimester system and this had a negative impact on both the learning and the examination process.

## **The UK Scenario**

In 1993, a report from the Committee of Enquiry into the Organisation of the Academic Year chaired by Lord Flowers recommended that: higher education institutions should consider introducing a third semester and that the Higher Education Funding Councils should provide funding for a number of pilot projects to explore the implications of operating year-round teaching (Flowers, 1993). The Flowers Committee (1993) concluded that:

- a trimester system offers the potential for greater flexibility and choice for students, and opportunities for staff to make more effective use of their time;
- it also offers the opportunity for more efficient 'throughput' of students and thus improved utilisation of facilities;
- however, for efficient planning and management of resources, institutions would need to be able to manage the number of students attending in each semester (equalising them) and therefore would have to limit the students' exercise of choice;
- efficient management would depend on multiple intakes which present major challenges for timetabling, especially in those areas where sequential learning is emphasized;
- benefits to staff would depend on their teaching for no longer than they do in the current system;
- undergraduate students other than those on accelerated degree courses would continue to attend for around 30–36 weeks in any given year;

- students on accelerated programmes should study specially designed 'fast track' courses, using new teaching methods, rather than current courses scheduled over three terms a year;
- only a small minority of undergraduate students will wish to follow accelerated degree courses; and
- not all institutions would wish to introduce an extended undergraduate teaching year—for example, research intensive institutions might decide against changes which would reduce the time or facilities available for research.

(Baldwin and McInnis, 2002)

The Accelerated and Intensive Routes Programme (AIR) (Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council 1991, Higher Education Funding Council, 1993) was established typically as a 45-week academic year in response to a Government focus on developing more flexible approaches to course structures such as the creation of intensive courses.

The AIR Programme was **not** developed to replace mainstream undergraduate education. As the Evaluation commissioned by the Higher Education Academy on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills and the Higher Education Funding Council for England explained:

[the intention was] to add to the range of options open to students. In many cases, especially in Europe and the UK, acceleration is for the more able students; i.e. those of sufficient maturity, with motivation and commitment to handle the additional workload. Therefore fast-track degrees are applicable in specific circumstances, including students' life circumstances.

(McCaig et al., 2007, p.30)

Baldwin and McInnis (2002) suggest that:

of particular interest to Australian universities may be the staff apprehension that the AIRs would be a device for dividing elite research-based universities from basic undergraduate teaching universities, which would be the sole providers of the two-year track.

With regard to resource implications, the initial concept (suggested by Flowers) was to utilise physical resources that would otherwise lay idle. Fallows and Symon (1999) believe this to be an over-simplified view and made the following observations which may be pertinent to the UWS situation:

- The greatest cost in operating any university teaching programme is salaries. If summer teaching can be absorbed into the expected workload of existing staff ... there will be no additional costs but otherwise it will be necessary to take on additional staff or to pay inducements to existing staff.
- Academic services such as libraries and computing facilities will require longer opening hours than may be conventional during the summer period – thereby incurring costs.

- Provision of self-financing services such as catering may not be viable if numbers are low.
- The summer period is often utilised for refurbishment, relocations and similar disruptive activities such as stock checking in the library. The time when mainstream students are not on campus should not be regarded as a time of inactivity.

## **The US Scenario**

In the US, the majority of American universities operate two regular 15-week semesters with a summer school which is usually shorter than other academic sessions/terms. Summer schools vary between 5 and 10 weeks and serve many interests such as:

1. Outreach programs for the community;
2. Professional development or general education courses;
3. Regular term for enrolled university students offering credits for courses that are offered during semesters.

In the 1960s and 1970s the trimester was perceived by some universities to be a logical extension of the summer school. Yet, at the height of its popularity 1967-68, only 4% of colleges and universities implemented the system. By 1985-86 only 2 percent were using trimesters.

