

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE
FUTURE ACADEMIC YEAR STRUCTURE

1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

The purpose of this paper is to provide a revised proposal on the structure of the academic year from 2024/25 onwards following comments from relevant committees including Senate.

The paper provides an overview of the academic view provided by Senate on 19 April for the initial proposal ([SEN22:50](#)), and an adjusted proposal for a further academic view in light of that feedback. The paper provides the following information:

- A set of principles for the development of the academic year structure with comments on each in relation to feedback received throughout the process of consultation, and comments on implications for workload
- A proposed structure, based on the original Option 1 (see Senate paper [SEN22:50](#))
- A review of the proposed structure against the principles
- Recommendations for next steps

2. PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	SMT <u>Academic view</u> Joint Meeting of EEC and SSEC Qatar Academic Planning Group UEC QAC Heads of School SRC Senate URC	23 March 2023 27 March 2023 By circulation 23 March 2023 29 March 2023 29 March 2023 <i>Via Teams</i> 19 April 2023 3 May 2023
Further consideration/ approval required by	<u>Further academic view</u> UEC SRC QAC Senate <u>Approval</u> QAC UEC Senate	16 May 2023 17 May 2023 18 May 2023 7 June 2023 August (tbc) August (tbc) 20 September 2023

3. RECOMMENDED ACTION

UEC is asked to provide an academic view on the proposals to:

- (i) Commence teaching w/c 23 September 2024 (week 9 of AY) with Welcome Week w/c 16 September 2024 (week 8 of AY) to optimise student recruitment activity.
- (ii) Put in place a three-term structure for the academic year (AY).
- (iii) Utilise 'term' as the terminology for the teaching periods
- (iv) Implement 13-week terms for terms 1 and 2, including one floating week; and a 12-week term 3 with no floating week (PGT teaching in term 3). (See Principle (ii) for explanation of reason for 12-week term 3).
- (v) Align University holidays, as far as possible, with school holidays in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire for the Winter break and the Spring break.
- (vi) Implement an 'Induction/Transition and Employability Week' (ITEW) at the beginning of terms 1 and 2 for continuing UG students with this time being used for a Welcome Week for new UG and PGT entrants.

Feedback from the Committees noted in section 2 will be considered as part of the next phase of the work which will aim to propose an academic year structure for approval through our Committees in August / September 2024.

INTRODUCTION

- 4.1 Following consultation with our Committees as detailed in section 2, a revised proposal for the structure of the academic year from 2024/25 onwards is provided for an academic view through our Committees, including Senate. The proposal that was brought forward to our Committees, culminating with Senate on 19 April 2023, has been further developed in light of the feedback through that process of consultation. It should be noted that, whilst there was an opportunity for Senate to provide an academic view at the 19 April meeting, a number of Senators had further questions and comments that could not be taken due to time constraints. With the agreement of Senate, further views were provided by Senators, by email, following the meeting of Senate. For each Principle, a summary of the feedback is provided, with a response to the feedback including implications for the Principle. A revised Principle (where revision is needed in light of feedback) is then provided.
- 4.2 This paper retains, from the first paper, the background information and the Principles. As stated above, adjustments have been made where appropriate to account for the feedback. It should be noted that concern was raised by a number of Senators about the suggested change to the original proposal on the three terms (to Terms 1 and 2, and a Summer Teaching Period) which had been included in the presentation to Senate, rather than in the paper. These concerns are outlined in Principle (ii) along with different views provided by other Senators after the meeting.
- 4.3 The feedback provided through the consultation process prior to Senate is provided in Appendix 7 and feedback from Senate is included below. The overall feedback is considered within each Principle and responses to the feedback are provided.

Comment at Senate	Response to comment
Concerns about the formalisation of a three-term academic year structure and that the proposal should be taken to the University Research Committee.	Proposal taken to URC. Section 7(ii) provides the detailed feedback from URC as this was an action agreed at Senate Also see paragraph 8.2
That a three-term structure had previously been considered by QAC on 24 February 2022 and that it had not been approved.	The minute of the QAC on 24/02/22 notes that a three-term structure was not approved. It goes on to state that it was agreed at that

	meeting that the proposal 'would be taken away and further work carried out on it'.
Concerns were raised following Senate, by Senators, that the three-term proposal appeared to have been removed from the proposal with a 'summer teaching period for those who undertake teaching' being proposed instead. Support for the three-term proposal was received by email from Senators in Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition and School of Biological Sciences.	A three-term period is retained in this proposal (Term 1, Term 2, and Term 3 (PGT)) with Term 3 being designated as being for PGT specifically.
A query about the need for a marking period given that there is increasing use of continuous assessment.	A marking period of 3 weeks remains necessary as while there is increased use of continuous assessment, many Schools continue to use the end of course assessment period for exams or end of course assessments and as such require the marking period to complete marking and the associated confirmation of results through Examiners' meetings.
A query about whether formalising term 3 would impact on the opportunity for international students to undertake paid work	Students on the Student Visa route are allowed to work part-time during teaching periods and full-time (up to 40 hours) during the formal vacation periods for their personal course of study. The identification of a summer teaching period has no impact on a students' ability to work. For those on degree programmes, the maximum amount of part-time work during official teaching periods is 20 hours.
Student wanted more elaboration on extensions.	Schools take different approaches to the management of extensions and should make the information clear to students. The point is noted for future discussion with Schools.
Concern about the evidence-base for aspects of the proposal (e.g., use of three terms across other universities).	Evidence provided in section 9 and table 2
A recognition of the value and potential of each of the Principles as outlined in the proposal.	N/A
Comments on the start date for the academic year which seemed to demonstrate overall consensus for the Option 1 start date (16 September 2024 Welcome Week and 23 September Teaching).	Start date proposed: Option 1 with the proposed structure set out in Appendix 1
Request for consideration of a short break between cohorts.	It is not possible to provide a break between cohorts due to the number of weeks available for teaching and assessment, and holiday. It is anticipated that Schools will work with staff to manage workload appropriately as currently.
Request for a guarantee that people with childcare responsibilities can be free from scheduled teaching during the Winter, Spring and Summer breaks.	The Winter and Spring breaks align with the local school holidays (as are currently known). It is not possible to provide a guarantee that the Summer period can be kept free of

	teaching for those with childcare responsibilities. Further information provided in section 7(v)
Comment that the 13-week term with 2 weeks for assessment means there is only 10 weeks for teaching, where there was 11 (10 weeks teaching, 1 week revision, 2 weeks exams). Can we address the 'vanished' week?	Structure enables 10 + 1 + 2 assessment. While it would be possible to remove the flexible week this would limit flexibility and remove revision week where that is needed.
Concern about the reduction from 3 weeks to 2 weeks for the Spring break, impacting on both staff and students who have field trips to undertake.	The proposal now includes a 3-week Spring break. See section 7(ii)

5. BACKGROUND

- 5.1 Our Aberdeen 2040 Strategy articulates the ambitions for Education. In summary, the Strategy states our ambitions for Education as: Aberdeen 2040 aims to prepare our graduates to thrive in the diverse workplaces of the future with commitments that need to be embedded in the experience of all our students. Our Education aims to be among the very best in the world, enabling our students to grow as independent learners, to achieve their full potential and succeed whatever their personal and social background, their mode of study and location, and to be equipped for global employment. Our Curriculum is challenge-led, distinctive, has breadth and flexibility with the interdisciplinary challenges embedded. Our Curriculum is inclusive, international and enables our students to be leaders in protecting the environment. Our Environment aims to be diverse, caring, supportive, challenging, innovative, and developmental. The overarching ambitions are supported by a number of [Commitments](#)¹.
- 5.2 Whilst an academic year structure cannot deliver all aspects of an Education Strategy, the aim is to develop a structure that acts as an enabler for its achievement. The Principles (see section 6 below) aim to articulate how the academic year structure can support the delivery of Aberdeen 2040 Education. Of particular relevance to the development of these proposals are the actions to increase the opportunities for student mobility, international learning, work-based learning, and placements, all of which are being taken forward through Aberdeen 2040 workstreams.
- 5.3 The academic year structure that was in place for seven years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic is provided in Appendix 3 (approved at Senate on 14 November 2012). In 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23, and 2023/24 revisions to the academic year structure were approved by Senate² on a temporary basis to address the challenges of the pandemic. These are also provided in Appendix 3. It is not appropriate to continue to make changes year on year, and it is therefore important that an agreed academic year structure is in place for academic year 2024/25 onwards.
- 5.4 Consideration has been given to the future possible structures of the academic year to take forward from academic year 2024/25 with four options presented to Senate on 19 April 2023. The proposals aimed to support the developments in Education in line with the Aberdeen 2040 Commitments (see section 5.1 above) and are in line with changes to the external context that are impacting on recruitment and admissions of students. Once agreed, the new structure would take effect from academic year 2024/25. It had previously been planned that a decision about

¹ Commitments 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17

² Changes to second half-session 2020/21 and first half-session 2021/22 approved by Senate on 21 October 2020; 2021/22 term dates approved by Senate on 3 Feb 2020; Changes to second half-session 2021/22 approved by Senate on 12 May 2021; 2022/23 term dates approved by Senate on 1 December 2021 with adjustments approved 11 May 2022; 2023/24 term dates approved by Senate on 2 November 2022.

the structure be agreed by late summer 2023³ and would therefore need to be approved no later than the final Senate of this academic year on 7 June 2023 to optimise information to support the recruitment cycle for 2024/25. However, given the differences in view expressed by Senators, a further academic view is sought in June, with final approval being sought at the Senate on 20 September 2023. The new structure will apply to the majority of UG and PGT programmes with the exception of certain programmes⁴ where professional requirements necessitate a different academic year structure.

