Block Teaching: A Response to the Literature, Observations from Other Institutions, and Consultation Procedures at the University of Lancashire

Lancashire UCU Branch Committee

1 Summary

1.1 Review of considerations response summary

The main issues gleaned from the review of literature used by the 'Review of Considerations' document are as follows.

- **Blended Learning:** Since several of the articles consulted are about blended learning and many examples of block teaching involve blended learning, we need to have a deeper conversation about the implications of this for teaching at Lancashire. Many modules in fact do incorporate aspects of a blended approach, so we need to know how much flexibility module leaders have in implementing their own approaches.
As mentioned in Boelens et al. the flexibility of a blended approach can have negative consequences for students who find it harder to self-regulate. This may disadvantage some students coming from a widening participation background who are not accustomed to the habitus of university learning and have not acquired the skills for

independent learning. Foundation students may be particularly impacted.

Based on comments by Boelens et al. regarding affective learning, we cannot rely on the kind of spontaneity they discuss when aiding struggling students. Without the student coaches, this will be very difficult to implement as they were part of the workflow for identifying disengaged students.

- **Block and Student Experience:** While a number of studies show a positive reception for block with students, the data are somewhat unreliable. Often students do not have a point of comparison, or where they do it is fairly limited. Where studies (e.g. Swain) do compare block and traditional experiences within the same cohort, it is unclear as to whether block itself is really the factor making the difference. Dixon et al. note that students are arriving at university with far less capacity for critical thinking, having been taught for the purpose of attaining certain targets in standardised tests and, as such, block may suit their tendencies towards more passive learning (584). Articles such as Kofinas et al. give the sense that block works best for professional development and postgraduate courses.
- **Block and Widening Participation students:** Several papers (e.g. Buck et al. 2023) note that the uptake of Block is in response to the changing student demographic. More students from non-traditional backgrounds (lower SES students, disabled students including those with SPLDs, student parents, part-time students, non-native language speaking students) are entering higher education and it is suggested that block might be better for them. However, there are significant considerations around students' abilities to cope with the intensity of block, the need for self-regulation in compressed formats and the detriment from missing sections of a block due to disability or child care needs.
- **Block and Staff Experiences:** Swain (2016) notes issues of fatigue. Dixon et al.'s survey of previous literature highlights increased workloads, difficulty in managing time that subsequently affects research time, and fatigue. Their own study reveals a number of issues, including difficulty in planning and time management for staff, organising of assessments, negative impacts on learning (including of transferable skills), risk of failure for students missing class, and having to simplify material. Some positive comments included that block was good for helping students to transition to HE and some felt it increased focus in students, although it was felt that block should be just one mode of delivery amongst other options.
- **Block and Assessment:** studies such as Buck et al. (2023) suggest that traditional assessment formats such as longer form reports or essays do not work so well in block as students do not have time to prepare. They readily admit that this does not favour assignments that test higher order skills such as critical thinking. Another argument is that shorter form summative assignments throughout the block are better for mature students and those with learning difficulties. This is patronising and ableist - students from these groups are eminently capable of longer assignments with deep critical thinking when adequately supported in their learning journeys. There appears to be an implicit admission that shorter assessments under block are easier. There seem to be no studies that assess retention of information over a longer time period in block vs. traditional teaching. Further, the idea that modules currently only have large assessments at the end is fallacious and essays can be scaffolded.

- **Interpreting Studies of Block:** there are a number of issues with the studies consulted. The two Buck et al. papers (2022 & 2023) have a limited sample, with no means to compare like with like (i.e. students who are giving their feedback on block have generally not experienced the alternative in HE). Swain does compare block and traditional with the same cohort, however there are some limitations to this study noted below. The Davies (2006) article provides a useful summary of the issues with interpreting data on intensive teaching formats (see below).
One issue with these studies is that there can be too many independent variables making it hard to measure like for like. Another issue is that most studies are only of the very early implementation of block (usually the first year or two), which is insufficient to get a really good sense of the long-term positives and negatives. Where there are longer term case studies, these are for small liberal arts colleges who operate very differently.

1.2 Summary of observations from other institutions

Overall, interviews with Branch Committees at other institutions have yielded a negative impression of the experience of block. Key takeaways are:
- Increased or uneven workload for staff.
- Block has been described as discriminatory and ableist. The intensive format, lack of half terms, and lack of accommodation for part-time staff and students has created huge problems.
- Despite block being touted as a good way to innovate with assignments, staff from other universities have observed that it is hard to create scaffolded assignments, meaning that the depth of learning students gain from being able to work on feedback is severely limited.
- The turnaround time for marking is extremely limited, especially where staff must immediately teach another block.
- Block is simply not appropriate for courses that require depth of critical thinking or conceptual analysis.
- The lack of opportunity for diffused learning means students find it harder to apply their studies to the real world.
- It is difficult to 'cross-pollinate' between modules as students do not get the opportunity to explore complementary subjects alongside one another.
- Block has led to limited optionality.
- Recommendations include ensuring that staff have at least one block free per year and never teaching more than one block at a time.
- Due to the short timeframe of modules, struggling students can easily slip off the radar. Strong student support is needed.
- The lack of half-terms is discriminatory for staff and students with children.
- For the one university where block has been successful, it is worth noting that their consultation and implementation strategies have been radically different. Their format would not be suitable for us due to the lack of time for students to work or take care of their families. It is worth noting that they acknowledged the issues with conceptual or

critical thinking modules and allow them long, thin blocks or double blocks back to back to give students sufficient time for absorption and reflection.

1.3 Summary of staff survey

Key points:
- The survey received 182 responses from 11 schools or services.
- 78.5% of respondents do not believe the move to block is a good idea or have major reservations.
- 80.7% of respondents do not believe that block is right for their course or have major reservations.
- 72.4% of respondents who took part in a sprint process did not have a clear idea of what would happen in the sprint.
- 55.2% of respondents felt that the sprint gave them little or no influence over the design of their course.
- Only 10.7% of respondents were happy with how their course turned out post-sprint.
- For those still in pre-sprint planning, 54.9% have no idea what will happen and a further 41.8% have an idea but no details. 69.1% of respondents do not believe sprint will give them the opportunity to influence the design of their new modules.
- See section 4 for full data and respondents' comments.

2 'A review of considerations': reflections, responses and questions on the literature quoted

- **Boelens, R., B. De Wever, and M. Voet. 2017. "Four Key Challenges to the Design of Blended Learning: A Systematic Literature Review." *Educational Research Review,* [22](): 1–18. [online] available at: [doi:10.1016/j.edurev.2017.06.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2017.06.001)[Accessed 27 8 25]**

Presents a literature review of 20 articles on blended learning. They note that current literature lacks any "concrete design principles"(2) for creating blended learning activities. Noting 4 key challenges for designing blended environments (flexibility, stimulating interaction, facilitating students' learning processes, fostering an affective learning climate), they aim to extract and distill some key principles.

Flexibility: this has been identified as a benefit of blended learning, specifically with regards to time (when a student can learn), place (where they can learn), path (the order of content), and pace (the student's own speed of progress). The article identified a lot of variability in how flexibility was managed and delivered. Very few of the studies examined allowed students "control over the realization of the blend" (11). The authors speculated that "instructors may often find that learners do not yet possess the self-regulation and self-direction skills that are usually associated with a high degree of learner control and autonomy" (11).

Interaction: this can be difficult to facilitate in blended environments due to an enlarged "transactional distance" (3). It can be hard to gauge uptake/retention of material or to notice when learners have issues in a blended environment. The face-to-face element ameliorates this. They note that "many learners want the flexibility offered by the blended learning method, but do not want to lose the social interaction and human touch they are used to in a face-to-face environment" (4). Less than half the studies examined "explicitly include support for social interaction" (11).

Facilitating students' learning processes: the autonomy of flexibility requires more self-regulation from students. The writers note that the following factors are particularly important: "organization, discipline, time management, skill in using technology to support learning, and self-efficacy to exercise control over their own learning processes" (4). As such blended learning is found to be particularly effective for high achievers, but not so for low achievers. A set of regulative strategies are suggested by Vermunt and Verloop (1999). Most studies examined pay a lot of attention to "facilitating students' learning processes" (11). Their finding suggest that F2F meetings are particularly important for orientation and familiarising students with technological tools used for learning. Online tools are noted as being particularly helpful for assessment and monitoring progress.

Fostering an affective learning climate: increased transactional distance can lead to feelings of isolation and higher drop-out rates. Affective learning environments link the material delivered with the students' lives and emotions, giving them a greater sense of connection to it. Fostering such environments can lead to greater intrinsic motivation. Instructors can do this by "showing empathy, having a sense of humor, providing encouragements, directing attention to task-relevant aspects, and attending to students' individual differences" (4). Vermunt and Verloop (1999) also offer some affective learning strategies. Several of the studies focus on motivation

or creating variation, but few pay attention to appraising or dealing with emotions. Online learning environments are predominantly used for motivation (it is noted that F2F is motivating in and of itself since learners are brought together "ensuring spontaneous interaction" (12). There is not much evidence of the blended format being used to tailor the experience for individual students, which the authors found unexpected. While there are few examples of planned activities to offer emotional support, this is thought to occur more spontaneously, although the authors think this needs more attention in future studies.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

The inclusion of this article suggests that management see a blended approach as very much part of the successful delivery of block. It is worth noting that much teaching at Lancashire already involves a blended approach and that there is nothing inherent about block delivery that implies a blended approach, nor is this inherently lacking from our current teaching practices. If the University wishes us to extend online and asynchronous delivery, are we accredited for that? Has this been considered as part of EIAs?

