



## SURVEY REPORT:

### Proposed Changes to SWOT VAC

The following report contains results from the survey undertaken by the University of Queensland Union regarding proposed changes to SWOT VAC. The survey was released on Thursday 09/04/2015 and closed at 12pm Tuesday 14/04/2015. It was conducted via a Google Form, a Google Drive feature which allows for the creation of online survey forms. UQ Union advertised this survey via its newsletter, Facebook page and through various UQ student Facebook groups. The results in this report consist of both quantitative data and a condensed version of the qualitative data collected. As not all questions were mandatory there is a variation in total responses.

## The Survey

The text and questions of the survey were as follows:

*The University of Queensland is proposing changes to the way that the revision period (SWOT VAC) and exams are run. The UQ Union wants to give feedback on these changes but first we want to know what you think so that we can represent what students really want.*

*What are the changes they're proposing?*

*Currently, the revision period runs for five days (Monday to Friday after the last week of classes each semester). Exams run over a two-week period, beginning on the Saturday directly following the last day of the revision period and ending on the Saturday two weeks later.*

*UQ is proposing to shorten the revision period to three days (Monday until Wednesday) and extend the exam period to begin on the Thursday of that week. They aim to have no Saturday exams but cannot guarantee this yet. UQ has advised that they cannot add these days to the end of the examination period due to time constraints of marking. With Saturdays off, students have the same number of study days overall.*

*The Pros for the proposed changes:*

- *UQ has received negative feedback from students about exams on Saturdays due to public transport options, work, sport and community commitments.*
- *A similar change was made in Semester 2, 2014, to accommodate for the G20 Leaders Summit, and UQ had no student complaints lodged.*

*The cons of the proposed changes:*

- *Students will have two days less to study during the revision period.*
- *There's no guarantee that Saturday exams will not occur.*

*Now that we've caught you up to speed on the changes and what they might mean for you, please fill out our survey so we can represent your needs to the University.*

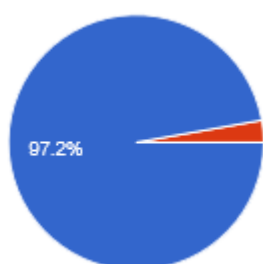
*The survey will be open from Thursday 09/04/2015 until 12pm Tuesday 14/04/2015. The results will be collated and presented to the University of Queensland through relevant channels including at the Committee for Academic Programs Policy.*

## Written Responses

Space was provided for written feedback on the proposed changes. Respondents' responses have been collated, from which the main themes have been identified. These comments have also been analysed in reference to major statistical trends in the survey findings and have helped in the analysis of reasoning behind responses to other questions. For this reason, these comments have been referenced throughout this report to shed light upon quantitative findings.

## Demographics of Respondents

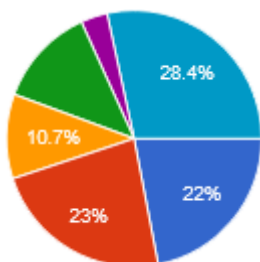
Are you a current UQ student?



Yes	5686	97.2%
No	163	2.8%

The survey received 5884 responses, of which only 163 were not from current students.

What is your faculty?

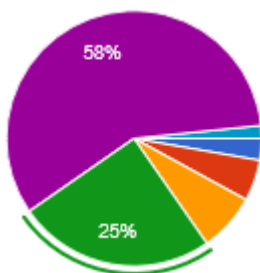


BEL	1262	22%
EAIT	1318	23%
HABS	612	10.7%
HASS	725	12.6%
MABS	194	3.4%
Science	1631	28.4%

There was a reasonably proportionate spread of responses from each faculty, taking into consideration the student population of each faculty.

## Multiple Choice Question Responses

How do you feel about UQ's proposed change?

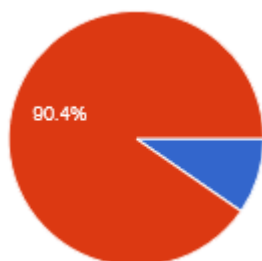


<b>Strongly For</b>	162	2.8%
<b>For</b>	307	5.2%
<b>Indifferent</b>	434	7.4%
<b>Against</b>	1470	25%
<b>Strongly Against</b>	3415	58%
<b>Other</b>	96	1.6%

Overall, survey respondents were not in favour of the proposed changes with 8% of students being in favour and 83% against them. Some students identified the value in starting exams earlier in order to have them more spread out across a longer period of time and many recognised that removing or reducing Saturday exams could be beneficial.