- 5.5 In developing a proposal for the structure of the academic year, we have also been mindful of the increasingly competitive and complex global student recruitment marketplace within which we are operating. We need to take an approach that places us in a strong position with our external audiences, specifically prospective students and their influencers including recruitment agents and scholarship providers.
- 5.6 An extensive process of consultation for the development of the initial options took place with colleagues and students as follows:
- Recruitment and Admissions Teams (UK and international)
 - Dean for Student Support and Experience
 - Dean for Portfolio Development and Programme Promotion
 - Team Leaders in the Directorate of Academic Services and Online Education
 - School Directors of Education
 - PGT Leads from Schools
 - AUSA Education Committee
 - Vice-Principal (Global Engagement)
- 5.7 Further consultation then took place through the formal committees and through Schools via the School representatives of the Education Committees, through the School Education Committees and other School-led discussions. The student membership of committees both institutional and School level will continue to ensure that student views inform the final outcome. The feedback from this process is provided in Appendix 7 and, along with the Senate feedback, was considered in the development of this proposal.
- 5.8 The paper outlines (in sections 6 and 7) the set of Principles on which the proposal for the new academic year structure is based. In the previous proposal, four options were presented. Option 1 has been identified as the most appropriate for taking forward to this next stage as it allows for the achievement of all of the Principles. Amendments to the length of the Spring break and to Term 3 (PGT) have been made based on feedback and these amendments are explained in section 7.1(ii). The other options have not been taken forward for the following reasons:
- Option 2: the earlier start date for the academic year does not allow for optimising recruitment opportunities.
 - Options 3 and 4: the late start date for the academic year impacts on the timing of teaching over Summer and would impact on research activities; they do not enable suitable student mobility opportunities; assessment is not completed prior to the Winter break. In addition, Option 4 does not achieve the principle of completion of marking before the start of the next term and, in addition, an overlap of marking and teaching was not seen as favourable from a workload perspective.
- 5.9 Appendix 1 provides the proposal for the academic year structure with an appraisal against the Principles set out in Appendix 2.

³ UCAS will open in September 2023 for September 2024 entry, and we will have started to receive applications for PG study; and need to have accurate information included in offers of admission and also for returning students. A September decision has been discussed with the Student Recruitment team and agreed as being manageable.

⁴ Programmes with non-standard academic year structures: MBChB, Physician's Associate, BDS, PGDE. Some programmes also include optional fieldwork over the spring and summer breaks.

6. AIMS OF THE PROPOSAL

6.1 The overarching aims of the development of a revised academic year are to:

- (i) Ensure appropriate allocation of time for the delivery of teaching, learning and assessment so that students are provided with sufficient time to undertake all programme requirements.
- (ii) Provide opportunities to further enhance the student experience in relation to, for example, student preparedness and transition into university and subsequent study years.
- (iii) Adopt a transparent three-term structure that better reflects current practices, which will aid clarity for prospective and current students, and support Schools in their workload planning.
- (iv) Ensure that the structure facilitates the Aberdeen 2040 Education Commitments relating to student mobility, international learning, work-based learning, and placements.
- (v) Ensure academic year start dates that provide optimal student recruitment opportunities.

7. PRINCIPLES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR STRUCTURE 24/25 ONWARDS

7.1 In developing the proposal for the future structure of the academic year, a set of Principles have been developed which have been used to evaluate the proposal. There are eight Principles, and, whilst there are connections across them, each one is considered separately in this section. Within each of these sections, comments are made on the feedback received, any adjustments that have been made in light of the feedback, and consideration of workload for each of the Principles.

(i) **Provide a structure that supports our Aberdeen 2040 Education ambitions**

Feedback from consultation including Senate, and response to feedback

Feedback

Feedback indicates support for the Induction, Transition and Employability Week (ITEW), and overall structure as a means to enabling student mobility, international learning opportunities, and opportunities for placement activity such that external stakeholders have clarity about student availability.

Response

No adjustments have been made to this Principle.

As part of the Aberdeen 2040 Strategy, the University has committed to providing 'an international education to learners from all around the world' (Commitment 11), equipping 'our graduates for global employment through our curriculum and teaching methods' (Commitment 12), and to ensuring that 'all our students can have an international experience, by studying or working collaboratively with international partners' (Commitment 14). These ambitions are being addressed, in part, through our workstreams on placements and work-based learning, Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes and Skills, and international learning (through student mobility and collaborative online international learning (COIL)). The academic year structure aims to be an enabler for these ambitions by:

- Providing a consistent academic year structure, including three equal terms, to enable consistent and coherent engagement with external stakeholders (e.g., employers, student mobility placement providers).
- Providing a dedicated week for returning students at the start of terms 1 and 2 to be used as a focus on skills enhancement recognising the importance of the University supporting continuing UG students to enhance their employability (Induction, Transition and Employability Week (ITEW)). These transition weeks will not only enhance skills development but will also augment a sense of belonging. For new entrants (UG and PGT) this time will be used for Welcome

Week. Further work will be required to determine how best to use these weeks and is referred to in section 11.2 and workload implications section below.

As part of our overall approach to enhancement of the student educational experience, there will be different areas of focus dependent on outcomes of student experience feedback (e.g., NSS), external quality assurance and enhancement processes (e.g., through QAA Scotland and professional / accreditation bodies), and the national focus on enhancement (e.g., the Resilient Learning Community Enhancement Theme, 2020-2023). In addition, the work that the University has undertaken over recent years in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated need to pivot our education online, has led to enhancements across our provision (e.g., delivery of continuous, authentic assessment). The academic year structure therefore aims to continue to support the ability for flexibility for enhancements such as these by:

- Providing consistent term timelines across the academic year.
- Clear timelines for assessment and feedback on assessment.
- Creating space for community building and creating a sense of belonging (through the Induction, Transition and Employability Weeks).
- Creating some flexibility for discipline-specific approaches to structuring the delivery of Education across each term.

Workload implications

The development of the two ITE Weeks for returning students will build on existing activities through the Careers and Employability Service, and will be discussed with Schools, through the Dean for Employability and Entrepreneurship (because some Schools have identified that there may be opportunities for them to use the Week for School-based activities). The aim would be to minimise academic staff workload (e.g., by providing packages of support through Toolkits and other means) whilst at the same time allowing scope for Schools to undertake high-impact and School-specific activities with their students. It is anticipated that these induction and transition activities will help with staff workload in the longer-term as we ensure that students are adequately prepared across a whole range of areas including, for example, academic integrity.

(ii) **A consistent and transparent structure of three equal terms across UG and PGT provision to provide adequate time for teaching, learning and assessment**

Feedback from consultation including Senate, and response to feedback

Feedback

Feedback on this aspect of the proposal has demonstrated different viewpoints summarised as follows:

- *Concerns that three formal terms will: lead to increased teaching and associated administration across Summer where these were previously not taking place; concern that there would be an introduction of undergraduate teaching to the proposed Term 3; reduced time for research activities; impact on childcare responsibilities; impact on the ability of academic staff to take annual leave.*
- *Support that three formal terms will: recognise teaching and associated activity that is already taking place; provide clarity for students, staff and external stakeholders (e.g., employers) on the timings of delivery of teaching; enable international students particularly to plan their year and when they are able to return home; provide practical advantages (e.g., in making room bookings easier); support recruitment onto PGT programmes which represent an important part of the income stream; should not impact on staff workloads as Schools manage staff workload whilst allowing for annual leave; transparently places value on the delivery of the PGT teaching that takes place across the proposed Term 3.*
- *Summer teaching is a reality for many academics and the proposal formalises what is already in place in many areas; appropriate management of workload, including teaching, by Heads of School is key to ensuring an equitable approach that enables*

all researchers to have time for undertaking research (e.g., one term each year free from teaching); concerns that the structure is a precursor to the introduction of more January start programmes and increased teaching loads generally leading to erosion of teaching-free period over the Summer and creating barriers to collaboration and team working for research; on balance, the structure could be neutral in terms of impact on research activities as long as teaching loads are not increased. [Feedback from URC]