If the autonomy of flexibility in blended learning requires more self-regulation from students, this may cause issues for many of our WP students. Those coming from non-traditional backgrounds may not have the cultural capital and experience to navigate university life without help. This could severely impact foundation students who often require additional input and face time in order to become acquainted with the habitus of Higher Education. "Organization, discipline, time management, skill in using technology to support learning, and self-efficacy to exercise control over their own learning processes" (4) are all key skills taught in foundation humanities, allowing students who have historically achieved lower outcomes to successfully negotiate higher education and improve their outcomes. As such, a more blended approach may not be suitable for them.

The remark by the authors that "instructors may often find that learners do not yet possess the self-regulation and self-direction skills that are usually associated with a high degree of learner control and autonomy" (11) is an important one for us to bear in mind when approaching any block-blend development.

The flexibility of blend would be limited by the fact that we will mostly still be delivering F2F, otherwise there would surely be AQA or accreditation issues?

Some of the studies examined used chat functions to stimulate interaction - something we already use in online teaching. Another suggested using Social Media, such as Facebook, but this seems risky given the GDPR issues as well as potential mental health dangers.

The authors argue that promoting social interaction in blended learning requires more attention in future research. They cite studies that show that face to face meetings and facilitated introductions are very helpful for students.

Given our WP population, it's important that we pay attention to the affective learning environment and be more deliberate and less spontaneous about emotional support than some of the studies discussed in this article.

- **Buck, E., & Tyrrell, K. (2022). Block and blend: a mixed method investigation into the impact of a pilot block teaching and blended learning approach upon student**

outcomes and experience. Journal of Further and Higher Education, 46(8), 1078–1091. [online] available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2022.2050686 [Accessed 28 8 25]

This article presents a study of 12 modules that suggests positive outcomes from a 'block and blend' approach. Technology enhanced learning provides greater accessibility and new ways of widening participation. They acknowledge that much of the previous literature on block has focused on modules that involve skills acquisition "as opposed to more theoretical, conceptual learning" (1080). Also, most block delivery has been at postgraduate level, with studies on this being inconclusive. The authors note that other studies have identified problems relating to student absence, staff fatigue and long-term learning.

The results show that assessment grades were higher (there was no discussion here of the kind of assessment) and there were fewer requests for deferral. However, the study also identified "greater [grade] variance across the cohort group" (1088).

Student reactions were that online learning was easier and convenient. Disabled students were able to work more from home. Accessibility of resources through the blended delivery was also important.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

If block has been successful at PG level, this may be due to the students already having subject-specific knowledge rendering intensive learning more appropriate.

It would be interesting to know the kinds of assessment and if these were adapted from the previous year's. At present it is hard to tell if like for like is being compared. The fewer deferrals are interesting, but it would be difficult to rule out the effects of the change to online learning during the COVID pandemic.

The positive reactions from students seem to be more related to the blended rather than the block delivery. However, students did report feeling more focussed and having a sense of accomplishment from completing a module. It is notable, however, that this study does not address longer term retention or the types of assessment. While some students enjoyed focusing on one subject at a time, others commented on 'content cramming (1087).

While fewer students applied for deferral (assuming they mean MCs), could this be because students were afraid they would miss too much in the following block if they deferred assessment from the previous? Or as the authors note "block leaves 'no margin for error'" (1088).

- **Buck, E., Vieira Braga, P, and Ortiz Granero, C.M. (2023) ' Effective Assessment in Block Pedagogy: Understanding the Impact of Summative Assessment Type on Student Achievement.'.** *Journal of Block and Intensive Learning and Teaching,1 (1), 6-16* **[online] https://doi.org/10.15209/jbilt.1280 [Accessed 28 8 25]**

This article uses summative assessment as the benchmark for evaluating student achievement under block teaching conditions. The rationale for this being that summative assessment is how we usually gauge student achievement. They focus on instances where instructors have

adapted their assessments for block. They note that previous studies indicate that students achieve higher marks in summative assessments from block as opposed to traditional learning. They note that previous research has shown positive results for higher grades, as well as improved time management, planning skills and motivation.

The authors, drawing on Loton et al. (2022), noted that the improvement in achievement "was higher in students in business degrees and lower in arts and education students" (9). This study did not take into account the kind of assessment. They further note that "short progressive tasks might be more suitable than long assignments that require considerable time given the short period of delivery per module in a block module" (9). Longer tasks also make it more difficult for lecturers to give feedback. They also argue that longer, written assignments may be less appropriate for students "with special needs or mature students who have not written an academic assignment in a long period of time" (9).

Their results showed that there were no statistically higher final grades for students on block modules with adapted summative assessments. However, there was a significant statistical improvement where multiple summative assessments were used or time-constrained summative assessments were used.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

There is no discussion or evidence given about the kinds of modules that the students in the study were taking.

A concern is that while adapting assessments may lead to higher grades, this doesn't necessarily reflect the extent to which students have developed critical thinking skills. They point to the final essay often achieving lower grades for students. However, a final essay is by its nature supposed to be tricky. It is a test of a student's ability to distill complex arguments, competing ideas and conflicting evidence and theories. In short, it is a test of critical thinking skills and a valuable indicator of a student's mastery of the kind of long-form thinking that university should be nurturing. While this should not by any means be the only form of assessment, it must, for most courses, be a part of the skill set that students develop.

The authors claim that there has been a surge in interest in block teaching, but quote the lead authors papers to back up this claim.

In noting that research shows that block leads to higher summative grades. However, they do not mention the kinds of knowledge being assessed or whether longer term retention was examined.

While the authors argue that "short progressive tasks" are more appropriate for assessment in block, they note that this is due to the short period of delivery. This is circular reasoning.

The authors' contention that longer written pieces may not be appropriate for mature students or students with learning difficulties is patronising and ableist. It also betrays the fact that they see shorter summative pieces as easier.

The authors noted that shorter, more frequent summative assessments were likely better because of the time constraints of block teaching. Students do not have time to prepare for longer form pieces such as essays. They also noted that, particularly for the time-constrained

assessments, that these usually only assess "students' ability to recall and not…higher order skills" (14).

The Austin and Gustavson (2006) and Anastasi (2007) articles are missing from the reference list.

- **Burton, S. and Nesbit, P.L Block or traditional? An analysis of student choice of teaching format. *Journal of Management and Organization. 2008; 14 (1): 4-19. Doi* https://doi.org/10.5172/jmo.2008.14.1.4 [Accessed 23 7 24]**

This review article examines what makes students choose intensive over traditional formats. They only studied students in accounting, marketing and human resource management courses. The results showed that the majority of students, when presented with the option of block or weekly formats, chose block, although they were more likely to choose block having already completed some modules (suggesting that familiarity with the process of studying made them more confident in trying other formats). Students were also more likely to choose block if they already had confidence in their abilities. Reasons for choosing block format were more likely to be lifestyle reasons than pedagogical ones. Students preferred a weekly format for digesting large amounts of or difficult content.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

The authors note early on that reduction of funding to universities in Australia has led to them becoming more commercial. Implicitly, therefore, the benefit of block may be the ability to offer something in a quick package for paying customers wanting to attain additional qualifications. This also works for part-time, working students. But, this doesn't speak to the long-term retention of information.

The fact that students with a strong confidence in their abilities were more likely to choose block suggests that this format is more appropriate for postgraduate or CPD learning rather than foundation or undergraduate students.

Given that students were more likely to choose block for lifestyle reasons is concerning. It suggests that they are not taking into account or able to assess the pedagogical merits of different formats.

- **Cawelti, G. (1994) in Davies, W. M. 2006. "Intensive Teaching Formats: A Review." *Issues in Educational Research,* 16: 1–20. [online] https://doi.org/10.5172/jmo.2008.14.1.4 [Not yet examined]**

- **Cleary, K., Samarawickrema, G., Ambler, T., Loton, D., Krcho, T., & McCluskey, T. (2023). Transitioning to emergency remote teaching in a block model curriculum: A case study of academics' experiences in an Australian University. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 1–22. [online] available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2023.2248289 [Accessed 23 7 24]**

The study explored "academics' experiences of factors that helped or hindered their teaching when transitioning to" (66) emergency teaching under COVID-19 in block format. The focus is

more on how block enabled them to transition to remote teaching rather than the merits of block in and of itself.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

Given the parameters of the study, this is not particularly helpful for gauging whether block, in and of itself, has merits.

- **Conrad, D. L., & Openo, J. (2018)***. Assessment strategies for online learning: Engagement and authenticity***. AU Press. [online] available at: https://doi.org/10.15215/aupress/9781771992329.01 [Accessed 23 7 24]**

Only chapter one was examined. The authors explore the possibilities offered by online teaching to improve and innovate assessment while "keeping the best of the traditional approaches" (4). They acknowledge some of the issues arising from neo-liberalism (i.e students being focused more narrowly on skills with economic value rather than serving society or becoming more rounded human beings). They promote a move from assessment as primarily focused on gauging students' comprehension of material to learner-centred assessments that promote student learning (i.e. more iterative and scaffolded approaches). Technology should serve pedagogy and not be used for its own sake.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

A useful observation is that there is an "increasing demographic of adult learners" who are studying with the particular goal of meeting requirements for employers. This is certainly worth bearing in mind when designing assessment, although this does not mean that traditional, long-form assignments, such as the essay, should be jettisoned, especially given that many employers are seeking graduates with high-level critical thinking skills.

The authors are not particularly critical of the problems of neoliberalism. Rather, they suggest that these economic factors "drive the move toward authentic assessment, where students can provide direct evidence of having meaningfully applied their learning" (6). This link between neoliberal market forces and authenticity in assessment is not well founded.