Arguments put forward in support of trimesters or multiple semesters included:

- inconsistency in slow college graduation rates alongside industry's need for an increased pool of trained professionals. The trimester plan promised both quality and efficiency;
- reduced costs of living due to reduced study time;
- greater effectiveness of human resource planning;
- inefficiencies arising from closure of the university for a quarter of a year;
- perceptions by students that in a semester system time was not utilized to its fullest advantage;
- increase in number of students studying in an year;
- more students graduating every year due to accelerated degrees;
- students who have fallen behind the normal schedule because of economic difficulties, family problems, illness, the failure of courses, and other disrupting factors, should be able to regain lost time and graduate on schedule;
- flexibility in terms of entering and exiting degree and university studies;
- full utilization of teaching personnel lead to additional employment and compensation for faculty;
- flexible opportunities for leave, study, travel, or teaching elsewhere for teaching staff;
- better academic performance due to continuity of studying.

The current trend in the US is to move to or maintain a semester system. The main driver for this has been perceptions of the advantage of alignment of academic years across different universities thus facilitating easier transfer of students between institutions.

## Trimesters: The Experience of Implementation

Australian Universities that have made the **conversion from semester to trimester** systems have argued that this allows the following **benefits**:

- Accelerated student pathways through degrees programs, saving valuable time for both undergraduate and postgraduate students who want to graduate sooner.
- Opportunities for students to make up missed or failed subjects in the next trimester rather than having to wait a whole year before re-takes.
- Restructuring the academic year could have positive implications for curriculum design and the quality in student learning.
- Greater flexibility in courses allowing students opportunities to alternate sessions of study and combine their university work with periods of full-time employment
- Better utilization of facilities and physical resources, thus achieving greater efficiency in the use of expensive infrastructure
- Enhanced access to inter-university exchange and credit transfer.
- More evenly distributed use of library and study facilities.
- Opportunities for staff to teach 4 out of 6 semesters in a 2 year period with the remaining 2 semesters available for focused research activity. This flexibility could create a planned extended period for research activity.
- More evenly spread out graduations thus providing a steady release of graduates into the employment market.
- Improved positioning in the international student market-place through better alignment of academic years between northern hemisphere countries and Australia. This would provide more opportunities for students to engage in international study and work integrated learning experience because the trimester system.

One concern that some academics express as systems change within universities is the perception of a negative impact on standards or the development of 'degree factories' with limited or uneven support services. While this may be true in some instances, it is by no means an inevitable outcome of trimesters. However, it does speak to the issue of managing effective implementation. When repositioning the University in the direction of trimesters, it is important to ensure that the quality of the teaching and support services remain high. An important consideration that is central to the success of such a transition is a targeted marketing strategy that focuses on sharpening, enhancing and maintaining brand value and awareness.

The following are some of the **disadvantages** that have been identified in various institutional implementations:

- There would be a very tight turn around for the provision of examination results and enrolments between trimesters.

- There would be a dramatic effect on the curricula and the way that subjects are taught.
- Universities cannot rent out residences and college facilities during the summer break for conferences.
- Increased administrative burdens of registration, updating student records and selection of students for admission.
- Students would not get enough time to read, reflect, absorb and mature with negative consequences for student learning and academic outcomes.
- Increased expense of maintaining university facilities because of constant use.
- Greater need for staff offices and facilities due to increased usage as staff manage the spread out student load.
- Increase in administrative and maintenance staff due to year round operation.

Regardless of the model that is chosen or the structure that is used for accelerating or compressing the teaching periods, it is important that consideration be given to the following:

- sequential learning structures are maintained;
- teaching periods allow sufficient time for some depth in student learning and maturation;
- sound assessment practices are maintained;
- that high levels of social interaction are maintained as far as possible;
- there is rigorous monitoring of the effectiveness of intensive and accelerated programmes to 'regular' courses; and
- academic staff research time and opportunities are protected (especially in areas of excellence).

(Adapted from Baldwin and McInnis, 2002, p.vi)

## **Conclusion: Models and Configurations for implementation**

Moves towards a three term academic year have generally been driven by opportunities for growth in student numbers, more efficient use of expensive infrastructure, greater flexibility in the use of staff time (including focused research time) and a perceived demand from students for flexibility in their study schedules. A judicious implementation of a trimester system could create opportunities for the University in each of these areas. The case studies identified in this report and discussed in greater detail in the green paper have generated a strong evidential base which both demonstrates the advantages and the pitfalls of the trimester system and its implementation.