Response

- *Retain the three-term structure.*
- *Confirm that there is no intention, through this proposal, to introduce undergraduate intakes at any other time of year than September (therefore no undergraduate teaching in T3), nor to require teaching and associated activity to take place in T3 where this does not already happen.*
- *Adjust the naming of the current Term 3 to Term 3 (PGT) to clearly identify it as PGT-only teaching (noting that some UG fieldwork currently takes place during that time period).*
- *Confirm that Schools will manage workload appropriately to ensure that staff are able to take allocated annual leave over the Summer and are able to undertake research activities.*
- *Encourage Schools to consider appropriate ways to utilise the three-term structure as a basis for the allocation of teaching (e.g., an approach might include the allocation of a term which is free from teaching).*

Additional Feedback

- *The previously proposed reduction (in the proposals brought to Senate on 19 April) from 2 weeks to 3 weeks for the Spring break would impact negatively on some field trip opportunities⁵.*
- *Consideration be given to creating a break between cohorts, with the suggestion that marking time be reduced to two weeks to accommodate the suggestion.*
- *A single week of delivery after the Spring break is of limited value.*

Response

- *The proposal introduces a third week to the Spring break, followed by 5 weeks of teaching including a two-week assessment period. This additional week will enable the field trips to take place, and for staff and students to have at least one week of vacation. The additional week is likely to provide more flexibility for staff and students with childcare should school holiday timings shift over the lifetime of the AY structure.*
- *Reduce the proposed Term 3 to 12 weeks (from 13 weeks) with no flexible week (compared to Terms 1 and 2) to accommodate the extended Spring break.*
- *Whilst there is merit in the suggestion to create a break between cohorts, a reduction in marking time would not be feasible due to workload.*
- *The proposed structure avoids having only a single teaching week followed by a two-week assessment period after the Spring break, as previously was in place.*

Currently the academic year has two defined half-sessions currently with 11 weeks (including a floating week) teaching followed by 2 weeks assessment with the summer teaching period for PGT being set at a School / programme level. This approach leads to variability in both timing and length of the summer period and given the lack of consistency, means the transparency of information about term dates for PGT students is impacted. The rationale for Principle (ii) is:

⁵ In Geosciences, 2 weeks of field trips and 1 week of vacation typically take place across the 3-week period. The trips are scheduled to fit with learning outcomes threaded through T2 and staff availability. Most students do 2 separate field trips based on discipline, and these could not be moved to 'within' term as they would clash with other Schools' teaching at level 2. They cannot be moved later as data gathered is required for later assessment. It is important that students and staff are able to have at least one week of vacation.

- As each stage of PGT programmes carries 60 credits, it is important that each term is of equal and appropriate length to recognise the notional student effort required.
- Helpful for external messaging to prospective and new students as it will better support a dual entry model (i.e., term 1 and term 2 entry) which is important from a recruitment perspective given international markets.
- Transparently acknowledges the delivery of Education that takes place in many areas across the University, and the associated staff workload (although does **not** require delivery of education across all three terms).

As such an academic year model based on three terms of equal length is proposed with the start and end dates of each term being consistent across Schools. The nomenclature is proposed to be:

- Term 1 (T1)
- Term 2 (T2)
- Term 3 (PGT) (T3 (PGT)).

For September PGT cohorts they would work through T1, T2, and T3 (PGT) in that order. For January PGT cohorts they would work through T2, T3 (PGT), and T1 in that order. Comparison universities have similar models and naming conventions (see paragraph 9.2).

The proposal for the academic year structure consists of two 13-week (T1 and T2) and one 12-week (T3 (PGT)) periods of teaching. Term 3 (PGT) is clearly identified as a PGT-only teaching period. The structure is composed of:

- 10 weeks of teaching (including in-course assessment) in T1 and T2 and 2 weeks of assessment in weeks 12 and 13 to allow for in-person exams where these need to take place.
- 12 weeks of teaching and assessment in T3 (PGT) (for postgraduate taught delivery recognising that for many programmes, dissertations / projects / fieldwork take place over that teaching period).
- In T1 and T2, one flexible week for:
 - Revision where in-person exams are used
 - Reading week
 - Fieldwork
 - Other suitable activities
- A dedicated two-week assessment period at the end of Terms 1 and 2 for most undergraduate programmes. While in-course assessment is threaded through the term for most courses, this assessment period provides time for end-of-course assessments and, where required, formal exams. For postgraduate provision, this period can be used for teaching due to the more prescriptive nature of these programmes except if formal exams are required in which case a two-week assessment period will be used.

The proposed new structure will apply to the majority of UG and PGT programmes with the exception of certain programmes⁶ where professional requirements necessitate a different academic year structure.

Workload Implications

Feedback from some Senators indicate that the three-term structure will support the management of staff workload by providing transparency and consistency of timings across the academic year. It is important to reiterate that, where teaching does not take place, there is no intention through this proposal to introduce teaching or administration during Term 3 (PGT). There will be no introduction of new undergraduate teaching across T3 (PGT). There should therefore be no negative impact on workload and the proposed approach should support the allocation of workload by providing opportunities to consider

⁶ Programmes with non-standard academic year structures: MBChB, Physician's Associate, BDS, PGDE and some Exec Education programmes. Some programmes also include optional fieldwork over the spring and summer breaks.

discipline- and School-specific approaches which might include the allocation of a no-teaching term where this is appropriate.

(iii) **All first term assessment completed prior to the Winter break**

Feedback from consultation including Senate, and response to feedback

Feedback

- *Completion of assessment prior to the Winter break is favoured, with students stating that this is their preference.*

Response

- *No changes to the Principle have been made.*

A core principle underpinning the last substantive review of the academic year structure, approved by Senate in November 2012, was the move of first half-session assessments before the Winter break. This was agreed to be important to allow students to have a proper break and take advantage of employment opportunities over that period. It was also agreed to be important from a retention perspective to reduce the risk of those struggling in the first half-session not returning after the winter break. Additionally, this structure was also agreed to be beneficial to both incoming and outgoing international exchange students because it allowed visiting students to return home prior to the Winter break having completed all teaching and assessment and likewise allowed outgoing exchange students to be able to start their exchange early in the new year without needing to return to Aberdeen to complete assessments.

It is possible to change the timing of the completion of assessment to after the Winter break and two options were presented in the previous paper to that effect (Options 3 and 4). Not all international students choose to return to their home country over that period; some students prefer to have time over the Winter break to complete assessment (although it is important to note that students will not have access to support from academic or professional services staff who can support assessment during that period). Comparable data on student retention related to any change to the timing of assessment is not available for the University so it is not possible to make an evidence-based judgement on this matter. Where the delivery of assessment takes place after the Winter break, this timing allows for a later start date.

Workload Implications

Workload remains the same no matter when assessment is submitted. However, having submissions prior to the Winter break ensures that staff do not feel a sense of obligation to support students with their assessment over the break. There is the usual period of marking time within the structure, so time for this activity is not impacted negatively.

(iv) **Marking completed in 3-week window prior to start of next term**

Feedback from consultation including Senate, and response to feedback

Feedback

- *The allocation of marking time (3 weeks) does not reflect the reality of workloads at 'heavy' marking times and, in the case of the feedback provided, impacting on the opportunity to take annual leave over the Spring break.*

Response

- *We make a commitment to our students through our Feedback Framework that feedback should be provided within a maximum of three working weeks excluding vacation periods.*

- *No changes to this Principle have been made.*

The University's [Feedback Framework](#) states that feedback should be timely and normally provided within a maximum of three working weeks (excluding vacation periods). In the context of the academic year structure, it is important that students can receive their overall course results before the start of the next Term to allow them, where necessary, to make changes to their curriculum (e.g., changes to curriculum breadth courses). This timing is important where students may not have passed a pre-requisite or where a student finds they have not done well in their elective courses and wish to make changes (e.g., a student who has taken a language to fulfil their Enhanced Study requirements who decides after the Term 1 that, based on performance, they would prefer to switch to a Sixth Century course in Term 2 instead of taking a further language course).

Workload Implications

Marking is currently undertaken in a 3-week time period. Therefore there are no additional workload implications.

(v) **Enable optimal consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion 1: school, public and religious holidays**

Feedback from consultation including Senate, and response to feedback

Feedback

- *Consideration should be given to guaranteeing that people with childcare responsibilities can be free from scheduled teaching during the Winter, Spring and Summer school holidays.*

Response

- *It is not possible to make this guarantee. The university has an annual leave allocation which should be utilised alongside other support mechanisms to put support in place for childcare or other caring responsibilities⁷.*

The University has an increasingly diverse student population and, in line with the Aberdeen 2040 commitments in regard to inclusion, it is important that in developing a new academic year structure that consideration is given to equality, diversity and inclusion issues impacting both staff and students.

School holidays

In recognition of caring (childcare), work commitments, and wellbeing needs of both staff and students, where possible, the proposed structure has been aligned with school holidays. As the timing of City and Shire school holidays can vary, it cannot be guaranteed that the academic year structure will always fully align with school holidays but where possible alignment will be made. School term dates for 2022/23 to 2024/25 for Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire as currently published, are given in Appendix 5.

The Spring break aligns with the City and Shire holidays, and it is proposed that it reverts to 3 weeks in length rather than the previously proposed 2 weeks (see Section 7(ii)).