- **Daniel, E. L. (2000). "A Review of Time-Shortened Courses across Disciplines."** *College Student Journal,* **34:2, 298-308. [online] available at: A Review of Time-Shortened Courses across Disciplines | Semantic Scholar   [Not yet examined]**

- **Davies, W. M. (2006). "Intensive Teaching Formats: A Review."** *Issues in Educational Research,* **16: 1–20. [online] available at: IIER 16: Davies - intensive teaching formats: A review   [Accessed 23 7 24]**

Davies notes the market forces that have forced universities "to become more entrepreneurial" as a reason for interest in intensive formats. In addition, he observes that the change in student demographic from school leavers to more mature and life-long learners is changing the focus of the university. Davies describes block teaching as consisting of '*longer than usual classes* held during a conventionally timetabled schedule'. The article reviews studies of intensive teaching

formats. Of particular use is Davies' summary of the problems of interpreting data on intensive teaching:

1. "Ratings of student evaluation are to some degree biased. IMD programs are usually self-selected by students. None of the studies comparing intensive and traditional courses randomly assigned students to courses (Daniel, 2000).
2. The self-selection of the teaching format cannot reliably be separated from the evaluation given about the teaching format by students (in other words, how do we distinguish students' preferences for intensive formats from their estimation of them?)
3. Students also may select the teaching format the suits their learning style, giving an inaccurate assessment of the benefits of IMD formats (Burton & Nesbit, 2002).
4. Data is generally taken immediately after a period of intensive teaching ends. This may or may not accurately reflect the long-term learning outcomes achieved (Daniel, 2000).
5. While most studies note that the learning outcomes of students from IMD and traditional formats to be comparable (or in favour of IMD formats), it is not clear what is being measured, and whether this is a long-term outcome of the teaching method used. Students completing IMD format courses tend to be older (Caskey, 1994), more motivated (Christy, 1991) and better prepared (Smith, 1988), and thus, more likely to succeed regardless of the time-format. This makes any interpretation of the benefits of IMDs problematic."

Davies further notes that "most studies report 'no significant difference' between intensively- and traditionally-taught methods in terms of learning outcomes".

Questions/issues arising from this article:

Davies' definition of block is slightly different from others'. His definition of '*Accelerated or Intensive teaching*' seems to be more on par with other definitions of block.

The article does list some criticisms of time-intensive courses, although it does balance this by stressing that criticisms based on time alone do not necessarily pan. However, it does seem that although Davies provides some rebuttal for criticisms of block-style formats, this is dependent upon instructors having the opportunity and flexibility to design modules well. He does point out, though " It appears, however, that the arrival of intensive teaching on the tertiary stage has little to do with good pedagogy. It is principally due to institutions being more attentive to meeting the needs of their 'clients' (students) in a changing world."

- **Dixon, L., & O'Gorman, V. (2019). Block teaching – exploring lecturers' perceptions of intensive modes of delivery in the context of undergraduate education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44(5): 583–595. [online] available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2018.1564024 [Accessed 31 8 25]**

One of the few studies to really investigate lecturers' perceptions of block. Their literature review highlights increased workloads, difficulty in managing time that subsequently affects research time, and fatigue. They note that the accelerated time-frame may necessitate "incorporating shorter and more frequent assignments" (587). Their own study revealed that lecturers felt their planning and preparation was negatively affected and that students did not have enough time for reflection and deep learning. One positive implication of block was that the lecturers felt students could get a sense of accomplishment more quickly and could help them transition to

HE. A barrier to block was trying to fit in assessments, with a second assignment being placed during the subsequent block, leading to lower student outcomes. While some felt block had gone better than expected, others felt there was an increased risk of failure and that it does not foster time management and multi-tasking skills.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

Very useful for examining block from the perspective of lecturers.

- **Gilpin, S. 2020. "Fostering Emerging Online Learner Persistence." *Journal of Teaching and Learning,* 14.1 [online] available at: doi:10.22329/jtl.v14i1.6253 [Accessed 31 8 25]**

Presents a conceptual framework for engaging online learners that involves more tailoring of the experience to the "needs of distinct groups of learners" (39).

Questions/issues arising from this article:

Useful for blended learning.

- **Graham, C. R. (2006). "Blended Learning Systems: Definition, Current Trends, and Future Directions." In *Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Designs*, edited by C. J. Bonk & C. R. Graham, 3–21. San Francisco: Pfeiffer Publishing [Not yet examined]**

- **Jansen, E. P. (2004). "The Influence of the Curriculum Organization on Study Progress in Higher Education." *Higher Education* 47 (4): 411–435. [online] available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/B:HIGH.0000020868.39084.21 [Not yet examined]**

- **Kasworm, C. (2001). *Adult Learner Experiences of an Accelerated Degree Program*. Adult Education Research Conference. [online] available at: https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2001/papers/37 [Accessed 31 8 25]**

Kasworm notes that the kinds of accelerated degrees studied here "typically represent professional areas of applied study". The case study here was applied management. Students largely had a positive relationship to the accelerated programme.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

It frequently appears to be the case that intensive or accelerated programmes best serve some form of professional development. This study was also focussed only on mature students.

- **Kofinas, A. B., Bentley, Y., Minnet-Smith, C., & Cao, G. (2017). Block Teaching as the Basis for an Innovative Redesign of the PG Suite of Programmes in University**

of Bedfordshire Business School [Conference paper]. Third International Conference on Higher Education Advances, HEAd'17, Universitat Politecnica de Valencia, [online] available at: http://ocs.editorial.upv.es/index.php/HEAD/HEAD17/paper/viewFile/5379/2984 [Accessed 31 8 25]

The paper evaluates a new Masters programme in Business Studies that utilises block delivery. An interesting point is that the induction week is "specifically aimed at preparing students for the learning experience rather than solely being articulated as an introduction to the institution and course" (714). The comments from the first survey they conducted mentioned a number of positive things about the teaching, the negative comments, however, specifically mentioned issues with getting used to block and too little time. The second survey also had a mixture of reviews with some students saying positive things about being able to focus on one subject at a time while others lamented the lack of learning time. Similarly a survey of staff noted positives such as improved student engagement, but negatives such as students struggling to catch up when they missed classes and a lack of coordination for key skills such as critical writing.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

This is another article that focuses on postgraduate, professional training, suggesting again that block is most appropriate for these styles of courses. It is likely that postgraduate and CPD students would be able to deep dive more quickly into conceptual material and critical thinking in an intensive format as this would be based on previous knowledge and experience. The aim of the induction week is something we could consider. This article was written during the first year of running the programme, so there was not much time to evaluate the longer term benefits or caveats of block.

- **Konjarski, L., Weldon, J., Ashley, S., Freeman, T., Shanata, J., Yamanishi, M., Lotz, E., Gilde, C., & Ganzel, A. (2023). The Block: A catalyst for ongoing innovation. Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 20(4). [online] available at: https://doi.org/10.53761/1.20.4.13 [Accessed 31 8 25]**

The article distills features of block from five case studies of institutions that have adopted it in an attempt to ascertain what block offers HE. This is an interesting study as it presents five US and Australian colleges who all adopted block at different times, for very different reasons and with varying strategies. They note that for the smaller colleges, which only run one block at a time per course, there is a good amount of freedom that allows opportunities for expeditions and civic engagement. They do acknowledge, however, that this is not possible at the larger university with a larger student body.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

The limitations of the larger university might suggest that this would work better at a small liberal arts college. Indeed, the one university here in the UK that we interviewed who had a successful experience did have a more liberal arts style programme and were heavily influenced by a US private college. The only common feature distilled by the writers is 'one course at a time'.

- **Kucsera, J. V., and D. M. Zimmaro. (2010). "Comparing the Effectiveness of Intensive and Traditional Courses." *College Teaching* 58: 62–68. [online] available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/25763421 . [Accessed 31 8 25]**

This studied compared the teaching of instructors who taught both intensive and traditional formats. They found that intensive courses got higher ratings from students.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

It is good that this study actually seeks to have a control variable - i.e. the same lecturers who teach in both formats. They have also taken into account issues that other studies did not, such as variables such as student age. Although the authors of this paper are more rigorous than some of the other studies, it is still worth being cautious. This is still measuring student perceptions, which do not necessarily reflect actual attainment and no study as yet has provided evidence on longer term retention of knowledge or skills, which would ultimately be a far better indicator of the value of a teaching format.

- **Kuiper, A., Solomonides, I., & Hardy, L. (2015). Time on task in intensive modes of delivery.** *Distance Education*, **36(2): 231–245. [online] available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2015.1055058 [Accessed 31 8 25]**

Explores strategies for engaging students successfully in intensive teaching. The authors note that the intensive formats were, in part, developed for students who wished to retake failed modules. To ensure student success, the modules had to be designed differently. Many of these modules were being delivered over the summer period when students are not traditionally at university. Providing content in advance helped students not to fall behind.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

Not so much about the value of block, more about how to engage students with it. Most of the intensive delivery discussed here was to serve the purpose of educating students outside of regular programming (e.g. students retaking failed modules over the summer), so this has somewhat limited use for our purposes. Some of the discussion focuses around being available at odd times for students who have competing time pressures - this would not be a tenable situation for most of our staff.

- **Loton, D., Stein, C., Parker, P., & Weaven, M. (2022). Introducing block mode to first-year university students: A natural experiment on satisfaction and performance.** *Studies in Higher Education*, **47(6): 1097–1120. [online] available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1843150 [Accessed 31 8 25]**

The study compares results from a new block format to the previous two years' cohorts. Their findings showed that assessment results improved. This was most noticeable in business, but less so in the arts and education. There was not a significant change in student satisfaction ratings. Students did rate block modules lower on "overall unit quality, learning activities, learning resources being relevant and up-to-date, and the largest - a reasonable workload" (1112).

Questions/issues arising from this article:

The new format also implements blended learning, which raises the question as to whether it is more the blended approach rather than block that is particularly helping students.

Apparently, their management got keen on block after watching a TED Talk…

They cite one of their design principles as 'Have a clear beginning and ending'. Wouldn't any well-designed module have this? They also state 'Include clear assessment rubrics' - again, it makes one wonder what they were doing before.

