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Timetabling Policy (2025)

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https://universityofwestminster.sharepoint.com/sites/00278/SitePages/Timetabling.aspx

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Introduction

An effective and efficient timetabling service is pivotal to a high-quality student experience, and research undertaken by the Students' Union makes it their number one student priority on enrolment.

This refreshed policy document has been informed by the workings of the current Education-led Timetabling Project and updates the existing policy document approved by Academic Council in 2022.

1 Purpose and Scope

1.1 The purpose of the policy is to provide clear and consistent guidance to all colleagues involved in the production of the University-wide teaching timetable, outlining a framework to support and enable colleagues to engage effectively with timetabling preparation and production processes and to contribute to the publication of accurate and reliable timetables.

1.2 The scope of the policy is determined by the need to produce a timetable that is equitable and effective, taking into account the needs of both students and colleagues, balancing the efficient use of space and resources with the delivery of a high-quality student experience in line with the University's strategic objectives and day-to-day business needs. It covers all teaching activities, across all Colleges, Schools, courses, modules, and campuses, and associated arrangements for the booking of teaching space for non-teaching events.

1.3 The document is solely focused on the policy underpinning timetabling services. It is supported by a range of standard operating procedure documents, including process documentation and an annual calendar of key dates, which are developed by the central Timetabling team in conjunction with, and with the agreement of, key stakeholders across the University.

1.4 Except whether otherwise explicitly stated, the policy applies in full to all teaching activities undertaken across all Colleges, Schools, and levels.

1.5 The policy is presented for immediate implementation as the timetable which is produced in accordance with the policy is developed during the first half of 2025, and takes effect for the academic year 2025-26.

2 Outcomes

2.1 The overall aim of this policy is to enable a coherent and consistent approach to timetabling, producing a timetable which is:

a) student focused, pedagogically sound, accurate, and efficient in the utilisation of colleague time and teaching space

b) designed to avoid clashes for mandatory modules and common option combinations

c) available to students in a timely manner

d) has minimal changes post-publication

e) able to accommodate the management of associated processes, such as timetabling personal tutoring and the ability of students to be able to book rooms for personal study

3 Guiding Principles

3.1 The guiding principles underpinning this policy are:

a) to provide a consistent and unified approach that enhances colleague and student experience through the timely construction and publication of a stable and reliable timetable

b) to support the delivery of the highest quality learning and teaching to students at the University

c) to support a flexible and dynamic curriculum which reflects accurately all marketing information and other contractual commitments

d) to meet core teaching commitments and achieve an optimum balance between competing constraints

e) to produce a timetable that takes account of equality and diversity needs of members of the University community, informed by colleague and student engagement with relevant University policy and procedural frameworks.

f) to provide timely, accurate and comprehensive information to students and colleagues

4 Leadership and Governance

4.1 Development and delivery of timetabling services is currently led by the Timetable Project Board, reporting to UEB and Academic Council as appropriate. This group is chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) and includes senior academic and professional services colleagues reflecting the collaborative nature of the timetable production process. Once the Education-led Timetabling Project is complete this will transition to a business as usual governance process which will be described in an update to this policy at the appropriate time.

Timetable production framework

There are some fundamental principles which must sit at the centre of the timetabling process, and which are key to the successful production and delivery of the teaching timetable.

Any exceptions to any elements of sections 5-10 of the policy must be agreed by the Head of College or authorised deputy.

5 Timetable construction

5.1 In order to support timetable construction, stability and reliability, all academic and professional services colleagues engaged in the provision of relevant data sets are required to complete processes in accordance with the deadlines set out in the annual Timetabling Production Schedule of Works.

5.2 The timetabling process should be a unified, collaborative effort involving both academic and professional service colleagues. By working together seamlessly, and using computer software to assist with auto scheduling, we can ensure a more efficient workflow and minimize any duplication of effort.

5.3 The timetable production process will be scheduled so as to take account of the availability, accuracy, and reliability of the key data sets. A balance is required between early deadlines, which give the central timetabling team more time to complete the final timetable, and the reliability of the available data, which will be increased the later these data are collected.

5.4 To ensure efficiency in the process, the resource requirements and delivery details which enable auto scheduling of timetabled teaching activities should be rolled over from one year to the next where applicable.

