



## JCU Refreshed Academic Calendar Calendar Implementation Design Principles

The following design principles explain and support the implementation of JCU's refreshed academic calendar, which will be gradually introduced across all campuses from 2024.

### **1. JCU offers a primary academic calendar with standardised study periods**

Study periods have developed organically over time at JCU to a point where approximately 100 study periods are described, with around 50 in use in 2022. The ongoing creation of study periods within the semester timetable has led to a rather chaotic calendar with far more study periods than the University can effectively maintain and service, and leading to an uneven distribution of resources. The organisation, management, and administration of multiple study periods burdens local and central resources and overloads some academic and professional staff. Standardising study periods by length provides more certainty to all staff regarding allocation and timing, and also provides greater clarity to students in study planning.

### **2. Wherever possible, study periods are nested within a simplified architecture**

Currently JCU has a mixture of semesters, trimesters, carousels (6-to-7-week teaching blocks), and other fast-tracked, intensive, and modular subjects. There is usually no clear justification for the use of one study period over another and the overlap of study periods creates further complexity. Teaching across locations currently requires different study period administration, assessment, moderation, and results. Having a set of standard-length carousels and trimesters has the advantage of providing shorter or longer, consolidated subject offerings where warranted, while optimising and better predicting needs for support and coordination, along with opportunities for multiple intake and graduation dates, acceleration, and remediation.

### **3. Study periods are aligned across the University and organised in such a way as to maximise other opportunities and demands**

The University, across its multiple locations, has a number of challenges related to resourcing teaching and administration, recruiting students and staff, breaks for religious or cultural festivals, the timing of professional placements and work-integrated learning, and student and staff mobility, etc. Having one overarching calendar architecture with aligned start and end dates for study periods provides a predictable pattern of subject availabilities into which all teaching and learning, research, and professional activities may be fitted.

#### **4. Examinations and allied processes are kept to a minimum**

There is currently significant demand for end of study period examinations. In 2022, for example, JCU operated a total of 37 weeks of examinations across 23 different weeks in the academic calendar. Multiple examinations are required where study periods overlap, where examinations are offered across different locations, when they are used as deferred and supplementary assessment, or where multiple assessment tasks within the same discipline are required to maintain integrity across locations and timing of assessments. A coherent pedagogic argument may also be made against the use of high-stakes, hurdle assessments in the form of invigilated examinations as a reliable and authentic test of the quality of student learning. Further, with increased surveillance on academic integrity, programmatic assessment with juncture points for assured security may have potential. A principled position in the design of carousels is that end of study period examinations are not supported due to the condensed nature of learning and the need for cumulative assessment design.

#### **5. Subject pre-requisites, sequencing and electives are kept to a minimum to enable more flexible access to subjects**

Enabling greater flexibility in subject offerings across the calendar year requires that prerequisites and compelled sequences of subjects are kept to a minimum, especially if subjects are offered in carousels, or other types of intensive teaching. For the potential benefits of a disaggregated learning environment to be realised, and student choice, flexibility, access, and mobility to be prioritised, the setting of prerequisites, designating core or compulsory subjects, determining sequences of subjects, and designating some subjects as incompatible with others needs to be restricted.<sup>1</sup>

#### **6. There is a limited number of aligned census dates**

The 2022 JCU academic calendar had at least 24 different census dates and with them, repetition of processes to meet legislative obligations, including withdrawal (with or without penalty), communications to students, deferral of contributions, distribution of Commonwealth Assistance Notices, cancellation for non-payment, identification of students at risk of failing, etc.

Proliferation of census dates brings further difficulties in managing HESA<sup>2</sup> related demands such as withdrawal dates and targeted communications and interventions. Study and workload planning or the allocation of staff and students is further complicated when managing multiple key dates.

#### **7. Sufficient time is provided between study periods**

Gaps between study periods are especially important for subjects offered using the carousel model, or other intensive teaching formats. Providing predictable gaps between study periods affords a break from what are otherwise intense learning and teaching experiences and creates space for administration activities. Standardising study periods requires a limited number of study period operations with common lengths of time. A standardised calendar provides cohesion and promotes student wellbeing.

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<sup>1</sup> French, S. (2015), *The Benefits and Challenges of Modular Higher Education Curricula*. Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education.

<sup>2</sup> *Higher Education Support Act 2003*, amended January 2023.