They have a 2-day turnaround on marking assessments, which seems completely untenable.

Similar to a number of the other studies, this is just the first year of implementation and does not provide sufficient longitudinal data.

While grades improved, it was not clear as to whether the assessments were changed. The block model principles in table 1 would suggest that they were, meaning they are not comparing like with like.

- **Muscat, Amanda and Thomas, Melissah (2023) Teaching on the Block: an exploration of university educators' experiences of block teaching in higher education contexts. Journal of Block and Intensive Learning and Teaching, 1 (2): 32-48. [online] available at: https://doi.org/10.15209/jbilt.1301 [Accessed 31 8 25]**

As with Loton et al and Samarawickrema et al. (2020), this examines the adoption of block at Victoria University. Written from the perspective of two teachers developing block and focused on "a small number of case-writing studies" (45).

Questions/issues arising from this article:

The authors acknowledge that more research is needed to gauge things such as block's "impact on student learning outcomes" (46). They also recognise that the body of research on block is limited and much more research needs to be done. They note also that "attention should be directed towards scrutinising areas such as academic workload" (46).

- **Nerantzi, C., & Chatzidamianos, G. (2020). Moving to block teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Management and Applied Research*, 7(4): 482–495. [online] available at: https://doi.org/10.18646/2056.74.20-034 [Not yet examined]**

- **Oraison, H., Konjarski, L., Young, J., Howe, S., & Smallridge, A. (2020, July) in Konjarski, L., Weldon, J., Ashley, S., Freeman, T., Shanata, J., Yamanishi, M., Lotz, E., Gilde, C., & Ganzel, A. (2023). The Block: A catalyst for ongoing innovation. Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 20(4). [online] available at: https://doi.org/10.53761/1.20.4.13 [Not yet examined]**

- **Richmond, A. S., B. C. Murphy, L. S. Curl, and K. A. Broussard. (2015). "The Effect of Immersion Scheduling on Academic Performance and Students' Ratings of Instructors."** *Teaching of Psychology* **42 (1): 26–33. [online] available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/0098628314562675 [Accessed 31 8 25]**

Specifically examines immersion scheduling for psychology. Their findings show that students on the immersion course outperformed those on a traditional 16-week course. The students on the immersion course also rated their lecturers more favourably.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

The study does not address long-term retention. It is highly likely that students on an immersive course may well perform immediately better, but less clear as to whether they can retain that information over a longer period of time. The authors also admit that the students in the immersion course were in smaller classes and benefitted from that closer attention. They speculate that the immersion tutors got a more favourable rating because a deeper rapport was formed in that intensive period.

- **Samarawickrema, G., Galloway, T., Raponi, K., & Everett, G. (2020). A participatory evaluation of transforming first year LLB into block mode. Legal Education Review, 30(1): 1-17. [online] available at: https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.969771640265068 [Accessed 31 8 25]**

This reviews the Victoria University model that was also reviewed by Loton et al., but specifically looks at the law programme. The article looks at the process more from the perspective of the course designers than the students.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

This is another article that lauds block for 'structuring knowledge developmentally', which again begs the question as to what people were apparently doing before. It seems unlikely that block teaching ushered in well-structured teaching and that no traditionally delivered module had this.

Since this is about the same institution as the Loton article, similar questions and critiques can be applied.

The discuss meeting accreditation standards so this could be a useful reference point for staff concerned about this issue.

- **Samarawickrema, G., & Cleary, K. (2021). Block mode study: Opportunities and challenges for a new generation of learners in an Australian University.** *Student Success*, **12(1): 13–23. [online] available at: https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.1579 [Not yet examined]**

- **Samarawickrema, G., Cleary, K., Loton, D., Ambler, T., Krcho, T (2023) 'Academics' experiences of Block Model assessment during COVID-19: Taking principles-based insights into the future. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* Dec 23:1-16 [online] https://www.doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2023.2296657 [Accessed 31 8 25]**

Another study from Victoria University, this time looking at assessment in block during COVID-19 and detailing how academics with varying ranges of experience with block adapted their assessments during block delivery of emergency remote teaching. The emphasise the importance of accessibility.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

This is more focused on emergency remote teaching than block.

- **Scott, Patricia A. and 'Conrad, C. F. "A Critique of Intensive Courses and an Agenda for Research." In Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research, edited by John C. Smart. New York: Agathon Press, 1992, 8: 411-459. [online] available at: dm.education.wisc.edu/cfconrad/intellcont/A Critique of Intensive Courses and an Agenda for Research-1.pdf [Accessed 31 8 25]**

A useful earlier review of a variety of intensive formats. They note that some disciplines fare better than others in this mode. They advocate that "academic time should accommodate–not ignore–educational needs, and colleges and universities should consider a wide variety of course formats which vary according to length, pace, and intensity to temporally match course formats with the educational goals of each course and the needs of all students." (451)

Questions/issues arising from this article:

This has perhaps been superseded by some of the more recent studies, however their more open-minded approach to a variety of course formats is refreshing.

- **Şenel, S., & Şenel, H. C. (2021). Remote assessment in higher Education during COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Assessment Tools in Education*, 8(2): 181–199. [online] available at: https://doi.org/10.21449/ijate.820140 [Not yet examined]**

- **Slade, C., Lawrie, G., Taptamat, N., Browne, E., Sheppard, K., & Matthews, K. E. (2022). Insights into how academics reframed their assessment during a pandemic: Disciplinary variation and assessment as afterthought. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 47(4): 588–605. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2021.1933379 [Not yet examined]**

- **Spanjers, I. a. E., K. D. Könings, J. Leppink, D. M. L. Verstegen, N. De Jong, K. Czabanowska, and J. J. G. Van Merriënboer. 2015. "The Promised Land of Blended Learning: Quizzes as a Moderator." *Educational Research Review* 15: 59–74.**

[online] available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2015.05.001 . [Not yet examined]

- **St-Onge, C., Ouellet, K., Lakhal, S., Dubé, T., & Marceau, M. (2022). COVID-19 as the tipping point for integrating e-assessment in higher education practices.** *British Journal of Educational Technology*, **53(2): 349–366. [online] available at:** https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13169 [Accessed 31 8 25]

Examines how ready instructors were to incorporate e-assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Considers some of the social consequences and consequences for students in changing assessment styles.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

Useful for considering blended learning environments, particularly the considerations that the use of digital information and communication technologies can be an added source of stress.

- **Swain, M. (2016). "Block Teaching and the Three A's: Attendance, Attainment and Attitudes."** *Innovations in Practice, 10 (1):333-38.* **[online] available at:** https://doi.org/10.24377/LJMU.iip.vol10iss1article57 **[Accessed 31 8 25]**

Swain's article finds that students prefer block when compared with a traditional format they experienced later the same year. There was some correlation with block and improved attendance. He also noted that staff fatigue was a serious issue as well as timetabling.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

Students said this module was the one they enjoyed most, but some of the comments were about it being 'engaging' and 'interesting'. Alongside this, the students were 'taught as one group, which enabled strong relationships to be formed amongst the student cohort' (36). This does beg the question as to whether some of the benefit may have come from the good teaching practices of the instructor and the feeling of camaraderie with fellow students - factors that can be achieved in non-block situations.

- **Tuah, N., & Naing, L. (2021). Is online assessment in higher education institutions during COVID-19 pandemic reliable?** *Siriraj Medical Journal*, **73(1): 61–68. [online] available at:** https://doi.org/10.33192/smj.2021.09 [31 8 25]

The article is specifically looking at the use of online assessment during COVID-19 and outlines a number of methods.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

Useful for thinking about blended learning.

- **University of Suffolk. (2021) .*Block and blend learning and teaching: An evaluation of the University of Suffolk pilot of block and blended approaches to learning and teaching*. [online] available at: [Not yet examined]**

- **Watson, J. (2008). *Blended Learning: The Convergence of Online and Face-to-Face Education. Promising Practices in Online Learning*. Vienna, VA: North American Council for Online Learning   [online] available at: https://oars.uos.ac.uk/2373/1/Block%20and%20blend.pdf   [Accessed 28 8 25]**

This study from the North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) focuses on K-12 education. Examples of promising practices are outlined through case studies from a handful of institutions.

Questions/issues arising from this article:

There are some good examples of tailoring learning to meet the needs of students who require additional support or 1-2-1 tuition, however, this is an intensive load on staff and may not be so easy for HE.

There are some good examples of students being able to work at different paces, but when combined with block, this would be far less effective given the short timeframe in which students will need to complete modules.

No mention is made of any issues arising from the digital divide.

- **Wlodkowski, R. J., & Kasworm, C. E. (2003). *Accelerated learning for adults: the promise and practice of intensive educational formats.* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass [online] available at: https://search.worldcat.org/title/757502749 [Unable to obtain this as yet]**

3 Observations from other institutions that have implemented block teaching

3.1 University A

Consultation and implementation process
Staff at this university experienced almost no consultation. Block was implemented during the pandemic and within the space of four months. Many were unhappy with the process and the results. The system implemented was four week blocks with a 5th week for assessment.

Experience of block for staff
Assessment turnaround has been really stressful with assignments all having to be due on the Friday of the 5th week at 5pm. This meant staff had a highly pressured window of time in which to get feedback to students before the next block began.
UCU members at this university felt that they had workload problems because the delivery of block is much more intense. Staff were supposed to be teaching every other block, but this has not transpired. Staff find that they are still grading from block one while teaching block two, negating some of the supposed benefits of being able to give students quick feedback. They do not feel that their Workload Allocation Models account for all the work needed to deliver block. Staff are less likely to take time off when ill because missing a week from a block equates to a huge chunk of content from a module. They frequently find that extra work is generated when students miss class due to disability or illness and miss larger chunks of the content
While the lowered recruitment cannot be proven to be related to block, this has led to more staff redundancies.
Discussions have been had with staff about whether block is discriminatory. Members of staff cannot have their adjustments met within the block model. The lack of a half term is extremely problematic for people with children or caring responsibilities. The intensive format of block is also not appropriate for part-time staff.