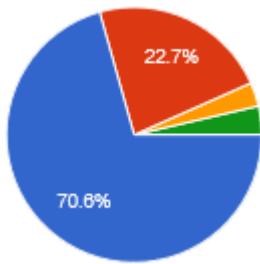
From the written responses, a majority of students prefer the inconvenience of Saturday exams as opposed to losing two week-days of SWOTVAC. EAIT students were particularly vocal in their opposition throughout written responses. It was suggested that the lack of complaints against the system designed around the G20 event was reflective of the fact that students understood the changes were due to a one-off special event. One notable written response suggested analysis of the exam model from the UK where there is one week of revision, a three week exam block and no weekend exams. They further suggested that 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year exams could be held in week 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> year exams could be held in week 2 and 1<sup>st</sup> year exams in the final week.

Which do you Prefer?



<b>A three-day revision period in SWOT VAC and a strong likelihood of no Saturday exams</b>	567	9.6%
<b>A five-day revision period in SWOT VAC and Saturday exams</b>	5317	90.4%

**If SWOT VAC were reduced to three days, what would your major concerns be?**



<b>Not enough time to revise before exams begin</b>	4155	70.6%
<b>Not enough time to learn new material added towards the end of semester</b>	1336	22.7%
<b>None</b>	177	3%
<b>Other</b>	214	3.6%

In their written responses, some students raised that preparation for exams should occur throughout the semester and a full week of revision time is an un-necessary luxury which does not exist in the working world. Others in favour of the changes raised that as the spread of exams will be longer, revision could take place more evenly across the three weeks. However, although students would obviously have Saturdays to study instead of the Thursday and Friday, most students identified the value in having a full week of revision prior to the commencement of exams.

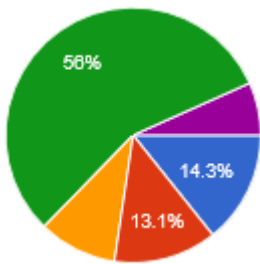
**70.6% of students raised that their major concern with the change, was not having enough time to revise prior to the commencement of exams.** When this concern was addressed through the written responses, it was largely in reference to:

- The time required to fully revise material learned at the end of semester before any exams begin. This was also highlighted with particular reference to exchange students who are often facing quite a lot of stress associated with their program such as studying in a second language.
- The importance of being able to complete end of semester assignments and take-home exams (due before SWOT VAC) as well as having time to fully prepare for the examination period.
- The disadvantage to individual students and particular faculties who have exams scheduled on the first day.

**Written responses often also highlighted the importance of the five revision days occurring in a row and on weekdays. The importance of the five weekday SWOT VAC was often in reference to:**

- Lab time and prac equipment access, which is less accessible once exams commence.
- Access to course co-ordinators, lecturers, tutors and student discussion groups.
- The fact that a full week where no assignments are due and no exams are held ultimately allows for more effective academic preparation and mental wellbeing.

### What are your major concerns about Saturday exams?



Public transport can't get you to or from Saturday exams	829	14.3%
You regularly work on Saturdays	760	13.1%
You have musical/ sporting/ cultural/ religious/ family/ etc commitments on Saturdays	578	9.9%
I have no concerns	3255	56.0%
Other	389	6.7%

**44% of respondents raised concerns with Saturday exams. 14.3% of students indicated that transport was their biggest concern and 13.1% indicated that work commitments and associated loss of income were more of a problem for them.** Other often cited concerns included the difficulty for students with particular faiths and managing weekend sporting commitments. In their written responses some students noted the benefit of extra 'breathing room' during the exam period if Saturday exams were to be discontinued.

**While the concerns in regards to Saturday exams are significant 56% of respondents had no concerns.** Written responses often outlined that:

- Saturday exams benefit most full-time workers.
- Logistical concerns with work and transport should be manageable as the examination time table is released a month ahead of time.
- The loss of income from for the occasional Saturday exam should not be too financially damaging.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that students are overwhelmingly in favour of retaining the current SWOT VAC and exam time allocations and, over all, do not support the proposed changes.

It was noted by many students that UQ received no complaints about the SWOT VAC changes that occurred as a result of the G20 summit because it was thought that that was an isolated event and students were aware that the University had to make those changes due to external forces. Many students reported that they took their concerns to their respective school or faculty and were dissuaded from escalating those complaints by people within the school or faculty.

A majority of students reported that they had no concerns about Saturday exams. This could indicate that student concerns about Saturday exams are perceived disproportionately, i.e. that they are thought to be a greater issue than they actually are. There is an indication that students would appreciate measures taken to address common issues with Saturday exams but not at the cost of the Thursday and Friday currently dedicated to SWOT VAC which are seen as highly valuable for a variety of reasons.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendation arising from this report is, primarily, to retain a five sequential weekday SWOT VAC.

The University has outlined that removing Saturday exams and allowing for two more weekdays after the last Friday in the examination period is not feasible for logistical reasons. As such, the Union, and many written responses, suggest discussion with Translink regarding the possibility of better weekend public transport during Saturday examination days or starting Saturday exams a little later in the morning. Such discussions may help to offset one of the bigger concerns of students in relation to Saturday exams, being transport.