

Intensive Schools Guidelines for Unit Coordinators

Section 1 - Introduction

(1) These guidelines provide advice to Unit Coordinators in planning, organising and running intensive schools. These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the [Intensive Schools Policy](#).

Section 2 - Guidelines

(2) An intensive school is a mode of teaching and learning that brings students together at a particular location for a period of intensive interactive learning experiences. The location of an intensive school can be a physical location or an online location or a combination of both.

Types of Intensive Schools

(3) Mandatory intensive schools must be attended because they provide learning outcomes that cannot be achieved in any other way. Schools may be required by accrediting bodies or be supervised field trips and/or require use of facilities at a particular location. Mandatory Intensive Schools may not be conducted outside of Australia.

(4) Non-mandatory intensive schools may be held where alternative ways of attaining the desired learning outcomes are available but an intensive school may be a more attractive way of attaining defined learning outcomes than the alternatives. However, an alternative way of attaining learning outcomes for non-attendees is required.

Benefit and Cost Factors

Student benefits

(5) Student benefits include:

- a. Intensive schools provide students with the opportunity to complete key assessment tasks in a highly focussed and supportive environment.
- b. Face-to-face interaction with peers and lecturers/tutors is central to the philosophies and practices of particular discipline areas, courses and units.
- c. Students can ask live questions and have them discussed on the spot by the lecturer and the group: 'instant feedback' should increase confidence and enhance learning outcomes.
- d. Study difficulties are often easier to surmount in groups when participants find that they are not alone in their problems.
- e. Students attending intensive schools feel they are 'real' students attending a real university, rather than isolated individuals short on support.
- f. Intensives schools can create of a sense of student ownership and connection with the University.
- g. Both formal and informal interaction at the intensive school should validate a student's decision to study the particular unit or course because they get to meet other people who have made the same decision.
- h. Intensives offer a chance to develop on-going social networks with other students. The shared intense

experiences 'bond' those present.

- i. In a good intensive school, students get to feel (re)energised about the rest of the unit and possibly their course as a whole.
- j. Students get to feel more confident about fulfilling unit requirements.
- k. Where students have the opportunity to attend a linked series of Intensive Schools, benefits should compound and costs should reduce.
- l. Several days of an Intensive School may be a more efficient use of time for many students.

Student costs

(6) The potential costs to students should be carefully borne in mind when planning a course or unit-based intensive school:

- a. time and money (leave, travel, food, accommodation, childcare);
- b. negotiating leave with employers;
- c. stress on families and work colleagues due to absence.

Unit Coordinator benefits

(7) Unit Coordinator benefits include:

- a. Unit Coordinators get the chance to engage in a focussed and intense way with off-campus students and, as a consequence, are likely to have belief in what they do as teachers rewarded and strengthened. As one academic put it in a survey, 'I really enjoy the buzz and feel that my teaching experience at UNE would be sorely impoverished without them'.
- b. Intensive schools generally facilitate meeting a wider range of students and interests than (usually less diverse) on-campus students groups.
- c. The strengths and weaknesses of a unit are more likely to become visible in the intense environs of the intensive school: this makes it easier for Unit Coordinators to spot ways of improving unit organisation and teaching techniques.
- d. Intensives may provide out-of-hours social contact and connection with students.
- e. Unit Coordinators can learn more about the contexts and needs of individual students and groups and work with them to address these appropriately.

Unit Coordinators costs

(8) Unit Coordinators costs include:

- a. Intensive schools may conflict with other personal or professional commitments.
- b. Intensive schools may mobilise a lot of academics for relatively small student load.
- c. Intensive schools with small turnouts are an inefficient use of Unit Coordinator time.
- d. Unit Coordinators may not get a sufficient break from the teaching role.
- e. There may be logistical difficulties in relation to other units also offering Intensive Schools.
- f. Sole teaching for a three or four-day intensive school is exhausting, more so if a Unit Coordinator is involved in back-to-back schools.
- g. Well-organised and well-attended intensive schools increase the benefits for all concerned. Conversely, poorly organised or poorly attended intensive schools may lead to disappointment:
 - i. where poor attendance reduces the benefits of learning with and from others in the class;
 - ii. if campus facilities are unavailable;

- iii. if expectations are not met, and/or
- iv. if learning outcomes are not achieved.