A system with a three term academic year can take different forms and the University will need to consider various options and models. The following are three illustrative models:

**Model 1: Conduct a pilot in the first instance** with later conversion of all postgraduate programs and a selection of UG courses.

### **Model 2: Year 1 Semester followed by Trimesters from Year 2 onward**

The first year UG program is constructed on the basis of semesters and then switches to trimesters from year 2 onwards. The first year experience would help prepare students for an accelerated program of study in the following years.

**Model 3: Full move to a trimester system. See Systems 1 and 2 over.**

## **System 1 – A Trimester System Conducted Over a Calendar Year: 2014**

The Calendar Year 2014 option presented below has been developed by the School of Business and comprises three 13 week trimesters timed to be completed within a calendar year. **(See Appendix D)**

The arrangement provides alignment between UWS (School of Business) and UWS College which is an important component of the UWS strategy. Features of this option are:

- Ten scheduled teaching weeks
- Mid-session non-teaching week for examinations and intensive face-to-face sessions
- Two week formal examination period
- Saturdays can also be included as examination and break days.
- Three week intersession break
- Census date is set in week four of the teaching session providing time for an initial assessment after completion of 30% of the scheduled learning activities
- Results processing to occur at the beginning of week 16 (usually on Monday)

It is noted that while the UWS College trimesters will commence at the same time as UWS School of Business the proposed teaching weeks may vary. There are a number of benefits of this calendar year, some of which are outlined below. This model provides:

- alignment and facilitates transition between UWS School of Business and UWS College.
- alignment between UWS School of Business undergraduate courses and postgraduate courses, currently taught in semesters and quarters respectively.
- an opportunity for Trimester 1 to be timed so that it commences after the main round that UAC offers, thus enabling UWS School of Business to continue to participate in the UAC process.
- an opportunity for Trimesters 2 and 3 to commence prior to and following the UAC mid-year intake thus providing further opportunities for new students to commence. This non-standard timing provides opportunities that are counter-cyclical to our main University competitors.

The trimester-based calendar year will also provide opportunities to structure academic work differently by providing opportunities for research active staff to shift teaching workload into two semesters. Teaching focused academic staff will usually teach in all three trimesters and will usually take annual leave in January each year. The three 13-week trimesters also provide 5 non-teaching weeks for shorter annual leave breaks for these staff. The following is a simplified version of Appendix D.



**Trimester 1 - 13 weeks: 3 Feb – 2 May 2014**

Teaching:	3 Feb – 7 Mar
Mid Trimester Break	10 Mar – 14 Mar
Teaching:	17 Mar – 17 Apr
NSW Primary School Holidays:	14 Apr – 25 Apr
Public Holiday Easter:	18 Apr – 21 Apr
Public Holiday Anzac Day:	25 Apr
Exams:	21 Apr – 2 May

**Inter- Semester Break: 5 May – 23 May**

**Trimester 2 - 13 weeks: 26 May – 22 Aug 2014**

Teaching:	26 May – 27 Jun
Mid Trimester Break	30 Jun – 4 Jul
NSW Primary School Holidays:	30 Jun – 11 Jul
Teaching:	7 Jul - 8 Aug
Exams:	11 Aug – 22 Aug

**Inter- Semester Break: 25 Aug – 12 Sep**

**Trimester 3 - 13 weeks: 15 Sep – 12 Dec 2014**

Teaching:	15 Sep – 17 Oct
NSW Primary School Holidays:	22 Sep – 6 Oct
Mid Trimester Break	20 Oct – 24 Oct
Teaching:	27 Oct - 28 Nov
Exams:	1 Dec – 12 Dec
NSW Primary School Holidays:	22 Dec 2014 – 27 Jan 2015

**Inter- Semester Break: 15 Dec – 30 Jan 2015**

## **System 2 – A Trimester System Conducted Over a Non-Calendar Academic Year: 2014-15**

(Saturdays have been included as examination days and break days)

