Timetabling Team, Academic Registry

Loughborough University

# Timetabling Operational Guide: Loughborough Campus

This document provides operational guidance for staff on how the teaching timetable is produced on an annual basis, how they contribute to it being successful, and what they need to do and when. It is divided chronologically into key production stages.

## 1. Annual Update of Programmes, Modules and Timetabling Information

The Annual Update of Programmes, Modules and Timetabling Information commences in December and runs until late March. It is the crucial starting point in the timetabling production process.

During that process, schools are responsible for:

1. ensuring the timely submission of programme and module information for the next academic year, and timetabling information for Semester 1 and 2***** of the next academic year, by the published deadline.
2. liaising with the Timetabling Team regarding programme changes, new programmes being launched, or programmes being discontinued.
3. providing staffing information (including availability details) as much as possible to facilitate the timetable build.

**Semester 3 timetabling information is captured separately at a later point in the cycle, directly with schools who teach during this period.*

### Why we need the data on time:

This data is essential for the production of the University's teaching timetable. Timely submission of the data by the published deadline enables the following crucial processes to run effectively, prior to scheduling taking place:

1. Programme structure build:
    a. Building programme structures in MOCS (Module Option Choice System) to enable continuing students to make optional module choices for the following academic year, during the designated window during early May.
    b. Building programme structures in the Timetabling System, to enable accurate clash checking for staff and students.
2. Identifying specific teaching delivery requirements for teaching sessions:
    a. that require to be run in a specific order or sequence.
    b. that require a specific minimum or maximum capacity, or number of sub-groups.
    c. that require specialist equipment or software, or a specific room to be allocated.

    d. that require a specific room type or layout.

3. Collation of staffing information:
    a. part-time working patterns and flexible working arrangements to be inputted to the Timetabling System to avoid teaching being scheduled outside of approved availability.
    b. reasonable adjustments to be inputted to the Timetabling System to ensure requirements are met.
    c. ensuring staff clashes are avoided.

Having this information by the published deadline, prior to scheduling, facilitates the production of a higher quality teaching timetable, and enables more effective quality checks (e.g. spread of teaching, consecutive hours, gaps etc) to take place.

## 2. Module Choice

Continuing students make their optional module choices for the next academic year during a designated window in early May (teaching weeks 10 and 11 of Semester 2 in the current academic year). Preparation for this window begins as soon as the deadline for the Annual Update of Programmes, Modules and Timetabling Information has passed (late March).

### The Timetabling Team are responsible for facilitating that process by:

1. Building programme structures in the Module Options Choice System (MOCS), so that students can only pick valid available options in adherence with approved programme specifications
2. Giving students who are expecting to progress onto a placement in the next academic year the opportunity to make insurance choices for their next Part, in case they are not able to secure one
3. Enabling students who are expecting to change programme or route in the next academic year to make the relevant module choices
4. Making MOCS available for students during the approved timeframe
5. Resolving any technical/system queries in liaison with IT Services
6. Updating and maintaining the University's module choices webpages, in liaison with Marketing & Advancement
7. Monitoring and reporting on completion rates and progress to senior colleagues

### Schools are responsible for facilitating that process by:

1. Providing guidance to students regarding module options by
    a. running module choice events or producing guidance documents
    b. responding to student queries (other than technical/system issues) – e.g. off-programme choice, pre-requisites.
2. Encouraging students to complete the module choice process, providing prompts and chases where required.

### Why we need the data on time:

The dates for the module choice window are formally agreed by Education & Student Experience Committee, and are deliberately scheduled to take place during the final teaching weeks of Semester 2, to avoid taking place during Semester 2 exams. Delays in receiving confirmed programme structures could delay the module choice window, and risks students not being able to make informed decisions about their optional modules.

## 3. Timetable Build

Following the deadline for the Annual Update of Programmes, Modules and Timetabling Information, the Timetabling Team begin building teaching timetables for Semester 1 and 2 in the Timetabling System. This commences in late March, and is an ongoing process throughout the majority of the calendar year, with a particular focused period between April and July, after MOCS has been set up for students to complete module choice, and prior to Semester 1 draft timetables being released to staff.