The school Summer holidays, as currently in the Summer teaching period, fall within the proposed Term 3 (PGT). As currently, it is expected that staff will take annual leave during the Summer period in agreement with their line manager.

The October school holidays fall in the first term. It is not possible to include a formal break given the proximity to the start of Term 1. Importantly, Schools have the flexible week which could be used to provide a reading week at this time if the timing is appropriate in relation to the student learning experience.

⁷ Staff can request up to 18 weeks unpaid leave under the [parental leave policy](#).

Public holidays

In regard to public holidays, there are normally four public holidays which fall during teaching as outlined below for 2022/23:

Spring Public Holiday – 18 April
May Day Holiday – 2 May
Start of Trades Fortnight – 11 July
Autumn Public Holiday – 26 September

These dates may fall within teaching, assessment or non-term-time periods. Where an alternative teaching slot is requested to compensate for the public holiday, Schools can liaise with the Central Timetabling Team to review alternatives after Registration. It may not be possible to reschedule due to the flexibility of the curriculum as it can be difficult to find alternative slots which avoid clashes with other courses being taken by students and also available appropriate rooms for the type of teaching (e.g., lecture theatres). In the case of assessment, the scheduling will be managed to avoid delivery of assessments on public holidays. Where it is not possible to reschedule delivery to avoid public holidays, staff will be enabled to take a day in lieu as part of their existing annual leave entitlement.

Religious holidays

The [Policy on Religion and Belief](#) states that the University recognises that there may be circumstances where students may request absence or adjustment on the grounds of religious observance and where this is the case reasonable adjustments will be made. It is important that we do everything that we can as a University to create a sense of belonging and welcome for all. In addition, we have a partnership with Al Faleh Group for Education and Academic Services (AFG) in Qatar for whom religious days such as Eid Al-Fitr⁸ and Eid Al-Adha⁹ are important national holidays when the campus in Qatar is closed. The timing of these holidays varies widely. Further work will be done to determine what is possible in relation to managing the timing of assessment, and the delivery of education with respect to religious holidays.

Workload Implications

The flexible (floating) week allows for School-based management of workload around holiday periods. Where Summer teaching does take place, Schools will manage workload such that all staff are able to take their annual leave entitlement which, for some, will support childcare responsibilities.

- (vi) **Enable optimal consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion 2: optimal orientation and induction opportunities so as to enhance the preparation and readiness of students for university, their studies and wider student life**

Feedback from consultation including Senate, and response to feedback

Feedback

- *There could be opportunities for some Schools to put in place School- or discipline-specific activities that will enhance the student experience.*
- *The proposal presents opportunities to put in place institution-wide activities.*

Response

- *No changes have been made to this Principle.*

⁸ Eid al Fitr / End of Ramadan dates for the years 2023-2033 <https://www.qppstudio.net/global-holidays-observances/eid-al-fitr-end-of-ramadan.htm>

⁹ Eid al Adha / Feast of Sacrifice dates for the years 2023-2033 <https://www.qppstudio.net/global-holidays-observances/eid-al-adha-feast-of-sacrifice.htm>

It is critical that new students receive robust induction into their studies. This is important to ensure those joining the University are given an appropriate introduction to their chosen subject and informed about relevant policies and procedures (e.g., those associated with student support, academic integrity, wellbeing etc.). This approach will also allow opportunities for new students to have time to meet other students and get an insight into the wider student experience (e.g., clubs and societies). As such the proposed academic year structure as set out in Appendix 3 provides time for orientation and induction at the start of Terms 1 and 2. As detailed in (i), it is proposed that this time is also used to support skills development for returning students. As part of the ongoing work to enhance student induction, orientation and transition, consideration will be given to how such induction and orientation can be delivered more flexibly, whilst ensuring that we provide all opportunities for students to arrive during these important weeks.

Workload Implications
See Principle (i) workload implications.

(vii) **Enable optimal consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion 3: Equality Impact Assessment**

In developing the new academic year structure, an equality impact assessment has been undertaken prior to the proposal being brought forward for a further academic view.

A revised Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken (see Appendix 6).

(viii) **Academic year start date late enough to optimise recruitment activity, including the Clearing period following school exam results, timing of release of school results more generally, UKVI requirements and timing of the confirmation of external scholarships**

Feedback from consultation including Senate, and response to feedback

Feedback

- A later start date is seen as beneficial for recruitment and that, whilst there was some support for the previously presented option 2 (with a start date of 09 September 2024), it does not support this Principle. Whilst the start date for options 3 and 4 (30 September 2024) are noted as allowing further time for recruitment, a number of concerns were raised around the impact on the timing of teaching over the Summer (e.g., time for research).

Response

- On balance, option 1 with its start date of 16 September 2024 (Welcome Week) and 23 September 2024 (for teaching) is proposed (see Appendix 1).

Although enhancements have been made to processing times for applications for study to allow more time for prospective students to complete required actions after receiving an offer of admission, there are different external factors which mean a later start date is competitively advantageous.

In recent years, we have recruited around 200 undergraduate students during “Clearing” that is the period following the release of Higher and A Level exam results in August. This group has been key to us achieving growth in Rest of UK undergraduates, and now, with a very competitive market for Home fees/Scotland students is even more strategically important. However, a school exam release date of 8 August (Highers) and 17 August (A Levels) is very close to a September start, which could be off-putting for an applicant who is re-considering their university options in Clearing. Some of our Clearing applicants will also be international and require time to apply for a Student Visa. It is worth noting that the

staffing within the UKVI will reflect the volume requirements for English Institutions, generally.

Specifically in relation to international students, the arrangements they require to put in place both before we issue them a CAS¹⁰ and before they apply for a Visa are complex and time consuming. Evidence of funding is required for some markets; in many cases this is dependent on external sponsors confirming scholarship awards which can occur close to the start of the academic year. To obtain a Visa, self-funding applicants have to demonstrate to UKVI that adequate finances have been held consistently in their bank account for 28 days. And the external bodies driving these processes often work to an understanding of an autumn start for the UK sector that is closer to October.

A later start date would also be advantageous for recruitment in Qatar.

Table 1 below provides details of start dates for 2023/24 for a range of other UK institutions where dates for the equivalents of our “Welcome Week” and “Start of Teaching” are readily available. This shows that our 2023/24 start date is one of the earliest in the group, with the most common start date for 2023 being one or two weeks later (a Welcome Week that starts on 18 September or 25 September). A start date that is more in line with others across the UK would be more in line with the expectations of prospective students, their agents, and other external agencies. It is noted that Scottish institutions in general start earlier, but we do need to be mindful of the wider UK context.

Table 1: Start Dates at other UK Universities

Wesley Group	Welcome week / Freshers' week	Start of teaching
St Andrews	04/09/2023	11/09/2023
Aberdeen	11/09/2023	18/09/2023
Dundee	11/09/2023	18/09/2023
East Anglia	18/09/2023	25/09/2023
Kent	18/09/2023	25/09/2023
Surrey	18/09/2023	25/09/2023
Bath	25/09/2023	03/10/2023
Leicester	25/09/2023	
Loughborough	26/09/2023	02/10/2023
Lancaster	02/10/2023	06/10/2023

Russell Group	Welcome week / Freshers' week	Start of teaching
Birmingham	18/09/23	25/09/23
Bristol	18/09/23	25/09/23
Cardiff	25/9/2023	2/10/2023
Durham	25/9/2023	2/10/2023
Edinburgh	12/09/23	18/09/23
Exeter	19/09/23	25/09/23
Glasgow	11/09/23	18/09/23
King's	18/09/23	25/09/23
Leeds		02/10/2023
Liverpool	18/09/23	25/09/23
Manchester	18/09/23	25/09/23
Newcastle	18/09/23	
Nottingham	25/09/23	
Oxford	09/10/2023	
Queen Mary	18/09/2023	
Sheffield	18/09/23	25/09/23
Southampton	25/09/23	2/10/23
Warwick	25/09/23	2/10/23

¹⁰ Certificate of Acceptance for Studies, the formal UKVI document we issue to applicants which they require to apply for a Visa.

Workload Implications

The structure prevents the impact of teaching running later into the Summer, and the subsequent impact on research time for academic colleagues.

8. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 *The structure will be appropriate for our Transnational Education*

The University has a number of transnational education (TNE) partnerships. Some of these necessarily require to be delivered over a different timeframe to that of our academic year, such as the SCNU Joint Institute where delivery takes place on the SCNU campus in China and as such requires delivery to align with their academic year structure and associated public holidays (e.g., Chinese New Year). Others such as the University's partnership with AFG in Qatar in contrast require the alignment of delivery between Aberdeen and Qatar to ensure equivalence of experience between both cohorts who are studying on the same programme. As such, input has been provided from the Qatar Academic Planning Group as part of the consultation and support for option 1 was provided. In this context, it is noted that the Ministry of Education in Qatar can impose changes to the academic year structure to reflect nationwide events such as the FIFA World Cup.

