Academic Timetabling and Space Usage Policy

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Table of Contents

Glossary 2
1 Purpose and Objectives of this Policy 3
2 Policy Governance 3
3 Guiding Principles 3
4 Scope 4
Scheduling 5
Space Usage 5
5 Academic Timetabling Roles and Responsibilities 5
Heads of School/Department 5
Course Directors 6
Faculty Timetable Co-ordinating 6
Academic Staff 6
Examination Timetabling Officers 7
Central Timetabling 7
Central Timetabling Planning Manager 8
6 Academic Space Usage 9
Prioritisation in Space Allocation 9
Approval for Commercialisation 10
Space Usage Audit 11
7 Scheduling 11
Automated Scheduling Routines 12
Accommodations in Scheduling Routines 13
8 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 13
9 Publication of Draft and Final Timetables 14
10 Changes, Cancellations and Notifications 15
Notification of approved change or cancellation: 15
11 Training and Support 16
12 Queries and Complaints 16
13 Relevant Legislation 16
APPENDIX A – Academic Timetable Board (ATB) 17

Glossary

Systems

ATS – Academic Timetabling System
CMS – Curriculum Management System
LMS – Learning Management System
SRS – Student Record System

Policy

AMPc – Active Module and Programme catalogue
ATB – Academic Timetabling Board
DATE – Diary of Annual Timetabling Events
LTC – Learning and Teaching Committee (of Senate)

1 Purpose and Objectives of this Policy

The University's timetabling system has been designed to facilitate the delivery of pedagogically excellent and inclusive learning, teaching and assessment in suitable, accessible accommodation. The purpose of this policy is to set out clear principles, responsibilities and procedures for planning, producing, publishing and amending the academic timetable.

This policy sets out a framework to:

- Facilitate high quality learning and teaching experiences for staff and students by providing for the timely delivery of a well-managed and efficient academic timetable and system.
- Achieve pedagogically effective and efficient use of teaching resources and facilities.
- Support the autonomy of schools and programmes through the provision of an intelligent scheduling process which facilitates the efficient deployment of their staff, students and programmes.
- Promote the timely production of a single unified timetable reflecting all teaching activity for staff and students.
- Enable the generation of personalised timetables for students and teaching staff.
- Support a managed, uniform approach to post-publication timetable changes.

2 Policy Governance

The Dean of Academic Business Development is the Senior Responsible Officer for the academic teaching and examination timetables and this policy which is overseen by the Academic Timetabling Board (ATB). ATB will report to the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) on matters of the policy and its effectiveness.

ATB will select and monitor an annual set of metrics to assess the effectiveness of the academic teaching timetable in meeting University objectives and strategic goals.

Please note: The Terms of Reference and Membership of ATB can be found in Appendix A.

3 Guiding Principles

The timetabling system is designed to deliver the best possible fit for the face-to-face educational delivery of programmes for staff and students within a unified system.

The timetabling system sets out a fair, reasonable and inclusive scheduling model which:

- respects the pedagogic requirements and autonomy of schools/departments in populating their timetable;
- promotes collegiality and consultation between Heads of School/Department and staff on the formation of timetabling schedules;
- enables timetables to be produced and published in a timely and coordinated manner across the University.

The timetabling system will ensure balanced schedules for the defined teaching day and week. It will facilitate optimal usage of all teaching space, both general and specialised. This includes the identification of downtime periods when room usage can be repurposed.

Training for staff on the timetabling system will be provided by the Central Timetabling Office. Support from the Academic Timetable Planning team will assist Schools/Departments in considering and specifying the accommodation resources required for their programmes.

4 Scope

This policy is effective for the production of academic timetabling for the academic year commencing September 2021 and it is subject to annual review by the ATB to ensure continued compliance, efficiency and best practice in the management of the University's academic timetable. Guidelines which accompany this Policy may be updated from time to time to reflect technical upgrades.

All taught programmes and modules will be scheduled through the ATS. On-campus teaching, including both central and faculty-managed spaces, will be hosted in the ATS. In addition, off-campus teaching *delivered by University staff*; will be scheduled through the ATS. Exclusions to this policy include validated teaching provision that is delivered by partner organisations at their premises.

The attributes of all teaching spaces are managed and maintained by either ISD or Estates Services. For ISD, end-point technologies include: wi-fi, internet access, and audio-visual equipment. The physical environment and furnishings are maintained by Estates Services. A best match of teaching needs to space attributes will be achieved by recording and tagging the attributes in the ATS to enable informed scheduling.