Student and pedagogical issues
Students do not feel that they have time to absorb all the information or explore around the topics in the four week block format and therefore expect everything to be delivered to them in class. There were far too many topics that needed to be delivered in quick succession over three consecutive blocks in a semester.
While retention was up minimally, recruitment declined. It is hard to assess if either of these are directly related to block, but certainly block does not seem to be a magic bullet for retention and recruitment. It is possible that the improved retention was due to shortened days on campus rather than the block format.
It was hard for there to be cross-pollination between the materials in different modules because there were no concurrent modules. This lessened the diffuse learning that students could experience and limited the depth of understanding they could achieve.

With a large number of WP students, they needed to build in a lot of support to each module, which diluted the amount of subject-specific information.

There are issues for students who are disabled, since in-person attendance is frequently less than others. So special arrangements need to be made (and that's more work for lecturers).

Student experiences were examined in a study, however they only used year one students who only had experience of block teaching. As such they did not have a point of comparison.

Block was not felt by many staff members to be appropriate for certain kinds of content, especially subjects that involve more conceptual understanding, critical thinking, diffused learning or current affairs. Students do not have the time to deeply absorb and, therefore, critique key concepts or to relate them to the world around them as they learn.

Block does not really allow for part time students. A block needs to be completed in a full-time entirety. Hence it is discriminatory for part-time students. The lack of half terms is highly problematic for student parents and part-time students.

Moving forward
Having experienced six blocks of five weeks, they are now moving to four 30-credit blocks in 2026-27. The BC at this university think this is a slow move back towards a semesterised version of teaching due to the lack of success with block.

3.2 University B

Experiences of block for staff
Our interviewee described block as "exhausting, disorienting and ableist", noting the exhaustion experienced after delivering a block. It is a problematic system for staff experiencing illness or disability since any time missed from teaching means it is harder to cover or to catch-up.

Staff were supposed to have 'micro-sabbaticals' (one block on, one block off for research time). This has not been achieved. As such, the teaching preparation time and research time is greatly diminished in practice. Staff have also found that it is difficult to deliver research-led teaching or to be creative with their teaching (for example, co-creating modules with students is nearly impossible). Class trips are hard to organise. Staff are constantly scrambling to keep on top of everything.

With such short timeframes, staff are finding that students are very transactional. They want to come to class and have everything handed to them because they do not have the time for reading and reflection.

Recruitment can be challenging because it is hard to persuade parents of the merits of block.

So-called 'enhancement weeks' do not match up with local school half-terms. Staff have been forced to bring their children to work leading to H&S issues.

Our interviewee recommends staff all have at least one block free from teaching. More than one block at a time is not recommended.

Student and pedagogical issues
Block is also ableist for students. Students missing class for even a few days due to disability or illness will miss out on a significant chunk of the module content. Catching up is much harder than for modules run concurrently.

The long days focussing on one module can be very challenging for some students. While the lecturer can adjust the format to try to keep things interesting, the students do not have other modules to break the monotony.

It can be very difficult to create scaffolded assignments in such a short space of time. This diminishes the depth of learning from feedback that can be achieved.

For modules that relate to current affairs or situations, it can be very hard to have adequate preparation time. Similarly there is not enough time for students to absorb material and apply it to real world situations or observations. For example, in a module about current US politics, there is far less time for students to reflect on the teaching and connect it to current affairs. The students may not be aware of what they are missing out on. The pace of delivery of material can be detrimental to diffused learning and deep reflection. By the end of day two, instructors will need to have covered the equivalent of four weeks' material, leaving little time for the kind of reading and reflection that should take place. Staff in subjects that are practical or skills-based find that block can work, even so, it can be challenging to organise placements with the NHS, for example. Accreditation issues can mean block teaching is not possible.

In such short time frames it can be very hard to get the students to read any of the material. As such, the first hour of classes are often given over to reading time.

Since students are not managing several modules at once they are not gaining key transferable skills in multi-tasking and time management.

There is very little time in modules for welcoming and ice-breaking, staff need to leap into teaching right away to cover the material, which also means less space for socialisation. There are also issues of information retention and instructors end up teaching certain key skills over and over again, such as referencing.

Modules involving data collection are almost impossible because you cannot get the time to get ethics approval. Dissertations are also very difficult to schedule and manage (which is further impacted by the students not having obtained time management skills). A lot of optionality has been lost.

Only about 20% of students are submitting on time. Because things are moving so fast, it is easy for students to slip off the radar. Strong student support is required.

3.3 University C

The third university with whom we spoke had a very different experience. However, although more positive, there are some notable takeaways. This university spent a long time researching and preparing for the transition to block, which they implemented in 2014. Unlike some of the other institutions investigated, they have not limited their teaching to just two days, instead offering an intensive experience where students are on campus most days and even eat with staff. The offer four-week blocks, in which contact time was set for each block. Lecturers teach three blocks in a year, but never two in a row. The experience was very much focussed around creating a learning community. Parents liked it because it offered more contact hours. Levels 5 and 6 were taught together to increase choice but reduce blocks. Students have one day of self-directed learning and 'Wellbeing Wednesdays'.

They were careful to 'stress test' different disciplines and listened to what lecturers told them. For example, in English Literature, two block could be put together to allow adequate time for reading and absorption. They also had the option of 'long and thing' vs. 'short and fat' blocks.
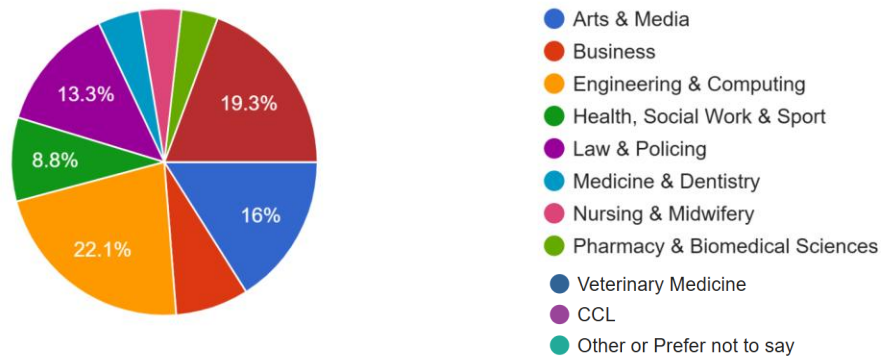
If one of our aims is to address student poverty, then this kind of format would not work as it would not leave students with the opportunity for employment or taking care of their families.

4 Consultation over block at the University of Lancashire: a survey of staff experiences so far

4.1 Which school/service are you in?

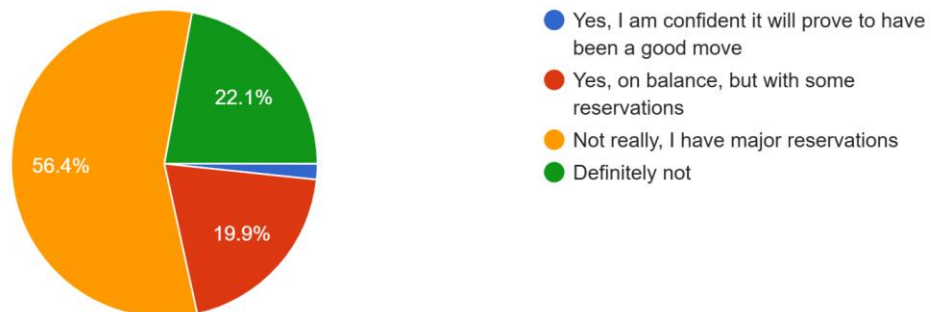Which school/service are you in?
181 responses

- Arts & Media
- Business
- Engineering & Computing
- Health, Social Work & Sport
- Law & Policing
- Medicine & Dentistry
- Nursing & Midwifery
- Pharmacy & Biomedical Sciences
- Veterinary Medicine
- CCL
- Other or Prefer not to say

4.2 In your opinion, is UCLan's move to block delivery a good idea in general?

In your opinion, is UCLan's move to block delivery a good idea in general?
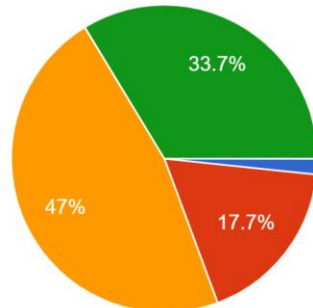181 responses

- Yes, I am confident it will prove to have been a good move
- Yes, on balance, but with some reservations
- Not really, I have major reservations
- Definitely not

4.3 In your opinion, is a move to block delivery a good idea for your particular course(s)?

In your opinion, is a move to block delivery a good idea for your particular course(s)?
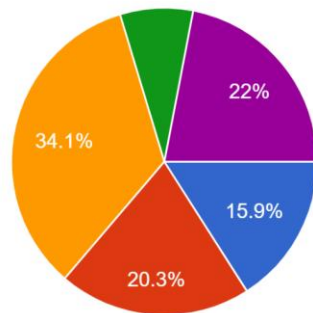181 responses

- Yes, I am confident it will prove to have been a good move
- Yes, on balance, but with some reservations
- Not really, I have major reservations
- Definitely not

4.4 What has happened in your school so far?

What has happened in your school so far?
182 responses

- Courses I am involved in have been through sprints
- Courses in my school have been through sprints, but not yet those I am personally involved in
- My school has started pre-sprint planning
- My school has done nothing yet
- I don't know whether anything has happened in my school so far