University benefits

(9) The benefits of intensive schools to the University are that they:

- a. promote the UNE experience as special, highly beneficial and rewarding, and distinct from other standard-online offerings;
- b. promote UNE as a place where off-campus students can come and get the 'real' university experience;
- c. help the colleges remain viable with extra occupancy;
- d. help the region through injection of money into the regional economy;
- e. increase flexibility of delivery in the case of non-mandatory intensive schools;
- f. offer a point of differentiation in the online education delivery market.

University costs

(10) University costs include:

- a. Campus support infrastructure must remain open longer, with associated staff costs.
- b. Units with mandatory intensive schools may attract fewer enrolments than those with non-mandatory intensive schools or no intensive schools.

Intensive School Alternatives

(11) The rapid development of learning technologies provides many alternatives for student learning that should not be too demanding to manage. Learning resources, such as text files, audio files (including podcasts), video files, multimedia interactive packages, web URLs, etc., can be provided via the Learning Management System or despatched on CD-ROM. Students can then engage in a learning process either by the completion of set tasks, such as traditional essays or assignments, or through the construction of other evidence of learning, such as a website or a wiki (tools for which are becoming progressively more widely available as links through the LMS), the creation of a piece of work (physical or electronic), or other creative outputs — either individually or as part of team. These have become common support mechanisms for higher education teaching in Australia. However, such technologies can be combined with webcams and virtual worlds (e.g. Second Life) to support innovative approaches to electronic intensive schools.

(12) Opportunities may exist in other centres such as TAFE colleges or businesses that might be used as learning sites when particular equipment or resources are required.

(13) Some learning outcomes demand that particular physical or intellectual skills are demonstrated. The use of video or webcam conferencing and virtual worlds to interact with the student to assess skill development might be considered in the context of both physical and online intensive schools. UNE has an extensive video conferencing system with availability through the Access Centres and partner institutions in capital cities and major centres. UNE has also conducted considerable research into the use of webcam technology.

(14) Even without attending intensive schools, students will have the opportunity to use the more traditional electronic communication tools embedded in the University learning management system to build virtual learning communities to assist in the completion of the 'default' learning tasks. Electronic learning systems allow more of the learning interaction to be student-to-student, rather than being directly mediated by the academic — whose role can be focussed more on structuring the learning opportunities and providing validation of the learning outcomes.

Deciding Whether to Hold an Intensive School

(15) Figure 1 may be helpful.

(16) A key question is: how are the unit or course learning outcomes to be attained? You must be clear about the learning outcomes of your unit or course.

- a. If an intensive school is essential to attaining them, and there is no viable alternative means of achieving those outcomes, then a mandatory intensive school is appropriate. If the unit is a core unit, then the implications of a mandatory school for the major and/or course need to be considered.
- b. If the intensive school provides more an attractive but alternative way of attaining the learning outcomes, then a non-mandatory school should be held. Note that it is necessary to provide alternatives of the intensive school for non-attendees. If attendance levels are unacceptable then you might reassess the role of the intensive school: there may be a more effective way of organising it, or it may not be necessary at all.

Length of Intensive Schools

(17) An intensive school has to be worth the investment for all involved.

- a. For off-campus intensive schools, a minimum of one day is appropriate.
- b. For on-Campus intensive schools:
 - i. two days is the minimum (ideally with a second linked two-day school so that the student's time on-campus is maximised, and
 - ii. four days is the maximum although field trips may require more than four days if approved by the Head of School;
 - iii. however, at least three days may be more appropriate when intensive schools are not linked as part of a series, otherwise students may invest a great deal for an inadequate return.
- c. At least four hours per day should be spent in structured learning activities although students should have sufficient free time to use campus services and support facilities and to socialise.