Tentative Dates for the 3 semesters are as follows:

**Trimester 1 –** 20 February to 8 June  
**Break:** 6<sup>th</sup> April to 22<sup>nd</sup> April  
 NSW Primary School Holidays: 14 Apr – 25 Apr

**Trimester 2 –** 25 June to 12 October  
 NSW Primary School Holidays: 30 Jun – 11 Jul  
**Break:** 11<sup>th</sup> August to 26<sup>th</sup> August

**Trimester 3 –** 29 October to 8 February  
 NSW Primary School Holidays: 22 Sep – 6 Oct  
**Break:** 22<sup>nd</sup> December to 6<sup>th</sup> January  
 NSW Primary School Holidays: 22 Dec – 27 Jan

## Possible Configuration of Intensive Courses

There are several ways in which subjects/units could be configured to support the use of an intensive format. It would be possible to accelerate or compress courses and subjects based on their internal academic structures or accreditation regimes. Finger & Penney (2001) have identified the following common configurations:

- **Week-long mode:** 5 or 6 consecutive days from 8.30-4.30 pm (Clark & Clark, 2000; Grant, 2001);
- **Two or Three Week-long Mode** (Petrowsky, 1996; van Scyoc & Gleason, 1993);
- **Weekend mode:** e.g., weekends either during the length of semester (e.g., in weeks 3, 6 and 9) or condensed into one half or one third of the semester;
- **Weekend and evening mode:** a mixture of weekends and allocated evening classes;
- **Other modes:** 3 hours per day for 18 days (Gose, 1995); weekly classes of 3 hours (Henebry, 1997); 4 hours per week for 5-10 weeks (Jonas et al., 2004).

## Assessing Internal and External Risks

There are internal and external risks that would need to be fully assessed and managed by the University in moving to a three term academic year. Among the external risks are the possible implications of a re-introduction of enrollment caps for Commonwealth Supported Places especially since the growth in Higher Education enrolments has been significant and may have budgetary implications. Moreover, the Government has given indications that it is looking at retention and completion rates in addition to access in the funding of universities. A good understanding of the possible impacts of a trimester system on retention and completion as well as the implication for student support services will be critical. Perhaps the major internal risk that the University would need to manage, based on the experience of those Australian Universities that have adopted the trimester system, is an implementation that is rushed, based on inadequate consultation with staff and students.

One of the main reasons for moving to a trimester system would be the gaining of efficiencies. However, if these are to be realized, other support systems need to be in gear. For example: the ICT systems, the admissions systems and the promotion pathways and performance management systems.

An important consideration as highlighted by AUQA suggests that:

the major risk the University will face as it implements its growth agenda will be the potential for further expansion to exacerbate the variability in the student experience, which needs to be diminished. Both the Board of Trustees and University management should make consistency in the student experience and in program delivery a priority for improvement. Reducing student attrition while at the same time pursuing a strategy of expanding access for under-represented groups is a demanding objective, and the University is making good progress in achieving it.

(TEQSA 2011, p.4)

The report also recognized that UWS “has many of the elements in place to manage these challenges and that others are in the process of being developed or scaled up, to form a generally supportive learning environment”. This is critical in providing a context for considering the processes underpinning the implementation of trimesters, including student consultation and involvement.

Finally, as this discussion moves forward, it would be worthwhile to consider the Executive Strategic Questions raised by our VC during the Campus Forums late last year:

- Which of the University’s strategic directions must be considered when developing the response to growth?
- Where is the demand and can the University take advantage of this demand?
- Where is there capacity to respond to demand and what needs to be done to increase capacity?
- What are the risks from growth and what is the University’s appetite for growth?

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## Comparing Australian University Trimester Schedules

Table 1 under presents basic number of weeks per semester for each of 10 universities that operate some form of a trimester system in Australia.