4.5 The sprint process & outcomes

4.5.1 What is your role in the courses that have been through sprints already? (select all that apply)

What is your role in the courses that have been through sprints already? (select all that apply)

29 responses
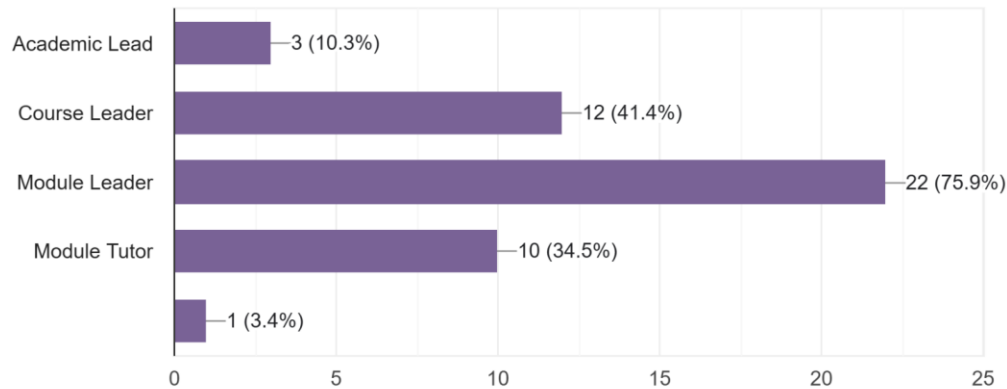
4.5.2 Did you feel properly prepared for the sprint process (eg through attending university events, staff meetings, drop-ins etc)?

Did you feel properly prepared for the sprint process (eg through attending university events, staff meetings, drop-ins etc)?

29 responses

4.5.3 What involvement did you have in the sprint(s) for your course(s)?

What involvement did you have in the sprint(s) for your course(s)?
28 responses

- ● I attended the whole thing
- ● I was able to attend the parts I wanted to
- ● I was able to attend some of it, but wanted to attend more and couldn't
- ● I wanted to attend but could not
- ● I was happy not to attend
- ● I was not informed/invited to the sprint
- ● Staff were required to attend the parts…
- ● I was asked to attend part of the sprint…
- ● I had a several individual meeting with…

4.5.4 Did you feel that the sprint process gave you a reasonable chance to have an influence on the design of the new course(s)?

Did you feel that the sprint process gave you a reasonable chance to have an influence on the design of the new course(s)?
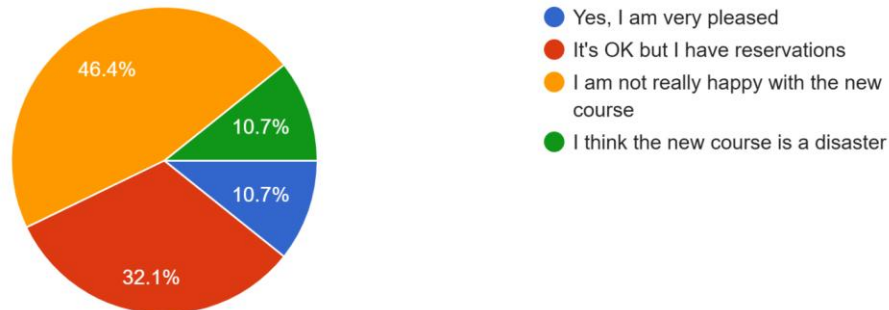29 responses

- ● Yes, definitely
- ● Yes, a bit
- ● No, not much
- ● No, not at all
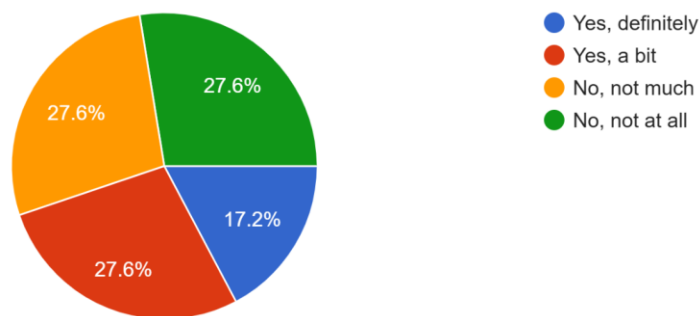
4.5.5 Are you happy with the way the new course(s) turned out?

Are you happy with the way the new course(s) turned out?
28 responses

- Yes, I am very pleased
- It's OK but I have reservations
- I am not really happy with the new course
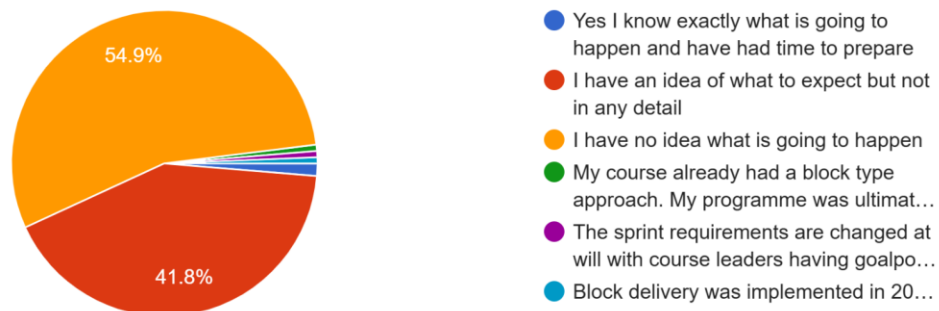- I think the new course is a disaster

46.4%
10.7%
10.7%
32.1%

4.6 Pre-sprint planning
4.6.1 Do you feel properly prepared for the sprint process when it starts (eg through attending university events, staff meetings, drop-ins etc)?

Do you feel properly prepared for the sprint process when it starts (eg through attending university events, staff meetings, drop-ins etc)?
153 responses

- Yes I know exactly what is going to happen and have had time to prepare
- I have an idea of what to expect but not in any detail
- I have no idea what is going to happen
- My course already had a block type approach. My programme was ultimat…
- The sprint requirements are changed at will with course leaders having goalpo…
- Block delivery was implemented in 20…

54.9%
41.8%
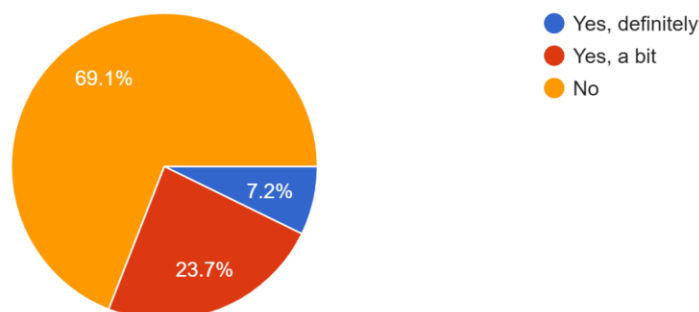
4.6.2 Do you feel confident that the sprint process will give you a reasonable opportunity to influence the new course/module structures?

Do you feel confident that the sprint process will give you a reasonable opportunity to influence the new course/module structures?

152 responses

● Yes, definitely
● Yes, a bit
● No

69.1%

7.2%

23.7%

4.7 Please add any comments you would be willing for the Branch Committee to quote, anonymously, in discussions with senior management

- There is no consideration to the different types of courses and how they are already running and how a change to block would negatively impact on them. I don't believe students have also been adequately briefed on what a change would mean for them in terms of choice, variety of modules, etc... There is also no real consideration to how students who have mitigating circumstances (carer/long term illness/etc..) would be impacted - if they miss a few days of classes, that is a lot more to catch up on. There is no clarity on how resits/reworks will work - are students supposed to carry all those over to the next block? How will that be looked at come Boards? Is the Board process changing? No information at all about these have been shared with us, perhaps because the answers are not known, in which case it seems silly to force us all into block before these are road tested.
  Furthermore, the timing of it alongside the mass redundancies is also unsettling - if we are reducing modules the cynic in me sees this as a clever way to reduce the number of staff..."
- This has no pedagogic value - it is simply a reduction in modules and therefore staff to lead those modules. The notion that it will give students a clear idea when they can undertake paid work is ridiculous as students have always had this clarity because we have these things called timetables.
- Block delivery appears to be an attempt to maximise staff utilisation in preparation for more voluntary or compulsory redundancies. The impact is likely to be an increase in staff burnout and a reduction in opportunities for research and professional development. All outcomes are likely to have a negative affect upon the experience of both students and academic staff.

- Senior management may be under the illusion they have provided a timeline, but this information has not successfully been passed down the ranks. In particular, in the most recent course team meeting (held in May 2025), it was not known whether the school would move to block delivery in 2026 or later.
- There were no consultation about block delivery in our school. We were told when the pre-sprint and sprint events would be and told to block our calendar.
- "This is the question that I asked the University of the Future and have had no reply "I am writing to seek clarification on UCLan's transition to block delivery, particularly regarding its potential impact on research activity. Having recently just a periodic course review in Sport, I have observed a significant decline in our unit's number of research outputs. Alongside Prof. Sarah Hobbs, I serve as the Unit of Assessment Lead for UOA 24, and in the year prior to the 2-year PCR process (for new programmes rolling in for September 2025), we had 60 outputs that were reviewed as part of the ARA process. In the first year of the PCR, this dropped to 40, and in the following and most recent year, to 30. This suggests that the course review process has had a negative effect on research productivity, particularly in a research-active yet teaching heavy unit like UOA 24. In UOA 24 we have only 2 staff on research only contracts, every other member with SRfR status is teaching focussed whilst being given 0.2 FTE for research.