### The Timetabling Team will undertake the following steps to build the timetable:

1. Build programme structures in the Timetabling System
2. Update availability information and reasonable adjustments for teaching staff
3. Ensure that teaching delivery in the Timetabling System reflects what has been requested via the Timetabling Information System, including but not limited to:
    a. Total number of hours by delivery type
    b. Week patterns
    c. Number of sub-group sessions/repeats
    d. Staffing
    e. Room type/layout requests
    f. Details of any specialist equipment/software requirements
4. Schedule teaching sessions across the University's teaching week (09:00-18:00 Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, and 09:00-13:00 on Wednesday), taking account of any sequencing information provided in the Timetabling Information System. This involves placing the teaching sessions at specific days/times in the Timetabling System, however rooms are not allocated to teaching sessions until after draft feedback has been received (see below).
5. Undertake initial quality checks of timetables at programme level, to monitor (amongst other things) spread of teaching, consecutive hours, gaps, early starts/late finishes, single hour sessions and free days.
6. Some specific sub-sets of teaching are allocated to rooms (school-owned spaces, specialist, STEM Lab, DigiLabs etc) – see Section 5 for more details.

When scheduling teaching sessions, the Timetabling Team will take account of the following guidance as given in the Teaching Timetabling Policy:

1. Teaching on Wednesday afternoons will be avoided wherever possible, to enable students to take part in extracurricular activities.
2. Best efforts will be made to avoid teaching on Fridays 17:00-18:00, particularly one-hour sessions.
3. Teaching sessions will normally be scheduled on the hour and for whole hours, except where this suits the pedagogy of the session, or where other timings can improve room utilisation.

 

4. Where there are opportunities to do so, sessions may be scheduled across rather than be contained within a single week – for example, lectures taking place in the latter part of the week and subsequent sub-group sessions taking place early the following week, to improve utilisation of the teaching estate, whilst maintaining teaching delivery sequencing.

### Why we need the data on time:

Any missing data at this stage can impact on the timetable build and have an adverse effect on the final quality of the teaching timetable.

## 4. Draft Timetables

Timetables are published to students and staff by semester. Prior to publication, each semester is shared with staff in a draft format, allowing them to provide feedback before the Timetabling Team commence with room allocation.

The provisional timetable for Semester 1 is normally released in early July for approximately three weeks. The indicative timetable for Semester 2 is normally released in late July, and remains open until October.

Engagement with draft timetables is vital to ensure that all necessary teaching requirements have been captured effectively prior to room allocation. Making changes to the timetable is significantly more challenging once rooms have been allocated, and it may not be possible to accommodate all requests.

When draft timetables are available, teaching staff are responsible for the following:

1. Module leaders should check that their draft timetable reflects the teaching delivery requirements they submitted, including:
    a. The overall number of hours by teaching type matches the module spec (e.g. correct number of lectures, tutorials etc)
    b. That teaching sessions are not scheduled at days/times that breach known periods of availability
    c. The teaching sessions are sequenced correctly where this has been stated (e.g. lectures prior to workshops)
    d. The correct number of sub-groups have been set up, and that they are/can be staffed where they have been stacked at the same day/time
    e. All teaching sessions are staffed, or that there are plans in place for allocating staff to teaching sessions
2. Programme leaders should check programme level draft timetables, including:
    a. Liaising with module leaders to ensure that module timetables reflect the teaching delivery requirements
    b. Ensuring that all modules are visible at programme level, and that there are no clashing sessions
    c. Reviewing the spread of teaching across the teaching week
    d. All teaching sessions are staffed, or that there are plans in place for allocating staff to teaching sessions

The Timetabling Team are mindful of less popular teaching slots at the starts and ends of the day, and this is taken into consideration when scheduling teaching, balanced against the limitations of the teaching week. Requests for specific days/timeslots will be considered, but cannot be guaranteed outside of approved staff availability patterns.

## 5. Room Allocation

The room allocation stage is where pool teaching rooms* are assigned to timetabled sessions. It predominantly takes place after draft feedback has been processed. Some specific sub-sets of room allocation take place during the timetable build stage, namely:

- Sessions to be scheduled in school/department teaching spaces**
- Sessions to be scheduled into specific specialist teaching spaces (often these are school-owned spaces)
- Sessions to be scheduled into collaborative technical spaces e.g. STEM Lab, DigiLabs

This is because of the need for specific rooms, and/or the need to share collaborative technical spaces that drives the placement of other teaching sessions.

Room allocation is a collaborative exercise where teaching sessions for all schools are treated equally, following guidance on prioritisation and complexity.