5.5 All teaching activities will be scheduled in full through the central timetabling software.

5.6 All teaching and other bookable spaces including lecture theatres, seminar rooms, and other classrooms (including specialist facilities and laboratories) will be managed as centrally-pooled rooms and booked through the central timetabling software unless an exception is agreed with the Director of Estates Planning and Services.

5.7 All modules must be delivered in line with the delivery criteria as detailed in the module specification documentation.

5.8 Whilst it is preferable for classes to be taught at the same day, time, and room each week, it is acknowledged that, in the interests of the student experience, there may be occasions where this might change for individual weeks in the semester. Such changes will be clearly communicated to colleagues and students via the CMIS timetable portal.

5.9 General timetabling constraints which are taken into account in the timetable construction process are listed in Appendix B.

6 Curriculum Approval

6.1 All changes (e.g. curriculum and assessment check-ins, additions, amendments, withdrawals) to the University's course and/or module offerings, and addition or removal of existing modules to a new or amended course structure must have received approval by the relevant committee(s) by the dates set out in the relevant existing process and timelines. For convenience, these dates are also included in the annual Timetabling Production Schedule of Works for the next academic year

6.2 These changes must then be made on the student records system to enable transfer to the scheduling system.

6.3 Failure to do so may result in delays in timetable production, which can lead to an inefficient process and wasted effort. Such delays could also impact the overall scheduling process, ultimately affecting the quality of service provided.

7 Timetabling day and week

7.1 All classes must adhere to the standard University teaching week pattern unless specifically stipulated in the course documentation, when exceptions are allowed for programmes which follow non-standard delivery patterns.

7.2 A timetabling day is the period from 08:00 to 22:00 hours Monday to Friday during which course components or activities (lecture, seminar, laboratory time, workshop, critique etc.) and/or events may be scheduled.

a) The core undergraduate timetabling day (including Foundation level teaching) is as follows:

Monday	09:00 to 19:00
Tuesday	09:00 to 19:00
Wednesday	09:00 to 13:00
Thursday	09:00 to 19:00
Friday	09:00 to 17:00

b) Where possible, teaching slots which encourage engagement and learning should be used, though it is understood that early and late slots will also be used in the interests of clash avoidance and space utilisation. Teaching activities can be scheduled outside these hours at the request of the relevant Head of School or authorised deputy and subject to agreed building opening hours.

c) Postgraduate teaching may take place at any time in the timetabling day. Evening teaching would normally commence at 18:00.

d) Accredited teaching should not normally be scheduled at weekends. However, occasional postgraduate teaching may be scheduled on Saturdays where there is a clear academic, pedagogic or operational justification and with the approval of the relevant Head of College or authorised deputy.Events such as exhibitions, showcases and other approved curriculum-related activities with optional student attendance may be scheduled at weekends, subject to the availability of space and agreed building opening hours.

7.3 Wednesday afternoons should be kept free from undergraduate teaching to promote the aims of "Wellbeing Wednesday". Consideration should be given to the same approach to postgraduate teaching where possible. Any exceptions must be approved by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) with the UWSU Vice President for Undergraduate Education.

7.4 Classes should start at 5 minutes past the hour and finish promptly at 5 minutes to the hour to allow for timely changeover of classes.

7.5 The most efficient use of shared teaching space will be achieved by filling the entire teaching day, from 9am to 7pm. Where two-hour classes are used, this can best be achieved by scheduling them to start at the following times: 9am, 11am, 1pm, 3pm, 5pm. This is designed both to reduce the potential for clashes and to ensure optimal space utilisation. Any exceptions must be approved by the relevant Head of School or authorised deputy and the Head of Space Management and Timetabling.

8 Teaching colleagues

8.1 Full-time teaching colleagues will be considered as available for teaching at any time during the teaching weeks and hours indicated at 7.1 and 7.2 above, and part-time colleagues on the basis of their contractual arrangements.

8.2 The process of timetable construction will support the University's objectives in respect of providing an inclusive and accessible learning and working environment, taking into account, for example:

a) the needs of colleagues with disabilities

b) the needs of those with caring and other commitments, recognised through use and application of the Flexible Working Policy and Procedure

c) adjustments as a result of religious observance, recognised through use and application of the Religion, Belief and Study Policy.