**Table 1: Australian Universities Trimester Schedule 2012/2013**

University	WEEKS			TOTAL WEEKS/ YEAR
	Trimester 1	Trimester 2	Trimester 3	
Bond University	14	14	13	<b>41</b>
Central Queensland University	14	14	14	<b>42</b>
Charles Sturt University	16	15	13	<b>44</b>
Curtin University of Technology	16	16	9	<b>41</b>
Deakin University	14	13	14	<b>41</b>
Southern Cross University	15	15	16	<b>46</b>
University of Canberra	17	9	17	<b>43</b>
University of Newcastle	14	13	13	<b>40</b>
University of New England	16	16	13	<b>45</b>
University of Western Australia	13	13	13	<b>39</b>

**Appendices B and C** outline the timetables of universities that operate **some form of a trimester system** in Australia. The extended tables provide details regarding dates of 2012 trimesters, the number of weeks/days of trimesters, study weeks and examination periods as they work through:

- an Academic year beginning January/February and ending in February/March or the following year (**See Appendix B**) ; and
- a Calendar year (**See Appendix C**).

Trimesters vary from 39 weeks (Western Australia) to 46 weeks (Southern Cross).

The following is an overview of how each of the following universities operate their academic year:

- **Bond University:** Single campus. All courses have run in trimester mode since 1989. Bond schedules three semesters each year, commencing in January, May and September, allowing a six-semester degree to be completed in two years, instead of three, without increasing semester workloads.
- **Central Queensland University:** 4 campuses. All courses run in trimester mode.
- **Charles Sturt University:** 12 campuses in Australia and 1 campus in Ontario, Canada. **Not a uniform trimester schedule** but a close match to it for all courses.
- **Curtin University of Technology:** 7 campuses in Australia. **Only postgraduate Business courses run in trimester mode in Bentley (main) campus.** Not an exact uniform trimester system. Primarily a 2-semester system and a third summer semester.

- **Deakin University:** 4 campuses. **All courses run in trimester mode, except the Medical School.**
- **Southern Cross University:** 4 campuses. All courses run in trimester mode.
- **University of Canberra:** Single campus. All courses run in mainly 2-semester system with a short winter session in between the two main semesters.
- **University of Newcastle:** 4 campuses in Australia and 1 in Singapore. **Only the Business school runs in trimester mode.**
- **University of New England:** 1 campus in Australia with eight regional study centres equipped with information technology infrastructure. All courses run in trimester mode.
- **University of Western Australia:** Single Campus. **Trimester system limited to the MBA program offered by its Business School and the Master of Pharmacy.**



# Australian Universities Trimester Schedules - Calendar Year: 2012 (Where applicable, Saturdays are included as exam days)