  UCLan is basing its decision to move to block delivery on De Montfort University's 'On The Block' model and whilst I don't deny that block teaching presents some clear benefits, I recently attended the Times Higher Education Digital Universities UK event, which really raised concerns about research continuity under this model particularly for UOA 24 given that we have just been through PCR and will be required to now undertake the administrative burden of revising our programmes again, will be running three versions of our programmes in 2026 (i.e. year 1 block, year 2 what we've just gone through PCR for 2025 start and year 3 current existing version of our programmes) as well as the continuing effects of actually delivering teaching in blocks as described below.
  In particular, Professor Susan Orr, De Montfort's PVC for Education and Equalities, acknowledged that "balancing block teaching with research remains an unresolved issue and that the long proposed solution i.e. offering staff 'micro-sabbaticals' (a whole block off for research) has rarely been implemented in practice and may not align with the needs of many research-active staff".
  I have enclosed a link to the article below for your info:
  https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/students-embrace-block-teaching-some-staff-still-unconvinced
  I would appreciate any insights you can provide on this matter "as the next few years will be those likely to be most formative for REF 2029."
- I'd like to see / have a meaningful discussion on the benefits and risks of block. A more transparent review of how we might integrate it into our course.
- It's a bat crazy, dog shit idea that will right royaliy fuck up several course
- I have spoken with many of my colleagues and they feel that the timing of the block delivery model cannot be completely coincidental to the growing financial demands of

the university. It's therefore a common view that this is being done NOT for any pedagogic reason or even as a myopic and naive attempt to generate income, but is about further running down existing courses and reducing staff numbers. There has been a lot of fear and uncertainty, as well as stress and anxiety caused by the timing of this.

- The idea that block teaching is magically appropriate for all courses at all levels is for the birds. Imposition in a non-consultative way, regardless of any context and whether the nature of the subject matter, course ethos, or student needs and what would best suit them is very poor practice to put it mildly. This has been presented as a fait accompli,. and in spite of much evidence from the negative experience of block teaching at other universities. What problem/s do its proponents contend it is the solution to, and on what evidential basis?

- The messaging around this has been awful. The unspoken assumption is that the current courses are poor and that the people who teach them can't be trusted to devise ways to solve problems with them. Both of these assumptions are wrong, course teams spend a lot of time in continuous course improvement making sure that courses are the best possible learning experience for students. How is a major upheaval like this going to benefit a course like mine which has consistently had NSS scores in the high 90s? If the answer to this is that this is not true of all courses then that is not an argument for a one size fits all solution like this but rather some learning from successful courses and applying of those lessons.

- Block delivery is a decision where staff seems to have no involvement, it is simply imposed. It is unclear which problem block delivery is addressing and/or any justification/arguments on why this is a solution to the problem. It is action without thought aiming to create the impression of dealing with issues and conceal incompetence.

- There has been no consultation whatsoever. I can't see how students can gain any in-depth learning and knowledge in 7 week blocks.

- "It is concerning that block teaching is being rolled out across the University without trialling this approach for a full cohort initially to see how it works.

- I'm concerned that Block teaching will put off students from applying to the university, particularly the courses that compete with Russell group universities where traditional teaching approaches are used and will negatively impact on recruitment.

- The time to revise the curriculum hasn't been work loaded. We're expected to do a huge amount of work to create block programmes without being given any additional hours in which to do this.

- Block teaching isn't optimal for students pedagogically and does not allow them to develop skills and knowledge by making cross comparisons between modules.

- Creative practice requires regular personal reflection for students. With only 7 week blocks students will miss out on the opportunity of in depth reflection before undertaking the next block. It seems also that there will be no pr-requisite blocks... this will make development of practice in terms of both skills, theory & research, which should underpin practice.

- This will have a disastrous impact on our students, and consequently on the university. Forcing students to learn one or two topics in a short time-frame does not give them sufficient time to absorb, reflect, and understand the material. Students will assimilate very little of the taught material in the long term, becoming purely an exercise in passing exams.
- This model does not meet the needs of PG students' accessing M level study at the University of Central Lancashire. How will you preserve and protect progression opportunities for graduates not least given the volume of professional (PSRB) courses are offered at this institution?
- Computing has one of the worst staff student ratios in the university. Currently, it would take 1/3 of our teaching staff to cover one first year block. We do not have enough staff to feasibly making it work. A minimum viable staff student ratio must be identified. Additionally, the practical nature of our subject (specifically programming) requires a long time for students to establish an appropriate understanding, which would not be possible in a 6 week. Including elements of programming in multiple blocks would be difficult given the multiple reassessment points. There is a serious concern of cascade failure causing serious harm to students progression.
- The initiative reeks of desperation in an institution that adopts a top-down approach to everything which filters down to the level of recruitment. Block could well be an absolute disaster. But they won't take responsibility, they will blame hard-working teaching staff.
- This has been presented as very much a 'done deal'. No real specific consultation or conversations about the impact on our particular course. When we have instigated any discussion and expressed any concerns, such as the reduction in contact hours, it has been met with verbal responses suggesting we need not worry as the suggested hours are "only notional" and that we would be able to deliver extra teaching at other times outside the 2.5 days per week, however those sessions would not be on the official timetable.
- Block teaching is a solution in search of a problem. It lacks any plausible pedagogical rationale and it has been forced on staff irrespective of their views. It is been driven entirely by the management and its lackeys. In two decades of teaching I have never heard any student express any reservations about the current teaching model, or suggest that block teaching of one kind or another would be desirable and beneficial.
- Seemed to be mostly lead by AQU rather than school staff.
- Very little is being said about block teaching. Nothing by way of consultation. The general feeling (reading the front page of the UCLan website) is that this is a fait accomplis and we will just have to like it or lump it. Nothing new there then.
- Shouldn't we be changing the students rather than always blaming the team, course or assessments. We consistently talk about world class teaching but then just make things easier and easier for students to pass no matter what they do. We underestimate their ability to grow and learn. 30 credit blocks is very unlikely to improve much because students will not attend.
- I am very concerned about year-long BSc(Hons) projects which are essential for our accredited courses. Shortening projects when the number of teaching weeks changed

from 24 to 21 was already a big stretch, both students and staff supervising were not happy with that. Any further shortening is simply not feasible.

- I think this is an excellent opportunity to spruce up our courses, and do things differently. We can't continue "as is" - because the job losses demonstrate that it isn't working.
- Block and project-led can work for non-science courses but will just cause stress and chaos elsewhere. Worse, part-time and day-release students (and similar staff) seem to have been thrown under the bus.
- I have major reservations as to how much time there is for consolidation of learning. Students and staff will feel they are rushing through the module/content with minimal time to process it. This I fear will have to total opposite to the university's plan of improving recruitment and retention.
- Course Teams have not been consulted if they do or do not want to engage with block teaching. What about students, do they know the difference between the two teaching and learning styles, have they been consulted - And - I mean current students who can make a comparison, not new recruits who won't know the difference.

- Are the workload hours allocation going to (adjusted) realistically to reflect the preparation and marking / turnaround timeframes with this proposed new model design? How are staff able to accommodate those learners that miss sessions or submit MCs - how are they going to be supported to "catch up?"
- As we needed to seek an exception for a variation to the block approach. this tells you management were not approaching matters in an open fashion
- Senior management are supposed to part of an extended team, yet they appear not to be team players, nor have any practical experience or empathy on teaching delivery, nor are financially competent, nor can perform their allocated duties in a timely manner. They are the living embodiment of the Peter Principle, and unfortunately they are on our payroll.
- A quote from CCL staff members when briefing senior management school staff was 'academic staff must come to a sprint with a positive attitude. There's no point turning up saying that 30 cr modules don't work for us / our course!!' When questioned, no explanation was given over what to do if 30 cr modules really don't work for your course. Also, engineers need maths delivered first of all in the first year, as it underpins all other knowledge. Do that for 7 weeks straight off and you will 'destroy' the students before you have even started. Management attitudes to variations / exemptions must change and be more positive, open and encouraging. If they are not careful they will very quickly destroy courses, that have taken 10 years plus of development to get right. In so doing, the university will lose large amounts of income subsequently threatening staff livelihoods even more.

Finally, just because it works for Google, doesn't mean it works for every other course going."

- I have grave concerns about the pedagogy. Our current structure has taken years to develop and enables wider participation. These new fangled ideas tend not to last. Also, some courses have been designed by those in favour and not necessarily those with appropriate expertise.
- Being told we have to change all courses to fit this ridiculous idea! No care for delivery of material and success we already have. It will not work for over 100 students per year with maximum of 24 students bake to undertake practical classes. It will mean as a course we have to deliver the block four times.
- our 'sprint' is scheduled in semester 1 which is one of the busiest teaching and assessment times of the year, so it is completely inappropriate timing and will add undue stress to front-line staff, which has knock-on impacts on the student experience
- As far as i can discern there is little to no credible pedagogic reason for block teaching and it is largely an attempt to appeal to students and generate new money making streams. I feel this will results in students learning even less during their time at University and not developing key skills that employers desire, such as the ability to manage and balance multiple tasks.

  In our School the block teaching sprints has also resulted in all modules/blocks moving towards coursework like assessments, the removal of exams and the reduction from multiple assessments per module/block to one per module/block. This is especially concerning as it seems to be a move towards assessment easily generated by AI and away from AI-proof assessment.
- Some module completely depend on semester, or year-long learning. Eg Networking, Field work. They also rely on intersecting with industry schedules that cant be arranged around 6 week blocks (or less).
- We are some way down the road to Block but we have not had any consultation. Only meetings in which we have only been told its happening."
- After recent redundancies, staffing levels have never been so low. 3 Semesters will destroy staff morale and wellbeing. We have had no pay increases of any note for years. An Aldi store manager gets paid the same as a SL now, and you want even more from us?
  A world class institution needs world class teaching staff - UCLan won't be or have either (and it doesn't take a PhD to work that one out, or to be an Aldi Store Manager!) "
- How will the extra contact hours be met with already slimmed teams due to redundancies? My understanding is the contact hours for 30 credits will increase to either 60 or 90? It is quite vague.
- I felt the sprint process provided very little time for considering the structure of new courses, but understood that this was to be part of the sprint process. This, in my opinion, has led to courses with ill fitting modules that have not been properly thought through.
- Staff need a choice about this system and to be listened to. I feel bulldozed.