8.3 Heads of School or authorised deputies may approve exceptions and requests for flexibility in the 'teaching unavailability collection' process outlined in the Timetable Production Schedule of Works. Colleagues should liaise with their line manager at the earliest opportunity to discuss either temporary or permanent adjustments that maybe required to working arrangements, and where appropriate, application of the relevant policy and process.

8.4 A set of general scheduling constraints including those relating to teaching colleagues can be found in Appendix B.

8.5 The process of timetable construction will aim to provide time during each week which is free of teaching commitments and available for undertaking of other activities as detailed in agreed workload allocation. Where possible this would provide, for example, a day clear of teaching activities for full-time colleagues engaged in research or knowledge exchange, or for those who hold particular leadership roles at College or School level. However, given the complexity and variability of data informing timetable construction, the day / time kept free of teaching commitments may vary and, in exceptional instances, may be disaggregated across multiple days.

9 Timetabling blocks (L4 to L6 courses only)

9.1 The University has adopted a block-based timetabling system.

9.2 The block system ensures that:

9.2.1 For each level of each UG course, all teaching of all core and primary option modules will be delivered across three days each week. These days may not be consecutive. This ensures that all UG students will have two days per week free of any timetabled teaching and learning activities, unless the student chooses to take an elective or optional module which is delivered during a different block

9.2.2 Undesirable clashes between courses, and between levels of different courses, are prevented

9.2.3 There is optimal space utilisation across the teaching week.

9.2.4 Students can be given advance notice of the time blocks in which their teaching will be delivered, to enable plans for caring and other commitments to be accommodated.

9.3 The standard university block model, as outlined in Appendix A, is the preferred method for block timetable. It ensures a spread of teaching delivery through the week, removes by design clashes between blocks within a level, and within a block across levels. This latter feature ensures that students with trailing modules are able to take a full part in all their teaching activities as clashes across levels are removed.,

9.4 In this model, undergraduate courses at levels 4 to 6 are allocated to one of three timetabling 'blocks', which stipulate the hours in which activities for the course must be scheduled. The teaching block template is included in Appendix A.

9.5 It is recognised that alternative block systems which achieve the three-day delivery are currently being used, but these will not necessarily achieve all of the benefits of the standard university block model. These alternative systems should be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure they still meet the university's requirements.

9.6 No teaching activities should be scheduled outside the course's block times except in exceptional circumstances, such as for sound pedagogical or student experience reasons.

9.7 In certain circumstances, it may not be possible to deliver some or all of the activities of the module within the three day/block timetable system.

a) e.g. Some practice-based courses may never fit the blocks, e.g. owing to different intensity of delivery

b) Some courses may not fit the blocks initially but could in future, e.g. with remodelled module pools

Any exceptions will be with the approval of the Head of School or authorised deputy and Director of Estates Planning Services or authorised deputy. Students should be made aware in advance of the implications of these exceptions on their teaching timetable.

10 Prioritising of activities and allocation of teaching spaces

10.1 In creating the annual timetable and allocating teaching space, activities taking place during each semester will be prioritised as follows. [See the Academic Regulations – sections 3.2.5-3.2.10 for definitions.]

a) Core undergraduate (including foundation level) and postgraduate modules

b) Optional/elective undergraduate and postgraduate teaching modules

c) Enrolment and examinations.

d) Student education development activity, such as academic support and employability events

e) Non-teaching events including, for example, academic events and conferences, musical and dramatic performances, organisational development events, outreach events, validation events, reviews, UWSU events and other meetings

f) Student (non-teaching) bookings

g) Social events and activities

10.2 The timetabling team will offer support to colleagues wishing to book non-teaching events in advising the booking approach more likely to fit in with the teaching schedule

10.3 Where teaching and learning activities, enrolment or examinations are required outside the ordinary semester dates, these activities will be prioritised above advance commitments for conferencing and event activities.

10.4 Space will be allocated taking into account available data relating to accessibility, practical and pedagogical requirements, with the aim of allocating suitable space to individual activities while also promoting optimal use of the University estate. Provision of suitable teaching space to meet the University's pedagogic requirements is incorporated into the University's Estates vision for the future.

10.5 The allocated room must be used for all timetabled teaching activities unless unavailable due to equipment breakdown or any other emergency reason.