Cancellation of Advertised Intensive Schools

(18) Once an intensive has been advertised, students will start to organise their life and travel and will incur commitments such as leave, childcare, travel and accommodation. For these reasons, mandatory intensive schools are cancelled only under the most exceptional of circumstances.

(19) For all intensive schools requiring a minimum number of students (normally ten) or a non-mandatory school that may have too few attendees to be cost-effective (for students and staff), students must be strongly advised in the online unit information to make refundable arrangements in case a school is withdrawn.

(20) In exceptional circumstances, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) may approve the cancellation of an advertised intensive school on the advice of the Head of School. Heads of School should note that compensation may be payable to students who demonstrate that they have entered into non-refundable commitments.

Intensive Schools and Contemporary Technology

(21) Intensive schools can take many forms. Traditionally, intensive schools have been residential schools at the Armidale campus, using classrooms for typical face-to-face teaching, such as lectures and tutorials, or for laboratory or practical work.

(22) Locations of intensives schools can be chosen for the convenience of the students, but also for access to other resources, such as libraries or galleries, particular technology, or access to industries or businesses that may provide a

compelling learning context. Often, businesses are pleased to be participants in learning situations, as it is both a promotion of their activities, and a chance to recruit potential new staff.

(23) Collaborative generation of digital resources, such as creating multimedia packages, or building group wikis, can be effectively conducted in a face-to-face intensive school with powerful learning outcomes. Not all students need to have computers: with three or four students clustering around one computer it is possible to have intensive learning occurring. Similarly, the UNE video-conferencing system can be used to connect with national or international sites that may stimulate learning interactions, or be used to 'bring in' students unable to physically attend an intensive school, but able to reach a video-conferencing centre, or with a webcam-enabled computer.

(24) Intensive schools can be conducted entirely online without any requirement for actual physical attendance. UNE produces technological guidelines to assist staff in implementing the technology.

Scheduling of Intensive Schools

(25) On-campus intensive schools should be held during the official intensive school periods specified in the Principal Dates because infrastructure such as the Library may have limited services outside these dates. Greater flexibility can be achieved for online intensive schools and these can be scheduled at any time with the permission of the Head of School.

Early mandatory intensive schools

(26) These are held before the official start of the teaching period and provide guidance, skills or curriculum content or context required before teaching starts. Enrolment may be very close to the intensive school. Although students are informed during online enrolment of Intensive School requirements, opportunities such as e-mailings, bulletin boards, web pages, etc., should be used to remind students that failure to attend an early mandatory intensive school means that the unit enrolment must be cancelled.

Exemption from a Mandatory Intensive School

(27) Exemption from attendance at a mandatory intensive school is not possible except under the most limited of circumstances (see Notes below). Students who do not attend a mandatory intensive school are withdrawn from the unit. Withdrawals applied after the census date, or after the last date for withdrawal without academic penalty, incur the HECS liability and/or the academic penalty.

Notes

(28) A student who is repeating a unit and has attended its mandatory intensive school is assumed to be re-attending unless exemption is granted by the Unit Coordinator from re-attendance. Exemption is not automatic as the unit or intensive school requirements may have changed. Students seeking exemption must do so before enrolling in the unit and if granted exemption, must notify the exemption to Student Administration and Services to avoid having their enrolment cancelled automatically for non-attendance.

(29) A student may, at the discretion of the Head of School, have alternative attendance arrangements granted for part (but not all) of an intensive school, where the Head of School is certain that professional or statutory accreditation is not compromised by the exercise of such discretion. The Head of School's decision is final on whether to exercise this limited discretion and what alternative arrangements for attendance will be required.

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