The scope of this policy includes scheduling and space usage as follows:

Scheduling

- TEACHING ACTIVITIES which are defined as one of the following: lecture, tutorial, laboratory, seminar, studio, or workshop.
- BLOCK SCHEDULING which is defined as a series of extended adjacent slot requirements across the teaching day, week or weeks, often tied to module sequences.
- ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING which will also be scheduled for virtual timetable purposes, room allocations being replaced with a timetable of synchronous online activities.
- OFF CAMPUS provision which includes the academic schedule only (in such case the venue will be arranged by the faculty).
- ACTIVE MODULES which will be determined through the ActMod catalogue (derived from CMS/SRS).

Space Usage

- TEACHING SPACE which includes all teaching rooms (i.e. lecture theatres, seminar rooms, laboratories, studios and PC suites).
- FACULTY-MANAGED SPACE which includes University space containing specialist equipment or facilities (e.g. wet laboratory facilities) required for the effective delivery and sole purpose of specific programmes of study.
- EXAMINATION SPACE which includes any University space where exam activity could take place. This includes any University approved externally sourced space.
- LIBRARY SPACE which includes teaching and learning delivered by the Library in accommodation managed by the Library.

Please note that social learning space which includes any informal University space that is predominantly used by students for study or social learning activities falls outside the scope of this Policy.

5 Academic Timetabling Roles and Responsibilities

The process of generating and validating the Timetable requires a secure and timely flow of information between Faculties and the Central Timetabling team.

Heads of School/Department

Heads of School and Departments are responsible for the academic operations and resources of their School. In the context of the Academic Timetable, this includes:

- Ensuring the School has a process and key delegated people (academic and administrative) who will assist the timely flow and validation of programme and staffing information.
- Ensuring the staffing for the validated timetable is agreed locally.
- Ensuring that Course Directors and others with delegated coordinating roles are adequately informed and empowered to fulfil their duties.

Course Directors

In accordance with the Programme Managers Handbook and acting with the delegated authority of the Head of School or Department, the Course Director is responsible for the timely coordination of the requirements and validation of programme and module timetabling data.

In addition, the Course Director should ensure that programme information in the CMS that populates the Timetable is up-to-date and accurate, particularly contact hours and mode of teaching.

Faculty Timetable Co-ordinating

- Co-ordinate the collection of their Faculty's considered and agreed academic and examination timetable requirements and/or validations of draft proposed timetables on behalf of their Head of School or Director of Faculty Operations.
- Collate their Faculty's complete portfolio of academic and examination timetable requirements and/or responses on behalf of their Head of School or Director of Faculty Operations in accordance with the agreed Central Timetabling timelines.
- Liaise with Course Directors to receive and submit the details of the timetable requirements.
- Liaise with Central Timetabling as required.
- Act as the point of communication of substantive timetable changes to Central Timetabling.

Academic Staff

- Ensure that their availability has been agreed with their Head of School/Department and communicated to their timetabling point of contact who will liaise with Central Timetabling accordingly.
- Be adaptive and sensitive to necessary timetabling changes which may be due to accessibility requirements.

- Inform their Head of School/Department and Faculty Timetabling Coordinator of any cancellations of classes so that the academic timetable can be updated.
- Adhere to the start and end times required by the teaching period and contribute to the smooth running of the interchange periods between classes.
- Adhere to the University guidelines on room etiquette. <insert link>

Examination Timetabling Officers

- Ensure that reasonable adjustments are considered in the allocation of accommodation for examinations.
- Coordinate and manage examinations for all academic faculties.
- Ensure that the University's invigilation process is followed.
- Implement continuous review and amendment of examination timetable prior to the agreed deadline.
- Prepare of examination packs and papers for each exam in line with process for exams.

Central Timetabling

- Produce the annual university academic timetables.
- Work collaboratively with staff in Faculties and Schools including those responsible for timetable co-ordination to capture teaching priorities and the discipline-specific requirements.
- Provide a timetabling service that best matches requirements with available space, providing advice and guidance on alternatives where this is required.
- Schedule available teaching slots that best match the requirements driven by programme module sequencing, student module options and availability of staff.
- Provide guidance regarding the module data collection and checking required at key points throughout the timetable planning and production cycle.
- Provide advice on alternative teaching slots and room availability.
- Act upon issues or queries generated from the publication of the draft or provisional timetable and ensure that agreed amendments are made in a timeframe which supports the publication stages and final date of the timetable.