10.6 Historic allocation of space is not a guarantee that future allocations will be maintained.

Requests for timetable change

11 Requests for changes to timetabled activities

11.1 Whilst the aim of the timetable production process is to produce a clash-free timetable which needs no alteration, it is recognised that in certain circumstances changes may be required to a timetable post-publication.

11.2 In these circumstances, the changes should be restricted to those which are **absolutely essential**, in order to minimise the impact on colleagues and students.

11.3 Change requests must be made in a timely manner, as soon as the requirement for a change is known.

11.4 All requests to be made by the Designated School Timetable Leads following an agreed change management process. Reasons for change which would be covered by this process are:

a) Staff Clash

b) Student Clash (between courses students are expected to take)

c) Back to back Staff (between campuses)

d) Back to back Student (between campuses)

e) Room not large enough

f) Room too large (Student numbers are less than 60% of the maximum room capacity and a smaller location is required)

g) Room layout inappropriate

h) Room unsuitable for purpose

i) Accessibility issues (such as colleagues or students having specific access requirements)

j) Time slot no longer required

11.5 Changes for other reasons must be approved by Head of School or authorised deputy.

11.6 All in-year timetable changes must be communicated to colleagues and students in a timely manner using the CMIS Timetable Portal.

11.7 Where a room change was required because of an issue which was only discovered immediately before teaching (e.g. equipment broken), a retrospective room change request must be made to the Timetabling Team by the teaching colleague. This is to ensure that attendance and monitoring systems are accurately updated.

Ad-hoc room bookings

12 Room booking requests

12.1 This process should be followed for all non-teaching room booking requests, which should be made through the central room booking software.

12.2 Any teaching activities which require ad-hoc rescheduling (e.g. for reasons of colleague sickness) should be rescheduled in accordance with the timetable change framework and not through the ad-hoc room booking process.

12.3 Rooms that are not scheduled for use during the timetabling process may be booked for ad-hoc purposes via the online room booking form.

12.4 Ad-hoc room bookings during teaching hours will not be confirmed until after the final timetable has been published though may be requested before this time via the online room booking form

12.5 Other than soft spaces established for informal learning engagement, requests for ad hoc events which are booked directly with the timetabling team (rather than through the online room booking form) should be submitted with a minimum of 2 weeks' notice, and certainly not less than 72 hours before the booking date. Requests submitted with less than 72 hours' notice may not be considered.

12.6 Students, clubs and societies may use the online room booking form. Room allocations made by the timetabling team will consider the request of the user alongside the needs of other activities taking place in nearby rooms.

12.7 All bookings must adhere to Health and Safety regulations

12.8 Requests for rooms are subject to the booker agreeing to the terms and conditions

13 External booking requests

13.1 The University's requirement for rooms and facilities takes priority over external groups or organisations wishing to use the rooms. No changes would normally be made to the University's teaching timetable to accommodate external use. Any such changes would normally be in the interests of an enhanced student experience and would only be possibly with the permission of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education).

13.2 All external bookers must fulfil the Universities terms and conditions of use

14 Appendix A: Teaching blocks

14.1 The University's standard block model is outlined below:

LEVEL 4

	09:00	10:00	11:00	12:00	13:00	14:00	15:00	16:00	17:00	18:00
Monday	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Z	Z	Z	Z
Tuesday	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	X	X	X	X
Wednesday	X	X	X	X						
Thursday	X	X	X	X	X	X	Y	Y	Y	Y
Friday	Y	Y	Y	Y	Z	Z	Z	Z		

LEVEL 5

	09:00	10:00	11:00	12:00	13:00	14:00	15:00	16:00	17:00	18:00
Monday	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	X	X	X	X
Tuesday	X	X	X	X	X	X	Y	Y	Y	Y
Wednesday	Z	Z	Z	Z						
Thursday	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Z	Z	Z	Z
Friday	X	X	X	X	Y	Y	Y	Y		

LEVEL 6

	09:00	10:00	11:00	12:00	13:00	14:00	15:00	16:00	17:00	18:00
Monday	X	X	X	X	X	X	Y	Y	Y	Y
Tuesday	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Z	Z	Z	Z
Wednesday	Y	Y	Y	Y						
Thursday	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	X	X	X	X
Friday	Z	Z	Z	Z	X	X	X	X		