By the completion of this stage, the Timetabling Team will ensure that all teaching sessions are allocated to a room that matches the teaching delivery requirements as closely as possible. In some cases this may not exactly match the original request – for example lecture sessions for less than 50 students where a tiered room is requested may be allocated a flat teaching room with a front-facing layout in rows, which provides the same effect as a lecture theatre but avoids a smaller cohort being allocated a much larger room.

During the room allocation process, it is sometimes necessary to move teaching sessions to a different day/time in order to find an available appropriate room. Whilst the Timetabling Team will try to take action to prevent this (e.g. moving lectures towards the end of the week and teaching subsequent sub-group sessions early the following week), this is sometimes unavoidable.

The Timetabling Team will always seek to allocate regularly weekly teaching sessions into consistent rooms, however this is not always possible where there are pinch points in the University's teaching estate.

**Pool teaching rooms are centrally managed spaces where teaching from many disciplines can be scheduled*

*** School/Department teaching rooms are spaces managed by a School or Department for the purpose of teaching their students*

## 6. Quality Checks/Refinement

Once room allocation is complete, the Timetabling Team undertake detailed quality checks to refine the teaching timetable before it is released to staff and students. These include, but are not limited to:

1. Minimising timetable clashes

2. Reviewing sub-group allocation
3. Spread of teaching across the week (gaps between teaching sessions, early starts and late finishes, single hour sessions and free days)
4. Lunch breaks between 11:00-15:00
5. Consecutive hours of teaching
6. Monitoring travel time between back-to-back teaching sessions, particularly for staff and students with mobility/accessibility issues

## 7. Publishing to Staff

The Timetabling Team will notify all relevant staff via email when the final semester timetable is available to view. Staff with teaching commitments will be able to view their personal teaching timetable via the University's Online Timetable, in the Staff Timetables tab. Teaching staff can import this into their Outlook calendar via an iCal feed. The University's Online Timetable also includes the facility to view timetables by programme, module, room and student.

At this point in the process, teaching staff are responsible for reviewing their timetables and familiarising themselves with the teaching rooms they have been allocated to.

## 8. Publishing to Students

The Timetabling Team will notify all students via email when the final semester timetable is available to view. Messages will also be published on the University's social media channels.

Students will be able to view their personalised teaching timetable via two mechanisms:

1. The calendar tile in the University's myLboro app
2. The University's Online Timetable

Publication to students will generally be 4 weeks prior to the start of teaching for that semester, with the exception of new incoming students in their first semester of teaching, which are published approximately 10 days prior to the start of teaching.

Students with Advanced Support Requirements will be identified by the Timetabling Team and separately contacted via email, with instructions on where and how to access online timetable and who to contact in case of any issues. Students will be discouraged from sharing the timetable with fellow students in or outside of their cohort.

## 9. Post-Publication Changes

Once the teaching timetable has been published to students, any change to the timetable is considered to be a post-publication change. Post-publication changes can have a negative impact on students who may have planned around their teaching timetable (e.g. travel arrangements, caring responsibilities, employment).

Whilst some post-publication changes are unavoidable (e.g. illness, unexpected emergencies), staff should seek to prevent avoidable post-publication changes to the teaching timetable wherever possible.

Any post-publication changes must be made via the post-publication change form, both to ensure that all the required information is provided to the team to avoid unnecessary back-and-forth queries, and so that change requests can be analysed.

Where post-publication changes are requested less than 48 hours before the teaching session concerned, the staff member requesting the change is responsible for informing students as soon as possible.

## 10. Non-Teaching Supplementary Sessions & ‘Q-Codes’

Non-teaching ‘supplementary’ sessions such as guided independent study will not normally form part of the teaching timetable, with the following exceptions:

1. Peer Assisted Learning
2. Personal Best
3. Careers and Placement activity

Any other non-teaching requests that would require a use of a pool teaching room, and are not set out above, should be submitted to the Central Room Bookings Team using the Pool Room Booking Request Form.

Supplementary sessions set out above will usually be added to student timetables via dummy module codes, known as 'Q-Codes' (the third letter of the module code, which normally denotes the Part or year of study a module relates to, is replaced with the letter Q, so that it is easily distinguished). These dummy module codes do not exist in the University’s Student Record System and do not appear in formal programme specifications, but are set up directly in the Timetabling System to enable sessions to be added to student timetables.

The following considerations should be taken into account regarding Q-Codes:

1. Automated MS Teams links are not generated for activities attached to Q-Code modules.
2. Activities attached to Q-Code modules are excluded from the University’s attendance monitoring system.

 