8.2 Staff Workload

The impact of each of the Principles, and therefore the proposal, has been addressed within each of the sections i)-vii). To highlight a response to a key concern:

- Whilst the proposal is to create three terms as a transparent approach to recognising the teaching activity that takes place across the academic year, it is recognised that Heads of School currently manage staff workload in relation to the realities of whole year teaching (including PGT summer teaching) in many areas. The management of staff workload in the context of delivery of Education across the whole academic year in some areas is of particular importance given the growing intake of January start PGT entrants and the need to ensure that staff have focused time for research or other activities. Delivery across three teaching periods is not new. However, the proposal highlights the need for Schools to appropriately manage workload in this context. For example, **it is not a requirement that academics teach across all three terms**, and it is important to ensure appropriate workload management in Schools as part of an overall approach to address workload concerns and create further time for research. It is also important to reiterate that there is no intention, as part of this proposal to introduce undergraduate teaching across the proposed Term 3 (PGT) (noting that some fieldwork takes place currently at this time).

Once the structure of the new academic year is agreed, work will be required to support the transition (e.g., updates to University IT systems (e.g., Student record) to accommodate the changed structure). Consideration will also need to be given, within Directorates and School Admin teams, to the management of any workload implications posed by the new structure. This will be done ahead of the presentation of proposals for approval in September.

One of the next phases of work for Aberdeen 2040 Education, is scoping of the flexibility of our curriculum with a view to aligning the breadth curriculum more closely with Aberdeen 2040 to benefit the student experience, as well as providing opportunities to appropriately streamline the curriculum.

8.3 The structure enables achievement of Statutory Requirements

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) defines full-time study as requiring at least 24 weeks of study¹¹ for at least 21 hours per week. The proposed academic year structure enables the achievement of these requirements. Additionally, the University has a growing number of students who are funded by US Federal Loans who stipulate a requirement for 30 weeks of instruction, exams, or study for final exams (excluding formal breaks). As such it is important that consideration is given to these requirements in designing the new academic year structure. The proposed structure offers a 28-week undergraduate academic year structure including the induction / transition and employability week at the start of Terms 1 and 2. In this regard, it is worth noting that a comparison of other Scottish HEIs shows their academic year structure for UGs to vary between 26 and 31 weeks in length¹².

9. NOMENCLATURE

- 9.1 We currently use the terminology 'half-session' and have only two half-sessions (from September to December, and from January to May). We deliver our Education across the entire academic year and the proposals for the new academic year structure transparently acknowledges this. The terminology proposed for the three teaching periods is 'term' (i.e., Term 1, Term 2, and Term 3 (PGT) for the specific teaching periods). Feedback from some areas suggest the use of Autumn, Spring, Summer as indicators of the terms. However, this could be confusing for some international students where seasons are at a different time of year. Numbering is suggested as being more inclusive. Previous discussion with QAC¹³ on this matter indicated some concern that all Schools and disciplines would be required to deliver education across all three terms (and thus staff would be required to teach across all three terms). In line with section 7.1(ii) above, Heads of School already manage staff workload in relation to the realities of whole year teaching (including PGT summer teaching) in many areas particularly given the growing intake of January start PGT entrants.
- 9.2 Many institutions across the sector use the terminology of 'term' (see table 2 below for examples). Other institutions use the terminology of 'semester' or 'trimester' (e.g., Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle and St Andrews) and likewise denote these either numerically or by seasons. It is felt that term is more meaningful internationally and would be most easily understood by our prospective and current students. It is proposed that numerical indicators are used as these are neutral rather than seasonal indicators given that seasons differ for our transnational education.

Table 2: Terminology

University	Terminology
Edinburgh Napier University	Trimester 1, 2 and 3 (latter ending at end of August)
Glasgow Caledonian University	Trimester A, B and C (latter ending at end of August)
University of Kent	Undergraduate Terms (Autumn, Spring, Summer); Postgraduate Terms (Autumn, Spring, Summer) (whole year academic calendar recognised)
Lancaster University	Michaelmas, Lent, Summer Terms (latter ends in June)
University of Leicester	Uses both Terms (1, 2 and 3) and Semesters (1 and 2) (term 2 and semester 2 end in June)
Loughborough University	Uses Term to refer to the period when students are on campus. Semesters refer to teaching periods for taught modules: Semesters 1, 2, 3 (PGT) (whole year academic calendar recognised through terms and semesters)

¹¹ Study is defined as including contact teaching time, private study and assessment.

¹² [QAC Minute of 24 February 2022](#)

¹³ Section 2.2-2.4 of [Minute](#) of 24 February 2022

University of Oxford	Michaelmas, Hilary and Trinity Terms (latter ends in June)
UCL	Uses Terms with these being denoted as First, Second and Third Term (latter ending in June) though it is acknowledged that PGT students study beyond the third term and submit their dissertation in September
Warwick University	Autumn, Spring, Summer Terms (latter ends beginning July)
University of West of Scotland	Terms 1, 2 and 3 (whole year academic calendar recognised)

10. ACTION REQUIRED

10.1 UEC is asked to provide an academic view on the proposals to:

- Commence teaching w/c 23 September 2024 (week 9 of AY) with Welcome Week w/c 16 September 2024 (week 8 of AY) to optimise student recruitment activity.
- Put in place a three-term structure for the academic year (AY).
- Utilise 'term' as the terminology for the teaching periods
- Implement 13-week terms for terms 1 and 2, including one floating week; and a 12-week term 3 with no floating week (PGT teaching in term 3). (See Principle (ii) for explanation of reason for 12-week term 3).
- Align University holidays, as far as possible, with school holidays in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire for the Winter break and the Spring break.
- Implement an 'Induction/Transition and Employability Week' (ITEW) at the beginning of terms 1 and 2 for continuing UG students with this time being used for a Welcome Week for new UG and PGT entrants.

11. NEXT STEPS

11.1 Feedback from all Committees and other consultation will be taken into account for the further development of the proposal which will then be presented for approval to relevant Committees.

11.2 Depending on the overall feedback from the Committees including Senate, work will be progressed (as part of the final overall proposal) as follows:

- Updated Equality Impact Assessment
- Development of an implementation plan, identifying all actions required to put the new structure in place (e.g., changes to processes, regulations).
- Proposals around an employability and skills focused induction/transition and employability week (ITEW) for returning UG students will be brought forward (see 7.1(ii) above).
- A communications plan for students and new entrants will be developed with the aim of ensuring clarity around the structure for both continuing and new entrants.

12. FURTHER INFORMATION

12.1 Further information is available from Ruth Taylor, Vice-Principal (Education) ruth.taylor@abdn.ac.uk or Gillian Mackintosh, Director of Academic Services and Online Education g.mackintosh@abdn.ac.uk

11 May 2023

Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status: Closed

Proposed New Academic Year Structure

[The full set of options presented to Senate on 19 April 2023 are available [here](#)]

Week No.	Date (w/c)	Important Dates	Proposed Structure
1	29.7.24		
2	5.8.24		
3	12.8.24		
4	19.8.24		
5	26.8.24		
6	2.9.24		
7	9.9.24		PGT Marking
8	16.9.24		IEW* PGT Marking
9	23.9.24	Sept Hol (Mon)	T1
10	30.9.24		T1
11	7.10.24		T1
12	14.10.24	School Holidays	T1
13	21.10.24	School Holidays	T1
14	28.10.24		T1
15	4.11.24		T1
16	11.11.24		T1
17	18.11.24		T1
18	25.11.24		T1 Winter Grads
19	2.12.24		T1 Qatar Grads (TBC)
20	9.12.24		T1
21	16.12.24		T1
22	23.12.24	School Holidays	Uni Closed Period
23	30.12.24	School Holidays	Uni Closed Period
24	6.1.25		Marking
25	13.1.25		Marking
26	20.1.25		Marking
27	27.1.25		IEW*
28	3.2.25		T2
29	10.2.25		T2
30	17.2.25		T2
31	24.2.25		T2
32	3.3.25		T2
33	10.3.25		T2
34	17.3.25		T2

35	24.3.25		T2
36	31.3.25	School Holidays	Spring Break
37	7.4.25	School Holidays	Spring Break
38	14.4.25		Spring Break
39	21.4.25	April Hol (Mon)	T2
40	28.4.25		T2
41	5.5.25	May Hol (Mon)	T2
42	12.5.25		T2
43	19.5.25		T2
44	26.5.25		Marking
45	2.6.25		Marking
46	9.6.25		Marking T3
47	16.6.25		T3
48	23.6.25		T3
49	30.6.25		T3 Summer Grads
50	7.7.25	School Holidays	T3
51	14.7.25	School Holidays July Hol (Mon)	T3
52	21.7.25	School Holidays	T3
1	28.7.25	School Holidays	T3
2	4.8.25	School Holidays	T3
3	11.8.25	School Holidays	T3
4	18.8.25		T3
5	25.8.25		T3
6	1.9.25		Marking