14.2 Courses (or cohorts within courses) are allocated to one of these three blocks.

14.3 Courses (or Each block has 14 hours per week, across 3 days.

14.4 There are three options for implementation – due to curriculum structures, the middle of these three is the approach currently taken at Westminster.

a) All activities for the given course/level are within the blocks (the GREEN approach). This is the strictest version of the block system.

b) All compulsory whole-group activities (e.g. lectures) for all modules are within the blocks, the remainder (e.g. sub-group activities, such as tutorials) are scheduled within or on the same days as the blocks (the YELLOW approach). This does not mean that tutorials or any given module are on the same day as that module's lecture.

c) All compulsory whole-group activities for all modules (e.g. lectures) are within the blocks, the remainder (e.g. sub-group activities, such as tutorials) are scheduled across the week (the RED approach). This is the loosest version of the block system.

14.5 There is currently a review of course/module structures being led by one of the Education-led Timetabling Project workstreams. This is looking to remodel course structures so that modules which are offered are actually, in practice, available and do not clash with other core or optional modules, This may have an impact on the block model, as modules whose 'home' block (i.e. the block of its parent course) is different to the student's 'home' block would still be available to the student but would necessitate a change to the student's expected timetabled days.

14.6 Some courses will require flexibility in the allocation of blocks to their teaching. This is particularly the case for joint honours courses, where the combination of modules from different subject areas may necessitate the use of two blocks to ensure that student timetables remain clash-free and pedagogically coherent.

15 Appendix B: General scheduling constraints

The timetabling process will, where possible, take account of the following general constraints, though exceptional circumstances may result in some of these constraints being overridden:

General

15.1 The needs of part-time students for teaching events to be adjacent to each other or scheduled on particular days to be prioritised above the needs of full time students attending the same event

Breaks and free slots

15.2 It is understood that some teaching activities do not always use the full booked slot every week (e.g. a 2-hour slot may actually be a 1h45 class). This will affect system reporting of the below constraints.

15.3 Colleagues and students should be allowed a break of not less than 1 hour after 4 hours of continuous teaching time, unless a single event has a scheduled duration greater than 4 hours, in which case the planning and conduct of the event must make suitable arrangements for a break

15.4 For the avoidance of doubt, this means that neither colleagues nor students should have 4 hours (or more) of consecutive teaching and learning without breaks.

15.5 Colleagues and students should be allowed a break of not less than 1 hour between 12:00 and 14:00 hours daily

15.6 Colleagues and students should not be scheduled across an overall envelope of more than eight hours in a day (i.e. for a 9am start, teaching should not go beyond 5pm).

15.7 For students, there should not be gaps of more than three hours in any given day between core module timetabled activity. Students may select options which create longer timetable gaps if they so choose.

15.8 For colleagues, early start teaching events (starting at 9am) should not be scheduled on the day following late finish events (finishing after 6pm)

15.9 Colleague groups within Schools should have teaching free slots in common to allow for collaboration, facilitate meetings etc.

Travel time

15.10 Where possible, efforts should be made to ensure teaching events for student groups/cohorts should be limited to only one campus (i.e. Fitzrovia [Regent / Cavendish / Little Titchfield / Wells Street]/Marylebone/Harrow) on any one timetabling day. Students may select options which override this constraint if they so choose.

15.11 If colleagues or students are required to travel between one building and another for teaching events, time for travelling will be scheduled as follows:

a) Regent / Cavendish / Little Titchfield / Wells Street – 30 minutes

b) Any of the above and Marylebone – 1 hour

c) Harrow and any other building – 1 hour

15.12 If a mobility disabled student or colleague is required to travel between campuses, an additional 30 minutes to those cited above is allowed for the transfer [Note – if this is not known at the time of scheduling this may result in a change under 11.4 (i) above]

Room allocation

15.13 Teaching events should be scheduled in space that is close to the location(s) of the host School where possible

15.14 Where some activities are delivered online, this should be for every week of the activity so as to ensure best room utilisation, unless it is possible to dovetail two or more activities to use the space during every week of the teaching semester

15.15 Activities should be clustered together in the same parts of a building as much as possible (to permit building services to be shut down in unused areas in the future as building management and control systems are modified to enable this)