## APPENDIX B

	University Attribute / Name	Bond University	University of Canberra	University of Newcastle	University of Western Australia
TRIMESTER 1		<b>Trimester 1</b> 15 weeks	<b>Trimester 1</b> 17 weeks	<b>Trimester 1</b> 14 weeks	<b>Trimester 1</b> 14 weeks
	<b>Trimester 1</b>	9 Jan – 21 Apr	30 Jan – 1 Jun	30 Jan – 11 May	21 Jan – 28 Apr
	Orientation	9 Jan – 13 Jan	30 Jan – 3 Feb	-----	-----
	Classes	16 Jan	6 Feb – 23 Mar	30 Jan – 5 Apr	21 Jan – 20 Apr
	Mid Trimester Break	-----	26 Mar – 30 Mar	6 Apr – 13 Apr	-----
	Classes	-----	2 Apr – 11 May	16 Apr – 27 Apr	-----
	Study Break	-----	-----	30 Apr – 2 May 3 days	-----
	Examination	13 Apr – 21 Apr 8 days	14 May – 1 Jun 17 days	3 May – 11 May 8 days	21 Apr – 28 Apr 7 days
	Inter Trimester Break	23 Apr – 4 May	4 Jun – 11 Jun	14 May – 18 May	30 Apr – 11 May
TRIMESTER 2		<b>Trimester 2</b> 15 weeks	<b>Trimester 2</b> 9 weeks	<b>Trimester 2</b> 14 weeks	<b>Trimester 2</b> 13 weeks
	<b>Trimester 2</b>	7 May – 18 Aug	12 Jun – 10 Aug	21 May – 24 Aug	12 May – 11 Aug
	Orientation	7 May – 11 May	-----	-----	-----
	Classes	14 May	12 Jun – 27 Jul	21 May – 10 Aug	12 May – 3 Aug
	Mid Trimester Break	-----	-----	-----	-----
	Classes	-----	-----	-----	-----
	Study Break	-----	-----	13 Aug – 15 Aug 3 days	-----
	Examination	10 Aug – 18 Aug 8 days	30 Jul – 10 Aug 11 days	16 Aug – 24 Aug 8 days	4 Aug – 11 Aug 7 days
	Inter Trimester Break	20 Aug – 31 Aug	No Break	27 Aug – 31 Aug	13 Aug – 24 Aug
TRIMESTER 3		<b>Trimester 3</b> 15 weeks	<b>Trimester 3</b> 17 weeks	<b>Trimester 3</b> 14 weeks	<b>Trimester 3</b> 13 weeks
	<b>Trimester 3</b>	3 Sep – 15 Dec	6 Aug – 7 Dec	3 Sep – 7 Dec	25 Aug – 24 Nov
	Orientation	3 Sep – 7 Sep	6 Aug – 10 Aug	-----	-----
	Classes	10 Sep	13 Aug – 28 Sep	3 Sep – 23 Nov	25 Aug – 16 Nov
	Mid Trimester Break	-----	1 Oct – 5 Oct	-----	-----
	Classes	-----	8 Oct – 16 Nov	-----	-----
	Study Break	-----	-----	26 Nov – 28 Nov 3 days	-----
	Examination	7 Dec – 15 Dec 8 days	19 Nov – 7 Dec 17 days	29 Nov – 7 Dec 8 days	17 Nov – 24 Nov 7 days
	<b>TOTAL WEEKS PER YR *</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>40</b>

NOTE: \* = No of weeks per semester/year includes orientation, classes and examination periods but excludes the mid-semester breaks

# Australian Universities Trimester Schedules - Non-Calendar Year: 2012 /13 (Where applicable, Saturdays are included as exam days)