Mapping of Proposed Academic Year Structure to Principles

Principles	Proposed Structure
Provides a structure that supports our Aberdeen 2040 Education ambitions	<p>Consistent structure supports work placement activity and mobility.</p> <p>Provides time for skills development to support employability.</p> <p>Completion of term 1 before Winter break may assist with student mobility.</p>
A consistent structure of three equal terms across UG and PGT provision	Yes (13 weeks for Terms 1 and 2; 12 weeks for Term 3 (PGT) with the latter having no 'floating' week but same number of weeks available for teaching and assessment).
All first term assessment completed prior to winter break	Yes
Marking completed in 3 week marking window prior to start of next term	Yes
Alignment of University vacation periods with Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire School holidays	<p>Yes for Winter and Spring breaks but timing of City and Shire holidays do move and do not always align so cannot guarantee there will always be alignment.</p> <p>Summer school holidays: Annual leave should be managed in Schools so that staff can take their annual leave entitlement to support their childcare responsibilities.</p> <p>October School holidays fall in weeks 4 and 5 of teaching.</p>
Academic year start as late as possible to support recruitment activity, including clearing, UKVI requirements and timing of release of school results	<p>Induction starts on 16 September and teaching on 23 September – aligns with 2023/24 timeline.</p> <p>For January starts, induction starts on 27 January and teaching on 2 February.</p>
Enable optimal consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion	<p>Supports childcare through school holiday alignment (see above) for Winter and Spring breaks.</p> <p>Assessment completion before Winter break would provide opportunity for employment and could support childcare responsibilities for students with school-aged children.</p> <p>Induction and orientation at all years to provide sense of belonging for all students.</p>

Former Academic Year Structures

Week No.	Pre-Covid Structure	2020/21		2021/22		2022/23	2023/24	
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6	Induction							
7	S1 Teaching & Assessment (14 weeks)					Induction	Induction	
8		Induction		Induction		S1 Teaching & Assessment (13 Weeks)	S1 Teaching & Assessment (13 Weeks)	
9		S1 Teaching & Assessment (12 Weeks)		S1 Teaching & Assessment (12 Weeks)				
10								
11								
12								
13								
14								
15								
16								
17								
18								
19								
20								
21	Marking					Marking		Marking
22	Vacation	Vacation		Vacation		Vacation	Vacation	
23								
24	Marking	Marking		Marking		Marking	Marking	
25	S2 Teaching & Assessment (11 weeks)	Marking	Induction	Marking	Induction			Marking
26		S2 Teaching & Assessment (10 Weeks)		S2 Teaching & Assessment (10 Weeks)		S2 Teaching & Assessment (10 Weeks)	S2 Teaching & Assessment (10 Weeks)	
27								
28								
29								
30								
31								
32								
33								
34								
35								
36								
37	Vacation	Vacation		Vacation		Vacation	Vacation	
38								
39	S2 Teaching & Assessment (4 weeks)	S2 Teaching & Assessment (3 Weeks)		S2 Teaching & Assessment (3 Weeks)		S2 Teaching Assessment (3 weeks)	S2 Teaching & Assessment (3 weeks)	
40		Marking		Marking		Marking	Marking	
41								
42								
43	Marking	Marking		Marking		Marking	Marking	
44								
45								
46								
47								
48								
49	Resits	Resits		Resits		Resits	Resits	
50								
51	Marking	Marking		Marking		Marking	Marking	
52								
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								

BACKGROUND TO STUDENT RECRUITMENT REQUIREMENTS

Optimise the conditions for recruitment to Intakes A and B for international students.

The University has taken a strategic decision to increase the number of international students, in particular postgraduate students. It is essential for the institution's financial sustainability that growth targets are achieved. It is therefore important that our academic year arrangements recognise the challenges and timelines that exist for international students.

It is apparent that there is a general perception that UK universities start teaching in late September from key bodies such as UKVI (in considering the timing for student Visa applications); external sponsorship bodies (in considering timing for scholarship awards that are required for us to issue CAS¹⁴ to students) and our international applicants and recruitment agents. Applicants and agents will be applying/researching many different UK universities. They develop an understanding of when the sector as a whole starts and plan on the basis. Our University should therefore aim not to be an outlier with regard to academic year start date and to align with other UK institutions.

In short, this final stage of conversion, post acceptance and after CAS is issued but prior to registration, is complex and challenging and institutions across the UK are in strong competition for these students (who may well hold CAS from more than one university). It is essential to provide as much space as possible at this time to allow students to make the progress they require to register at the University of Aberdeen. Any attrition through the various stages has financial implications for the institution. These are dedicated, committed students who wish to join to study at the University of Aberdeen, but some simply will not be able to through no fault of their own based on the potentially restrictive timeframes involved here. A key aim is therefore to mitigate this attrition as much as possible.

Optimise the conditions for recruitment to Intakes A and B for UK students.

Timing of exam results for domestic students and impact on start dates

- Opportunities for those with conditional offers to achieve conditions. As well as in the UK, internationally prospective students are waiting for exam results (school and undergraduate degree) across late Spring and into summer. This impacts on those applicants being able to achieve conditions of their offer and any delay to exam periods eats into the time that applicants have to accept their offer and move to the next stage of the process.
- School exam results and impact on offering places in Clearing. A Level results day in 2023 is Thursday 17 August and the equivalent date in 2024 would be 15 August – only just over **two weeks** before a start date of 2 September. Yet offering places in Clearing extends until well after a week after A Level results day. Clearing applicants will probably be applying to Aberdeen for the first time; they will have very limited time to plan for moving to Aberdeen – asking them to make that decision in less than two weeks will inevitably impact on the conversion of these applicants. This Summer we made 428 Clearing offers to international and RUK applicants and had 173 acceptances (40% conversion rate). Every 10% of those 428 offers that converts (assuming that they are all RUK and not the higher-level international fees level) is equivalent to annual income of almost 400K (42.8 X 9250) and total income of £1.6M (42.8 * 37K).
- In respect of students joining us through College pathways with an HNC or HND, we require confirmation of exam results from Colleges which can also be delayed close to the start of term.

¹⁴ Certificate of Acceptance for Studies, the document we need to provide to applicants in order for them to apply for a Student Visa.

Appendix 5

Future School Holiday Dates (Academic Year 2022/23 to 2024/25)

TERM 1	2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
	CITY	SHIRE	CITY	SHIRE	CITY	SHIRE
In-Service Day	Mon 22/08/22	Mon 22/08/22	Mon 21/08/23	Mon 21/08/23	Mon 19/08/24	Mon 19/08/24
Term Starts	Tue 23/08/22	Tue 23/08/22	Tue 22/08/23	Tue 22/08/23	Tue 20/08/24	Tue 20/08/24
Sept Holiday	Fri 23/09/22 – Mon 26/09/22	Mon 19/09/22	Fri 22/09/23 – Mon 25/09/23		Fri 20/09/24 – Mon 23/09/24	
Term Ends	Fri 14/10/22	Fri 14/10/22	Fri 13/10/23	Fri 13/10/23	Fri 11/10/24	Fri 11/10/24
Oct Holiday	Mon 17/10/22 – Fri 28/10/22	Mon 17/10/22 – Fri 28/10/22	Mon 16/10/23 – Fri 27/10/23	Mon 16/10/23 – Fri 27/10/23	Mon 14/10/24 – Fri 25/10/24	Mon 14/10/24 – Fri 25/10/24

TERM 2	2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
	CITY	SHIRE	CITY	SHIRE	CITY	SHIRE
Term Starts	Mon 31/10/22	Mon 31/10/22	Mon 30/10/23	Mon 30/10/23	Mon 28/10/24	Mon 28/10/24
In-Service Day	Fri 18/11/22	Thu 17/11/22 – Fri 18/11/22	Fri 17/11/23	Thu 16/11/23 – Fri 17/11/23	Fri 15/11/24	Thu 14/11/24 – Fri 15/11/24
Term Ends	Thu 22/12/22	Fri 23/12/22	Thu 21/12/23	Fri 22/12/23	Fri 20/12/24	Fri 20/12/24
Christmas Holiday	Fri 23/12/22 – Fri 06/01/23	Mon 26/12/22 – Fri 06/01/23	Fri 22/12/23 – Fri 05/01/24	Mon 25/12/23 – Fri 05/01/24	Mon 23/12/24 – Fri 03/01/25	Mon 23/12/24 – Fri 03/01/25

TERM 3	2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
	CITY	SHIRE	CITY	SHIRE	CITY	SHIRE
Term Starts	Mon 09/01/23	Mon 09/01/23	Mon 08/01/24	Mon 08/01/24	Mon 06/01/25	Mon 06/01/25
Mid-Term Holiday	Mon 13/02/23	Mon 13/02/23	Mon 12/02/24	Mon 12/02/24	Mon 10/02/25	Mon 10/02/25
In-Service Day	Tue 14/02/23 – Wed 15/02/23	Tue 14/02/23 – Wed 15/02/23	Tue 13/02/24 – Wed 14/02/24	Tue 13/02/24 – Wed 14/02/24	Tue 11/02/25 – Wed 12/02/25	Tue 11/02/25 – Wed 12/02/25
Term Ends	Fri 31/03/23	Fri 31/03/23	Fri 29/03/24	Thu 28/03/24	Fri 28/03/25	Fri 28/03/25
Spring Holiday	Mon 04/04/23 – Fri 14/04/23	Mon 04/04/23 – Fri 14/04/23	Mon 01/04/24 – Fri 12/04/24	Fri 29/03/24 – Fri 12/04/24	Mon 31/03/25 – Fri 11/04/25	Mon 31/03/25 – Fri 11/04/25