- I feel that while block teaching may be a practical way forward for some courses, it is unwise to pressurise all courses into following this. Knowledge and skills are developed over time and block teaching could lead to intense periods of learning one or two modules and this might be over-whelming, difficult for students with particular needs and also counter productive for learning practical skills and language skills.
It is also not clear to what extent students have actually been consulted about their preferences and if so, if the potential challenges of block teaching have been clearly put forward.
Staff and students may find the intensity under-pinning block teaching difficult to manage at times and this again may be especially challenging to people with particular learning needs / disabilities.
Assessments will also need careful planning to ensure that adequate time is given for content to be delivered and consolidated before students are assessed
- I think the sprint model was excellently done and in the business school course leaders were well prepared, with briefings, support and bitesize CPD to support course design. I asked for a reduced workload during the period leading up to the sprint and this was given. however, I was given a course team who did not receive the same support or workload allocation to support me; so this was challenging. I have some reservations about the amount of courses developed and wonder if one or 2 courses (with optional modules) would be better. However, this does not detract from the overall experience of the sprint which was an efficient and effective way to design a course, as well as enjoyable, collaborative and supportive.
- With practical base courses such as many in the Art & Media School require making time on top of delivery time this would take more the time than the 7 weeks of a block structure. This would be a major problem on learning and out comes.
- For one course I am involved in, I am reasonably happy with the new course and was able to attend most of the sprint. But for all the other courses I am involved in, I was only able to go to a tiny bit of the sprint. I don't really know whether I am happy with the resulting courses as I don't really know what they will look like as I wasn't involved (due to other commitments on the same week and not being invited to a lot of the sprint).
- School managers have verged on bullying behaviour in avoiding clear answers to concerns raised by staff. It feels like there's a divide and conquer approach in dealing with individual course teams
- This seems to be an ultimatum. There may well be a good rationale for block delivery in some courses, but having had no discussion and absolutely no consultation I don't know what the rationale or plan is. I feel that University management promotes an image of being open in communication and committed to consultation, but often dispenses with consultation when a strategy has been decided upon at senior management level. I honestly don't feel that this University supports an environment of authentic consultation.
- Humanities were forced to all come up with arguments for why Block teaching wouldn't work for our courses. But were told categorically that we could not include any research or opinions about whether Block delivery worked or not (we found only one course in Uk that used Block teaching for our subject and even they had one year long module per academic year!). We were also told that even, if we were exempt from Block Teaching

one followed by another module, we would have to move to 30 credit modules - two followed by two etc. anyway. There was no option about that. We have now been told that we can have the 30 credits, 2 followed by 2 etc. but only after spending ages sending papers to Ed about why one one block at a time would make no sense for live projects, creativity etc. We also found it deeply problematic that we were sending info to Ed for him to persuade Andrew Ireland and Janice Allen when Ed is management. That said, he did put our case forward and we did get the exemption.

- It would be helpful for all staff to have a proper understanding of the SPRINT process before the process occurs.
- I work on a course with big numbers and lots of practical classes. I have no idea how we will fit the practical elements in and they are crucial to the teaching. I feel we have no choice but to make it work. It will be detrimental to a lot of our students who are not as academic and more practical minded. People are drawn to this course for the hands on elements. I do not think our numbers will maintain.
- It would have been nice to have been consulted in WHETHER to move to block teaching overall, rather than the consultations about HOW we are going to do it. It is a fait acommpli and we have to get on board. If we don't we will be left behind. If a whole team is not behind it 100% it makes design and delivery of a new course nigh on impossible.
- Block delivery is pointless for Engineering where all courses are already set-up for part-time delivery.
- Attendance for those students or staff with children or are carers or who are disabled or even poor attenders can be managed via year-long modules whereas block delivery is likely to fail them. How will disabled staff deliver 3 full days of teaching for 6 weeks? Staff are specialists and not easily duplicated within Engineering so how will this and staff illness be managed?
- Many Engineering students are marginal entering at 80 points: are these 80-pointers likely to keep on top of, or catch-up with block delivery? They could view some modules as boring (engineering analysis) so will their drop-out rate increase when delivery is no longer improved with more interesting subject areas? And what about the loss of co-learning than is invaluable in developing engineering judgement?
Focusing on a single module at a time fails to prepare students for work where the norm is to work across multiple projects or aspects at the same time. Very few Engineering students are mature - the point is that the average profile within Engineering is a younger full-time student who doesn't need hop-on/ hop-off and Engineering already has a compressed timetable that is delivered on a part-time basis.
Engineering switched back to 20 credit modules at the last course review (that has yet to be fully rolled out) because 30 credits are not permitted to be compensated by the Engineering Council.
Finally, this is an impossible sell at Open Days and Offer Holder Days as this is not the best way to learn for our students.
- Is this proposal likely to reduce staff hours? How will it affect part-time staff (eg on 0.5 contracts)? I have certain medical issues, and would find working five full days a week exhausting and detrimental to my health & wellbeing.

- The discussions seem to be going on at a higher level with only selected people invited to participate. I am not aware of any particular forum where staff in general could input into the process, and we have certainly not been asked whether it is a "good idea" for our subject. I get the feeling that if staff don't get on board then they are basically saying they want their course to be closed...
- Another management decision being enforced with no consideration of staff opinion, appropriateness, external regulatory body requirements or impact on course quality.
- If the problem that block is solving is about a stable timetable for students that can be achieved with much less fuss, time and energy. Our own course has a stable timetable with students in the same 3 days each week. All it takes is for academic staff to engage more with timetabling and plan ahead.
  The problem is not really with block, its with the retractions of 30 credit modules, which makes no sense. I know the governments life long learning is linked to 30 credits, but it explicitly says modules can be lots of different sizes. No one in work is going to sign up for a 30 credit module and be able to take 3 days out of work for 6 weeks. That's not how in work learning works.
  If block goes wrong I hope Andrew Ireland (who by the way has never taught in block) losses his job rather than the hard working academic staff who have to implement this madness!
- The main issue here is the manner in which this change has been imposed by the university. A one-size-fits-all approach is not suitable for some subject areas and the ways in which they are being taught. Many programmes are not actually broken, so why are we being forced to fix them? Wouldn't it have been more beneficial to offer block as a potential delivery alternative method to courses that have been struggling with recruitment, retention and attainment, rather than this blanket, top-down imposition across all courses.
- every one I talk to is against the idea!!! who is pro ? why is it going ahead ?
- This seems just another move to further reduce and casualise staff.
- I believe long distance bin modules would have been fine, I think 6 week blocks are a recipe for disastrous student attainment problems, widening access and student engagement
- We are being forced down a route that is totally and utterly wrong for our discipline and management aren't even pretending to listen. Management have no idea about what our applicants want and what we deliver. There is no doubt in our team's mind that this will be a disaster. Don't come crying to us when we have no applicants.
- Very poor project management makes the situation worse. Sprint is stressful when the promised human resources involved do not materialise.
- The various 'curriculum transformation' type school meetings were all without any direct mention of how and why. Just the mechanics of it interspersed with some daycare type activities. Details of how specialism in a discipline stays guaranteed, industry practice with parallel processes being addressed, lecturers workload allocations, and most of all curriculum design by the delivery teams are all completely missing.

- It is disgraceful how staff are being bullied into adopting block teaching. There is little or no evidence that it will benefit students, and in 25 years of teaching I have never heard any student express a desire for anything like it.
- For courses in my area they are already taught in a form of block, as in weekly intense sessions, or are already taught across 2 days per week per year group. Both delivery types meet many of the criteria required for block teaching, why do we have to change when our results and retention statistics are very good?
  Are senior positions being reduced and a recruitment freeze also being applied to posts at AD or above, or are they exempt from the cost cutting process?"
- In my Faculty, School, or at Department level there has been no discussion or consultation regarding Block teaching. I do not know what this means, and how this impacts, or how this may happen, or the timescale involved. Who is going to do this, who is going to coordinate this, who is going to offer support, and with depleted staff numbers and the summer vacation period and with imminently returning/ arriving students how this can happen? Will any changes only affect new students, or will this be rolled out for progressing students, will this require Institution approval and indeed the approval from Regulatory Bodies on Professionally accredited Courses?
- It is clear that in not addressing these issues that 'Management' are not managing their duties, not being effective in communication and consultation, not being pragmatic or logistical in facilitating change, nor considering the Health and Wellbeing of Staff. We all deserve to be served better."

5 Other articles focussing on the implications of block

Quadir, B., Zhang, X. and Shen, J. (2025) 'Factors Affecting Learning in Block Mode Teaching: Challenges and Recommendations: Factors Affecting Learning in Block Mode', *The Asia-Pacific education researcher*, 34(3), pp. 989–1000. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-024-00913-7.

Rocha, M. do N. *et al.* (2025) 'Investigating block teaching at Hasselt University: benefits and challenges for disadvantaged students', *Journal of further and higher education*, 49(6), pp. 735–748. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2025.2492177.

Sewagegn, A.A. and Diale, B.M. (2021) 'Modular/Block teaching: practices and challenges at higher education institutions of Ethiopia', *Teaching in higher education*, 26(6), pp. 776–789. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2019.1681391.

Thomas, M. B., Muscat, A., Zuccolo, A., Nascimento Luguetti, C., & Watt, A. (2024). Academic voices delivering intensive teaching in higher education: 'What is really key' for block model delivery? *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 62(3), 1017–1031. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2024.2366407