- In accordance with the diary of annual timetabling events, produce in good time a revised provisional timetable.
- Produce and distribute final timetables at least 2 weeks before the beginning of each academic session.
- Provide a responsive service to the university to ensure minimal disruption to the teaching experience.
- Maintain the system to support the timetabling and room booking activities.
- Provide training and support to staff users.
- Ensure that the system is maintained to continuously service the University's evolving needs.

Central Timetabling Planning Manager

- Implements and maintains the Academic Policy for Timetabling and associated processes, governance and evaluation of effectiveness.
- Implements a timetable in collaboration with schools/departments and faculties that ensures that teaching space is conducive to delivering optimal teaching and learning experiences for staff and students respectively.
- Implements systems and processes to enable effective evaluation of the impact on timetabling from alterations to the University's estate and changes in the curriculum design or content.
- Effects strong liaison and close working with the space management function in Estates Services to draw on and share data and information produced in evaluating and reporting on space utilisation.
- Effects strong liaison with Estates Services and ISD to ensure that equipment in teaching and learning spaces is fit for purpose and that upgrades, re-purposing, new room layouts and new requirements are incorporated into timetable planning.
- Oversees the Academic Timetabling System ensuring the required information from faculties and data feeds from other systems are accurately and efficiently captured.
- Provides access and training for users of the ATS ensuring that associated systems and processes are clearly understood and adhered to maintaining a culture of best practice and positive student and staff focus.
- Oversees the process of academic timetable production and settlement to strict deadlines, effectively managing resolution of conflicts and contingency planning whilst adhering to University policy process and practice.

- Plans and oversees distribution of the agreed academic timetable in a variety of digital formats, including (inter alia) by school/department, programme, student and staff, ensuring feeds to systems such as the Portal and the VLE are effective and that a web-based timetable is accessible at all times for use by staff and students.
- Manages changes and notifications of change to the live academic timetable, especially for students.
- Takes lead responsibility for ongoing review.

6 Academic Space Usage

All centralised and faculty-owned learning and teaching spaces, including lecture theatres, seminar rooms, and laboratories will be scheduled through the ATS.

Allocation of space of Faculty A to Faculty B for teaching will be by exception and on the approval of the Executive Dean of the Faculty-owned space.

The ATS is designed to capture data feeds regarding modules from the CMS and the SRS. Faculty is required to supplement the data with local requirements such as the pattern of teaching, the delivery method; the room layout and equipment requirements; multiples of tutorial groups and other special teaching requirements, such as accommodation of volatility in the cohort size.

In the case that demand exceeds the largest available space, alternatives to double teaching that suit the academic requirement will be explored and prioritised in the timetable and captured in the ATS. An example might be use of technology for synchronous delivery across rooms.

Prioritisation in Space Allocation

Space allocations will be assigned to modules according to defined programme requirements (and this will be process mapped and published).

The following factors will be factored into the timetabling system:

- whether the module is compulsory or optional
- the teaching activity
- class size
- pedagogic requirements (e.g. sequenced learning)
- module sequence dependencies and co-teaching dependencies.

Prioritisation in allocation will generally be guided by the following:

- Large lectures will be locked down with associated tutorials/ seminars/ laboratories/ workshops etc fitted around the lecture.
- Block scheduling. (This will require a high degree of specification by the course director and approval of the module requirements of the block requirement from the Head of School/Department due to lock down in space to the exclusion of other programmes.)
- Sequencing of patterns that consolidate students' time on campus across the modules of a course
- Request for specific days and patterns
- Defined learning sequences
- Cohort size
- Capacity of space requested
- Layout of the room e.g. theatre, Harvard, raked, flat, executive
- Type of resource requested e.g. specialist spaces, furniture layout fixed/moveable
- Ownership of space
- Defined programme requirements or constraints
- Compulsory before optional modules
- Generally, in level order: level 4 and 6/7 then 5 on undergraduate programmes, with separate consideration for programme complexity and volume of taught sessions for postgraduate teaching

Please note that minimising transfer time between consecutively scheduled activities will be a priority in allocating space.

Approval for Commercialisation

This will follow the space management process of Estates Services. Where use of academic space may be required, the academic timetable will be the source of truth for availability and academic requirements will take priority. Campus Life requiring academic space already booked will channel enquiries for consent to use a room to the academic holder of the booking which will be the Head of School/Department. Appeal may be referred to the Executive Dean in the event of Faculty space or the DVC(Academic) in the event of general teaching space.