TERM 4	2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
	CITY	SHIRE	CITY	SHIRE	CITY	SHIRE
Term Starts	Mon 17/04/23	Mon 17/04/23	Mon 15/04/24	Mon 15/04/24	Mon 14/04/25	Mon 14/04/25
Good Friday					Fri 18/04/25	Fri 18/04/25
May Day Holiday	Mon 01/05/23	Mon 01/05/23	Mon 06/01/24	Mon 06/01/24	Mon 05/05/25	Mon 05/05/25
In-Service Day	Tue 02/05/23		Tue 07/05/24		Tue 06/05/25	Tue 06/05/25
Term Ends	Fri 07/07/23	Fri 07/07/23	Fri 05/07/24	Fri 05/07/24	Fri 04/07/25	Fri 04/07/25

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Impact Assessment

Title of Policy, Procedure, or Function: FUTURE ACADEMIC YEAR STRUCTURE	
School/Directorate: Academic Services	
Author/Position: Jason Bohan, Dean for Student Support and Experience	Date created: 11/5/23

1. Aims and purpose of Policy, Procedure, or Function: The purpose of the paper is to agree an academic year structure for 2024/25 which will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (vi) Ensure appropriate allocation of time for the delivery of teaching, learning and assessment so that students are provided with sufficient time to undertake all programme requirements. (vii) Facilitate opportunities to enhance workload planning through a transparent full-year structure, and provide opportunities to create further time for research. (viii) Ensure that the structure facilitates the Aberdeen 2040 Education Commitments. (ix) Facilitate optimal student recruitment opportunities. (x) Provide opportunities to further enhance the student experience in relation to, for example, student preparedness and transition into university and subsequent study years. 		
2. Stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students • Academics • Professional Services 		
3. Additional Consultation/Involvement		
Organisation/person consulted or involved	Date, method, and by whom	Location of consultation records
SMT	23 March 2023	See associated minutes for these meetings
<u>Academic view</u> Joint Meeting of EEC and SSEC	27 March 2023	
Qatar Academic Planning Group	By circulation	
UEC	23 March 2023	
QAC	29 March 2023	
Heads of School	29 March 2023	
SRC	<i>Via Teams</i>	

a) Brief summary of results of consultation indicating how this has affected the Policy, Procedure, or Function

The current paper summarises the feedback received vi the last round of consultation. In the previous paper there were four options presented describing the academic year and the consultation proved effective in identifying a preferred structure with further amendments. This consultation was successful in identifying a preferred structure however did require further amendments. Based on the feedback from this round of consultations the revised recommendations to be further considered for an academic view are:

- i. Put in place a three-term structure for the academic year (AY).
- ii. Commence teaching w/c 23 September 2024 (week 9 of AY) with Welcome Week w/c 16 September 2024 (week 8 of AY) to optimise student recruitment activity.
- iii. Implement 13-week terms for terms 1 and 2, including one floating week; and a 12 week term 3 with no floating week (PGT teaching in term 3). (See Principle (ii) for explanation of reason for 12-week term 3).
- iv. Align University holidays, as far as possible, with school holidays in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire for the Winter break and the Spring break (see Principle (v) for comment on Summer school holidays).
- v. Implement an 'Induction/Transition and Employability Week' (ITEW) at the beginning of terms 1 and 2.
- vi. Complete all term 1 assessment prior to the Winter break.
- vii. Complete marking in the 3-week window prior to the start of the next term.

Utilise 'term' as the terminology for the teaching periods. However, it was felt that more colleagues needed to be given the opportunity to comment and feedback on the proposed structure and so the attached paper is presented again for academic view.

4. Monitoring

a) Detail method of monitoring of the Policy, Procedure or Function and by whom

Consultation with colleagues in Student Support, Disability, and members of EDIC were consulted in preparing the EQIA. Ongoing monitoring will be conducted by Academic Services with further discussion at relevant committees, SMT, UEC, SSEC, QAC, and Senate overseen by the VP for Education and the EQIA revised accordingly if required.

b) Detail how monitoring results will be utilised to develop the Policy, Procedure, or Function

Ongoing feedback will be collated, analysed and discussed with appropriate committees, groups and networks.

c) Timescale of monitoring including proposed dates

Consultation is currently on-going and the paper will be discussed at various committees for further academic view prior to seeking approval, with the intention of being introduced for AY 2024, however equality impact concerns will continue to be considered at all stages of this project.

5. Impact assessment

Select what impact there will be on each group:

Characteristic	Positive Impact	No Impact	Negative Impact	Not Applicable
Race		X		
Disability (impact may differ according to physical, cognitive, and mental health conditions and impairments):			X	
British Sign Language (BSL)			X	
Neurodivergent			X	
Gender		X		
Age		X		
Sexual Orientation		X		
Religion, Belief or No Belief			X	
Gender Reassignment		X		
Non-Binary		X		
Marriage and Civil Partnership		X		
Pregnancy and Maternity		X		
Parents and Carers	X			
Care Experienced or Estranged		X		
Socio-Economic Group		X		

a) For each negative impact identified above, please state your mitigating actions below with timescales.

There are potential impacts for current students with disabilities, particularly neurodivergence, in relation to learning styles and assessment preparation, where they transition from the current to a new academic year structure. Where there are such changes consideration will need to be given about the support required through our specialist teams (e.g. Student Support) and from Schools to overcome this potential impact and gap between learning and assessment. This will be particularly the case for UG students where this change may come part way through a programme and require a change to learning approaches in a single programme.

Students with disabilities need to be assessed by the student support team in term 1 for their exam provisions to be put in place or reviewed by late October/early November. This has implication for staff workload in this team and for Schools who also require clarity on provisions as early as possible. Whilst models offering a later assessment period are preferable, the proposed model is broadly similar to current provision and further thought may need to be given to how best to manage this workload. Failure to do so can result in increased volume of emails, student anxiety, and increased number of GC/MCs.

A later start date between students receiving their UF and the start of term is preferable for students with disabilities to allow the Disability Team to put in place the support that they require, for example technology and equipment funded by Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) or arranging non-medical help such as BSL or note-taking.

There are potential impacts in relation to religious festivals and the interplay new term dates have on key festivals. This will need to be considered during any transition period and particularly with regard to flexibility for such festival in line with our normal processes. In reality any AY structure will benefit some and not others, however the universities Religion and Belief Policy addresses our commitment to fairness for all and implications on education and assessments should be considered throughout implementation to ensure that no groups are discriminated against.

b) How does this Policy, Procedure, or Function contribute to eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and advancing equality of opportunity?

This paper is aimed at establishing an inclusive educational experience for all students and supportive working conditions for staff. One goal of this paper has been to align academic weeks and holiday periods with local school holidays where possible. As such, this may advance equality of opportunity for staff and students who are parents, however providing a clear and transparent academic year structure, especially recognising the existing teaching that occurs during 'term 3' will be greatly beneficial for both staff and students.

c) How is the Policy, Procedure, or Function likely to promote good relations between people with different protected characteristics?

The current paper has developed a proposed new structure to the academic year that attempt to articulate our Aberdeen 2040 ambitions for Education through a set of principles underpinning the proposed structure. As such this paper aims to promote good relations between all members of the academic community, however principal (v) explicitly aims to address that EDI concerns when planning the AY. The 8 principles are:

- (i) *Provide a structure that supports our Aberdeen 2040 Education ambitions*
- (ii) *A consistent and transparent structure of three equal terms across UG and PGT provision to provide adequate time for teaching, learning and assessment*
- (iii) *All first term assessment completed prior to the Winter break*
- (iv) *Marking completed in 3-week window prior to start of next term*
- (v) *Enable optimal consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion 1: school, public and religious holidays*
- (vi) *Enable optimal consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion 2: optimal orientation and induction opportunities so as to enhance the preparation and readiness of students for university, their studies and wider student life*
- (vii) *Enable optimal consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion 3: Equality Impact Assessment*
- (viii) *Academic year start date late enough to optimise recruitment activity, including the Clearing period following school exam results, timing of release of school results more generally, UKVI requirements and timing of the confirmation of external scholarships*

7. Publication

- a) Provide details of arrangements to publish assessment:

This Equality Impact Assessment will be published on the Policy and Governance webpage where other EIAs sit. It will be shared with the staff and student equality networks and through the staff and student's newsletter.

8. Review Date: See paper

Author (Name and Position): Jason Bohan, Dean for Student Support

Authors signature:

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Team member (name):

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Team member signature:

9. Date of submission to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee: To be circulated to EDIC once comments/revisions of the paper have been made

Approval Yes ☐

No ☐

Feedback from Committees and Groups on the Academic Year Structure Options

Please note that, in the process of developing the options, a consultation took place as noted within the paper. This feedback is based on the options as presented in the Senate paper.