## APPENDIX C

	University Attribute/Name	Central Queensland University	Charles Sturt University	Curtin University of Technology	Deakin University	Southern Cross University	University of New England
TRIMESTER 1		<b>Trimester 1</b> 14 weeks	<b>Trimester 1</b> 15 weeks	<b>Trimester 1</b> 16 weeks	<b>Trimester 1</b> 14 weeks	<b>Trimester 1</b> 14 weeks	<b>Trimester 1</b> 15 weeks
		27 Feb – 8 Jun	20 Feb – 15 Jun	20 Feb – 15 Jun	5 Mar – 15 Jun	15 Feb – 2 Jun	13 Feb – 8 June
	Orientation	-----	20 Feb – 24 Feb	20 Feb – 24 Feb	-----	15 Feb – 17 Feb	13 Feb - 17 Feb
	Classes	-----	27 Feb – 5 Apr	27 Feb – 7 Apr	5 Mar – 5 Apr	20 Feb – 30 Mar	20 Feb – 25 May
	Mid Semester Break	-----	# 6 Apr – 20 Apr	9 Apr – 13 Apr	6 Apr – 15 Apr	** 2 Apr – 6 Apr	9 Apr – 22 Apr Intensive School
	Classes	-----	23 Apr – 1 Jun	16 Apr – 25 May	16 Apr – 1 Jun	10 Apr – 18 May	-----
	Study Break	-----	-----	28 May – 1 Jun 5 days	4 Jun – 6 Jun 3 days	21 May – 23 May 3 days	-----
	Examination	31 May – 8 Jun 8 days	4 Jun – 15 Jun 10 days	4 Jun – 15 Jun 10 days	7 Jun – 15 Jun 7 days	24 May – 2 Jun 9 days	28 May – 8 Jun 11 days
	Inter Trimester Break	11 Jun – 29 Jun	18 Jun – 6 Jul	18 Jun – 6 Jul	18 Jun – 6 Jul	4 Jun – 15 Jun	-----
TRIMESTER 2		<b>Trimester 2</b> 14 weeks	<b>Trimester 2</b> 15 weeks	<b>Trimester 2</b> 16 weeks	<b>Trimester 2</b> 14 weeks	<b>Trimester 2</b> 14 weeks	<b>Trimester 2</b> 13 weeks
		2 Jul – 12 Oct	9 Jul – 26 Oct	9 Jul – 2 Nov	9 Jul – 19 Oct	13 Jun – 29 Sep	21 Jun – 15 Oct
	Orientation	-----	-----	9 Jul – 13 Jul	-----	13 Jun – 15 Jun	21 Jun – 22 Jun
	Classes	-----	9 Jul – 17 Aug	16 Jul – 7 Sep	9 Jul – 21 Sep	18 Jun – 27 Jul	25 Jun – 28 Sep
	Mid Semester Break	-----	# 20 Aug – 31 Aug	10 Sep – 14 Sep	24 Sep – 30 Sep	** 30 Jul – 3 Aug	11 Jun – 24 Jun 11 Aug – 26 Aug Intensive Schools
	Classes	-----	3 Sep – 12 Oct	17 Sep – 12 Oct	1 Oct – 5 Oct	6 Aug – 14 Sep	-----
	Study Break	-----	-----	15 Oct – 19 Oct 5 days	8 Oct – 10 Oct 3 days	17 Sep – 19 Sep 3 days	-----
	Examination	4 Oct – 12 Oct 8 days	15 Oct – 26 Oct 11 days	22 Oct – 2 Nov 11 days	11 Oct – 19 Oct 8 days	20 Sep – 29 Sep 9 days	2 Oct – 15 Oct 12 days
	Inter Trimester Break	15 Oct – 26 Oct	29 Oct – 9 Nov	-----	22 Oct – 9 Nov	1 Oct – 12 Oct	-----
TRIMESTER 3		<b>Trimester 3</b> 14 weeks	<b>Trimester 3</b> 13 weeks	<b>Trimester 3</b> 13 weeks	<b>Trimester 3</b> 14 weeks	<b>Trimester 3</b> 15 weeks	<b>Trimester 3</b> 13 weeks
		29 Oct – 8 Feb '13	12 Nov – 15 Feb '13	5 Nov – 8 Feb '13	12 Nov – 22 Feb '13	15 Oct – 2 Feb '13	29 Oct – 11 Feb
	Orientation	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	Classes	-----	12 Nov – 21 Dec	5 Nov – 21 Dec	12 Nov – 24 Dec	15 Oct – 14 Dec	29 Oct – 21 Dec
	Mid Semester Break	24 Dec – 1 Jan '13	24 Dec – 1 Jan '13	24 Dec – 1Jan '13	25 Dec – 3 Jan '13	** 17 Dec – 1 Jan '13	24 Dec – 4 Jan
	Classes	-----	2 Jan – 25 Jan '13	2 Jan – 1 Feb '13	4 Jan – 8 Feb '13	2 Jan – 18 Jan '13	7 Jan – 25 Jan
	Study Break	-----	# 28 Jan – 8 Feb '13	-----	11 Feb – 13 Feb '13 3 days	21 Jan – 23 Jan '13 3 days	-----
	Examination	4 Feb – 8 Feb '13 5 days	11 Feb–15 Feb '13 5 days	4 Feb – 8 Feb '13 5 days	14 Feb – 22 Feb '13 8 days	24 Jan – 2 Feb '13 8 days	29 Jan – 11 Feb'13
	Inter Trimester Break	11 Feb – 22 Feb '13	-----	11 Feb – 22 Feb '13	25 Feb – 8 Mar '13	-----	-----
	<b>TOTAL WEEKS PER YR *</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>41</b>

NOTES: \* = No of weeks per semester/year includes orientation, classes and examination periods but excludes the mid-semester breaks  
 # = This period is denoted "residential school" for external students on the university calendar but is considered a mid-semester break here  
 \*\* = This period is denoted "study week" on the university calendar but is considered a mid-semester break here

## 2014

[illegible]