Space Usage Audit

Space usage audits will take place unobtrusively during the teaching period. Analyses will be reported to ATB. Following discussion with the appropriate faculty / school representative, this may result in the removal of cancelled classes/modules from the timetable in order to release space for alternative usage.

7 Scheduling

Rollover of the historical timetable will not necessarily be the starting point for each new academic session in the early stages of this policy. Over time, efficient patterns may well prove resilient for roll over. However, regular sequences will be the norm and every effort will be made to ensure that teaching activity requests are scheduled in regular sequences of the same slots each week. Therefore:

- Compulsory modules within a programme will be scheduled without clash.
- Optional modules will be scheduled to avoid clash with compulsory modules and other optional modules, and within a programme or suite of interdependent programmes.
- Linked modules (e.g. Lecture followed by laboratory, seminar followed by studio, other etc.) Will be scheduled contiguously if required and specified.
- Priority scheduling combinations will be available for modules electing pre-set learning activity design sequences.

Schedule Timing Guidelines
The academic teaching week is based on the following hours: - Monday, Tuesday Thursday 09:15 – 17:15 Wednesday 09:15-12:15 Friday 09:15 – 16:15
Single hour slots will be scheduled to start at a quarter past the hour.
Single hour slots will be scheduled to finish at five past the hour.
Two adjacent pedagogically linked one-hour slot requirements will be pattern scheduled to start at the following times: 0915, 1115, 1315, 1515, 1715 and 1915.

Three adjacent pedagogically linked one-hour slot requirements will be pattern scheduled to start at the following times: 0915, 1315 and 1715.
Block scheduling is accepted as an extended form of pattern scheduling across adjacent slots over days, weeks and semesters. The precise pattern per hour of the block must be defined.
A timetable-free hour will normally be scheduled into all programmes between 11.00-14.00 and 16.00-19.00 to allow breaks for students and staff to avail of lunch and evening snack in a staggered manner that space and services can cope with.
Continuous schedules of >90 minutes, will incorporate a break which will be agreed locally between teaching staff on the timetable and their students.
The timetable will normally ensure students or staff on a programme will not have two single hours separated by a gap of >3h.

Teaching will take precedence over non-teaching with the exception of pre-booked events. These are the careers fair, examinations, degree ceremonies and open days. Bookings for School open days should normally be on Wednesday afternoons or weekends to reduce demand on teaching space.

Automated Scheduling Routines

Foreseeable timetabling constraints are generally applied during the initial automated scheduling routines.

- **Global constraints** are applied as part of the initial database preparations for auto-scheduling of teaching activity. In addition, Schools/Departments are required to provide local staff constraints and individual activity constraints (such as linking or ordering lectures, classes, practical's etc) to the Timetable Planning Team.

- **Local constraints** are set by subject matter experts where practicable.

- **Module constraints** may apply for a number of reasons. Where multiple constraints are likely to significantly constrain module scheduling the Head of School/Department may approve scheduling constraints on a particular module, e.g. 'not to be scheduled on a Tuesday'.

- **Block teaching** is a form of legitimate constraint on the scheduling, sequencing and adjacency of modules which is the pedagogic norm in some faculties. Where this applies, the Head of School will approve this constraint to be associated with module blocks.

Accommodations in Scheduling Routines

A range of factors may limit either the scheduling of a module or the availability of staff. This section recognises these and aims to provide a reference for consistency in decision making.

The ATS will pay due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and enhance accessibility for students and staff. The timetabling system will also ensure compliance with the Working Time Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016.

The Head of School/Department or their nominee is responsible for determining the agreed allocation of teaching staff to the schedule, taking into consideration individual contracts, accessibility requirements, specialisms, and flexible working arrangements.

The teaching allocation of staff, as agreed with the Head of School/Department, will not make unreasonable demands or cause hours to be unsocial or excessive. For example, evening teaching by a member of staff will not normally be followed by early session daytime teaching during the following morning unless by election or agreement. (Evening teaching is normally for part-time or specialist courses). It will also take cognisance of academic workloads across the School/Department. This policy requires normal management protocols to apply in allocation. (Large Schools and Departments may have delegated authorities.)

Manual adjustments may apply post auto-scheduling to improve the overall timetable. This may be in response to local requirements which dictate a more flexible arrangement. For example, staff availability, part-time student arrangements, particular learning needs, or as a consequence of limited resources or complexities of programme offerings.