All feedback will be considered in the process of developing the final proposal for consideration at the relevant committees.

The feedback is summarised in this table, with further detail available in the minutes of the committee meetings. In addition, in italics, a response is provided to the comments.

University Education Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difference of views re timing of assessment/exams (before or after the Winter break) with similar points made to those in the paper. <i>Addressed in section 7.1(iii)</i> • With respect to the above, options 3 and 4 could be difficult for students with children as it could be difficult for them to study during the school holidays while caring for their children. <i>Options 3 and 4 removed from proposal</i> • Welcome the equal three terms and transparent recognition of the teaching that already goes on. One comment on the nomenclature (T1, T2, T3) for January starts. <i>Addressed in section 7.1(ii)</i> • Option 4 overlays teaching and marking which is not seen as favourable. <i>Option 4 removed from proposal</i> • Implications for the Library should assessment take place after the Winter break – staffing and other costs. Library would want to consider opening over the Winter break if this is required. <i>Not relevant to option 1</i> • A number of comments on teaching after the Winter break – disjointed, lack of cohesive structure, concerns about attendance. Noted similar for Spring break [although options have longer teaching period after Spring break. Need to encourage students to attend for all teaching. <i>No teaching after Winter break. Longer period of teaching after Spring break.</i> • Pushing taught content into later in the academic year (options 3 and 4) would be problematic for research activity. <i>Options 3 and 4 removed from proposal</i> • Noted that Qatar has been part of the discussion, with preferences for option 3 or option 1 due to time available for recruitment. <i>Noted and addressed with option 1</i> • The flexibility within the structure is welcome – for revision and reading weeks. <i>Noted and flexibility retained</i> • Noted that some fieldwork takes place across the Spring break so some adjustments would need to be made to the timing of fieldwork (as part of a complex structure for fieldwork across the year in Geosciences, for example). <i>Further feedback provided from Senate and adjustment to length of Spring break has been proposed</i> • Overall, options 3 and 4 were least popular, with option 1 being seen (overall) as the best compromise. Option 2 seen as not so suitable from a recruitment perspective. <i>Noted and reflected in proposal to go with option 1</i>
Student Support and Experience Committee/Employability and Entrepreneurship Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recognition of a clear three term structure was welcomed, including defined marking weeks. <i>Addressed in section 7.1(ii)</i> • It was unanimous that completing the term one ahead of the Winter break was preferred. This was affirmed by AUSA representatives from a student perspective. <i>Addressed in option 1</i> • Options 3 and 4 were the least popular, with Option 1 favourable in terms of student recruitment as opposed to Option 2. Option 1 was also favoured by colleagues in Qatar as a result of the additional recruitment time. <i>Option 1 presented in this proposal</i> • Concerns that there is no clear timeframe for completion of marking ahead of sending to Registry, in time for them being processed for graduation. Similarly, the turnaround time for marking, moderation and examiner's meetings seems very tight across all options. <i>Noted – the marking timelines are approved annually by QAC and adhere to agreed 3 week turnaround for</i>

<p><i>feedback to students as set out in the Feedback Framework. These timelines also align with the minimum 2 week timeframe necessary for graduation preparations.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A couple of comments that it would be useful for T1 and T2 to follow the same pattern. <i>Comment is understood, but it is not possible due to the timing of the Winter and Spring breaks</i> • Difference of views regarding the level of teaching/contact time, with some suggesting shorter teaching terms as is the case in other Universities, and others suggesting that the shorter teaching term would be impracticable for those with accreditation requirements. <i>13 week (T1 and T2) and 12 week (T3) terms</i> • With the current proposed models there will be a week less teaching, suggestions that quality assurance processes need to take place to ensure the right number of contact teaching hours is embedded. <i>There is not a week less for teaching than the university has had in recent years. QAC reviews contact time as part of the approval process for new courses. Consistent three-term structure ensures consistency in teaching period for delivery of 60 credits across all three terms (noting no flexible week in Term 3 (PGT)).</i> • Consideration should be given to the disability processes which can only be completed once a student has received an unconditional firm offer, thus a longer gap between school exam results and the start of term would be welcome. <i>Option 1 has a later start date than option 2 which should assist with this issue</i> • From a student welfare viewpoint, it was proposed that a mapping exercise across the Schools could be carried out to see if/when there might be a culmination of assessments happening. <i>A project (Transforming the Student Experience Through Assessment, TESTA) is in place. Schools can review assessment across programmes and make adjustments as needed</i>
<p>Quality Assurance Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally, support for teaching and assessment in T1 completed before Winter break. Issues with student placements (education) will arise if teaching extends beyond the Winter break. <i>In place in option 1</i> • Concerns that the recognition of a T3 will formalize more teaching across the summer months, particularly in relation to the fieldwork/field courses that already take place in the summer months. One comment that the recognition of a T3 might inspire Programme Leads to reorder January start programmes, which would not be preferable. <i>See section 7.1(ii)</i> • Concerns that there will be a lack of engagement with any teaching after the Spring break. <i>Extended period of teaching after Spring break (compared to previously)</i> • T3 ending late in the summer is problematic, particularly in terms of graduate schemes/employment. <i>Options 3 and 4 removed from proposal</i> • Importance of considering the religious holidays, particularly in Qatar, where there may be restrictions on the activities that can take place during particular holidays/periods. <i>See section 7.1(v)</i> • Avoiding an overlap between induction and marking would be useful, wherever possible – Option 4 not seen as favourable in this regard. <i>Option 4 removed from proposal</i> • Generally, Options 3 and 4 were not seen as favourable. Options 1 and 2 appeared to be most popular. <i>Noted</i>
<p>Senior Management Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of ensuring adequate time for optimal recruitment. <i>Noted and option 1 allows for longer time for recruitment than option 2</i> • Helpful to articulate the principles and evaluate the options against these principles. <i>Noted</i> • The importance of ensuring that the paper is clear that the three terms proposal is about articulating what currently happens (i.e., teaching is delivered in the university across the full academic year), making that transparent but not proposing changes to current expectations around delivery of teaching, and the importance of appropriate workload management as part of an overall approach to address workload concerns and create further time for research. <i>See section 7.1(ii)</i> • Naming of the terms as 1,2, and 3 is helpful. <i>Noted and in proposal</i> • The structure presents opportunities for institution-wide activities with the induction/transition weeks. <i>See section 7.1(i)</i> •
<p>Heads of School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of comments on the three terms and clarified that this is about formalising what is already taking place in areas across the university. <i>See section 7.1(ii)</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noted the need for Schools to manage workload. <i>See section 8.2</i> • Terms are useful in making transparent the beginning and end of activities. <i>See section 9</i> • Field trips and Spring break: Engineering identified that the reduction of a week may prove challenging, whereas SBS is managing field trips across a longer timeline and the proposed change should not impact in the same way. <i>Spring break adjusted in the proposal</i> • Noted the need to not start too early to maximise student recruitment. <i>Option 1 identified as later than option 2 start date</i> • The costs of travel for international travel for students traveling just before the Winter break are likely to be high (relates to the timing of the end of term). <i>Noted and considered in the context of all other feedback</i>
Student Recruitment Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of active management of teaching commitment and the relevant communication in the move to 3 Terms, as well as the potential for increased transparency to improve workload management. <i>Noted and will ensure communication is appropriate</i> • The nomenclature of Term and an associated number may be confusing for students, particularly for January Start students. Suggested that Autumn Term, Spring Term, and Summer Term would be less confusing. <i>See section 9</i> • The reduction by a week for Spring break might be problematic for fieldwork; would be useful to include an option which retains the three-week Spring break. <i>See section 7.1(ii)</i> • While a very thorough evaluation of pros and cons are presented, there is little discussion on the impact that the various proposals will have on research activity. <i>Further sections on workload implications are provided</i> • Some comments that Options 3 and 4 will not be able to deliver on principles (iii) and (iv). <i>Removed from proposal</i> • Overall, Options 1 and 3 were favoured, particularly in relation to a student recruitment and student experience perspective, as well as the conclusion of teaching prior to the Winter break. Options 2 and 4 seen as not so suitable. <i>Option 1 is presented</i>
Qatar Academic Planning Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance in Options 3 and 4 for optimal recruitment opportunity. Support for Option 3, in particular, placing less stress on staff. <i>Considered along with all other comments relating to the latest start dates</i> • Support for the nomenclature introducing three terms as opposed to half-sessions/ semesters. <i>Noted</i>
Other Feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One School indicated a clear preference for models 1 and 2 with these being felt to be better for international students and ensuring completion of assessment before the break. <i>Noted</i> • One School welcomed the focus on the 12-month PGT academic programme across three terms and also the proposals to support time within the academic year structure for induction and orientation in January. They noted some concern about the implications of the proposals in terms of teaching delivery and assessment and the impact on research time and staff workloads. The need for a revision period was also noted to allow students time to prepare for assessments and the tight turnaround times for marking. <i>Noted and addressed in various sections</i>