8 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The management of individual timetabling requirements is carried out at the local School or Department level. Accordingly, the timetabling system will assume that equality and diversity related requirements have been considered for timetabling purposes at the local School or Department level.

Examples of equality and diversity related requirements include:

- Religious belief observance of staff.
- Individual flexible working arrangements.
- Gender-balancing of group allocation where it is deemed appropriate to do so.

- Accessibility requirements, including physical access issues and issues related to hearing and visual impairments for centrally managed teaching space.
- Appropriate adjustments in respect of care for dependants.
- Additional access requirements for some staff and students.

The online timetable will be accessible to all users with a disability and compatible with assistive hardware and software which will be available in alternative formats.

The Student Wellbeing Service provides a confidential advice and support service to students with a disability. Student Wellbeing Advisors are available to work with individual students to produce an outline of individual timetabling and space usage support requirements.

9 Publication of Draft and Final Timetables

The University aims to provide complete, accurate and up-to-date timetables, published at the start of the academic year. The University will centrally publish the timetable by Programme, Student, Campus, Faculty, School. Faculties will also be able to access timetables by staff member. Students will be provided with individual timetables in a clear and accessible format at least 2 weeks before teaching begins for continuing students, and by the end of induction week for new students.

The indicative timeline for development and refinement of the Timetable will be as follows:

April	First draft of timetables by programme released to Faculty Timetabling Coordinators
May	Second draft of timetables by programme released to Faculty Timetabling Coordinators
June	Staffing of second draft timetables by programme populated by Faculty Timetabling Coordinators
July	Final timetable agreed for all programmes and released by School/Faculty/Campus
August	The timetable will be released to returning students through MyDay portal and VLE

10 Changes, Cancellations and Notifications

Except for unforeseen circumstances, changes to the timetable are to be kept to a minimum. Late changes will be minimised by enhanced planning and cohort prediction.

Timetabling changes that impact on the student experience must be accompanied by an overriding valid reason from Head of School/Department and allow for 5 working days' notice in advance of the proposed start date of the change, where possible. Students should receive a minimum of 2 working days' notice of timetable changes.

In the event that teaching is cancelled and in order to allow teaching rooms to be freed up, the following form should be completed at the earliest opportunity by the faculty support staff or academic - Room Cancellation Form

Examples of valid change or cancellation request criteria post-publication of the timetable would typically be:

- Slot no longer required.
- Unforeseen clash in student combinations.
- Unsuitability of allocated room for the teaching intent.
- Irresolvable staffing constraint confirmed by Head of School.
- Unforeseen changes in the requirement for planned support
- Implementation of a reasonable adjustment
- Specific overriding external matter or emergency
- Staff sickness absence, bereavement, or emergency carer responsibilities.
- Accessibility requirements for students or staff.
- Addressing late changes (e.g. admissions) to student numbers in relation to the capacity of the allocated room.

Notification of approved change or cancellation:

With the exception of the unforeseen circumstances, the Module Co-ordinator must take responsibility for giving students at least two working days' notice of any timetable changes where possible. The online timetable should be adjusted, and 'push' notifications should be sent to those students affected if possible. Alternatively, academic departments should notify all students and staff affected by the timetable change.

11 Training and Support

Training for staff on the timetabling systems and the policy and subsequent processes will be provided by the Timetabling Office both centrally and locally. Support for schools in considering and specifying the accommodation resources required for their programmes will also be provided by the Central Timetabling Office.

12 Queries and Complaints

Queries and complaints should be directed to the Central Timetabling Planning Manager.

13 Relevant Legislation

Legislation that applies to this Policy includes:

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995

The Autism Act (NI) 2011

The Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005

Working Time Regulations (NI) 2016

APPENDIX A – Academic Timetable Board (ATB)

Senior Responsible Officer – Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)

Membership

- Dean of Academic Business Development (Chair)
- Director of Faculty Operations (one nominee rotating annually by Faculty)
- Heads of School (or nominee - one from each campus)
- Member of academic teaching support staff (eg Technician – one per Campus)
- Student Administration representative
- Timetabling Planning Manager
- Campus Life (Student Wellbeing representative)

Terms of Reference

- Oversee the ATS and annual production, settlement and publication of the Academic Timetable and in line with policy.
- Oversee the Equality and Diversity implications of the policy.
- Periodically update Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) on the state of operation of the ATS and the production of the Academic Timetable.
- Recommend changes in policy to the LTC.
- Review evaluations of research using Timetabling data, e.g. correlations with retention, student experience and student performance.
- Agree and monitor KPIs and report impact to LTC.