

Timetabling Framework 25-26

1. OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this document is to provide the framework within which an efficient and effective timetabling process can operate. It forms part of the institutional commitment to a fit for purpose teaching timetable (*hereafter referred to as 'the timetable'*) for all students that makes the best use of all available resources. The importance of this commitment cannot be understated; a poor quality timetable contributes to a poor quality student and staff experience which is a risk that will be mitigated by adherence to this Framework.
- 1.2 It acknowledges the complexities of producing a timetable, and the related processes and operational constraints that feed into it, and provides instruction on how to mitigate these to reduce the impact on the timetable.
- 1.3 It clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all staff who engage with the process, as well as setting out to key stakeholders the realistic expectations of what the timetable can and will deliver within the constraints it operates under.
- 1.4 All relevant staff should ensure that their internal procedures are in accordance with this Framework.
- 1.5 It is in effect for the 25-26 timetable, which will be produced during the 24-25 academic year. It will be reviewed and updated for the 26-27 timetabling cycle by the Division of Student Experience, in conjunction with the Timetabling Project. At the conclusion of the Timetabling Project, the Framework will become an open ended document.
- 1.6 As a single year document, it is necessarily limited in its aspirations. It is looking to record current practices and take the opportunity, wherever possible, to increase consistency across and between Schools by taking examples of best practice and applying these more broadly, and by enabling staff to adhere to specified parameters.
- 1.6 This Framework should be read in conjunction with the 25-26 Timetabling Production Schedule¹ which sets out the main steps in the end to end process, the relevant deadlines, and the responsible parties.

¹ Published here: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/ssro/timetabling>

2. SCOPE

2.1 The Framework applies to the existing mechanisms for the planning, scheduling, checking, publishing, and maintenance of the timetable. It has not made major changes to the current ways of working; this will be the remit of the Sussex Timetabling Project. Minor changes have been considered and incorporated; these are clearly marked in the Framework for ease of reference.

2.2 Any teaching event that is to appear on an undergraduate or postgraduate taught student's personal teaching timetable is covered by this Framework unless otherwise noted as an exception (see 2.3 and 2.4).

2.2.1 A teaching event is an instance of modular teaching on the timetable including but not limited to a seminar, a lecture, a lab session and a workshop.

2.2.2 Students taking pre-sessional language courses of any duration, run by the Department of Language Studies, who will be progressing onto taught programmes, are included within this Framework.

2.2.3 Students accessing English Language for Academic Study (ELAS) are included within this Framework.

2.2.4 Language Short Courses for members of the public are scheduled within the teaching timetabling but not all aspects of the Framework apply.

2.2.5 IDS modules delivered to University of Sussex students as part of a University of Sussex award are included within this Framework.

2.2.6 All students are treated equally by this Framework, with no advantage or disadvantage built in based on the cohort to which they belong.

2.3 The exceptions to this are teaching events for the following categories of taught student where any timetable is produced separately, by staff teams not listed in 3.2, who are not working to this Framework:

- Students registered at the Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS)
- Students registered at affiliated partner institutions delivering University of Sussex awards
- Students studying on University of Sussex awards in the Sussex Artificial Intelligence Institute at Zhejiang Gongshang University.
- Students taking the Online Distance Learning (ODL) PGT courses supported by the ODL team within Educational Enhancement
- Students registered with International Study Group and completing any of their educational provision
- Those taking the Summer at Sussex short courses with the Department of Language Studies
- Those attending the Undergraduate Summer School supported by the Global Engagement team

- Students registered with the Institute of Development Studies, taking other types of IDS provision that do not lead to a University of Sussex award.

2.4 The following are not defined as “teaching events” and are excluded from the scope of this Framework:

- The use of general teaching space for activities such as students’ self directed study
- The booking of ad hoc 1:1s, dissertation supervisions or small group tutorials
- The timetabling of Welcome Week activities
- The timetabling of examinations within the designated central examination weeks, or the scheduling of any other types of assessment
- The current room bookings service (ORBS) via which available general teaching space can be booked for events that do not form part of the teaching timetable
- The local arrangements with BSMS which allow for general teaching space to be booked for some of their teaching, as and when possible and subject to availability
- The scheduling or booking of Students’ Union activities.

2.5 Non-credit bearing activity, provided as part of a taught student’s experience, does not usually form part of the teaching timetable. An example of an exception are the ELAS and Language Short Courses which are timetabled but not subject to all aspects of this Framework. Where there is a particular requirement for inclusion, this should be discussed with the timetable team.

2.6 Where 'School' appears in the document it is because the processes are currently carried out at School level. This will continue for the 25-26 timetabling cycle regardless of the new Faculty units because any process review to locate work elsewhere cannot be completed in time.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 The roles and responsibilities detailed here reflect current structures and working practices and they will remain in effect until such time as the Timetabling Project approves any changes that would reshape how the service is delivered.

3.2 The table captures those with direct tasks or responsibilities for the timetable. Staff whose responsibilities are generic ones relating to general matters of service delivery, compliance or reporting are not listed but are nonetheless required to support the timetable as part of their business as usual roles and responsibilities.

Role	Team/School/ Department	Responsibilities	Notes
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Timetabling Manager	DSE	<p>Planning & organising DSE's Timetabling operational activity</p> <p>Working collaboratively to promote adherence to the Framework</p> <p>Ensuring accurate timetables are produced in accordance with the agreed schedule of processes and deadlines.</p>	As set out in 2025-26 Timetable Production Schedule ²
Senior Timetabling Officers	DSE	<p>Constructing, scheduling and producing the timetable.</p> <p>Take account of physical accessibility requirements when scheduling.</p> <p>Working collaboratively with school timetabling staff to maintain the timetable post publication.</p>	As set out in 2025-26 Timetable Production Schedule
Curriculum Managers	DSE	<p>Accurate completion of allocated tasks relating to curriculum data as set out in the Timetable Production Schedule.</p>	As set out in 2025-26 Timetable Production Schedule
Head of Student Data and Records	DSE	<p>Accurate completion of allocated tasks relating to Oracle checks as set out in the Timetable Production Schedule.</p>	As set out in 2025-26 Timetable Production Schedule
Curriculum and Assessment Officers	School Offices	<p>Accurate checking and maintenance of course and module data (as required for timetabling) in Oracle.</p>	As set out in 2025-26 Timetable Production Schedule
Course Co-ordinators (with oversight/managing of processes from Senior course co-ordinators)	School Offices	<p>Collation, checking and timely input of teaching methods and staffing data.</p> <p>Allocation of students to teaching groups, allocation of staff to teaching activities and input of teaching activity in non-standard weeks.</p> <p>Acting as main liaison between academic staff and DSE timetabling team</p> <p>Reviewing draft timetable,</p>	

² The Timetable Production Schedule will be published here: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/ssro/timetabling> in the winter, prior to the commencement of the annual timetabling cycle.

		Ongoing maintenance of the test and live databases	
Space Manager	Estates & Facilities Management	Liaison with Timetabling Manager to determine available GTS space for each academic year. Forward planning and communication around Estates maintenance / project work. Contribute to problem solving for unforeseen issues that disrupt teaching.	

4. OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

4.1 The information in this section covers the different aspects of work that go into the service delivery of the timetable. It defines and explains for the reader what is involved in the process and confirms how the University approaches the tasks. Where necessary, it confirms the order of priority that will be used in order to assess and agree requests.

4.2 Scheduling Parameters

The parameters listed below define the operational boundaries within which the timetable should be delivered. They represent long standing custom and practice and/or formally agreed ways of working but are not always achievable within the constraints of the timetable. Where they cannot be met, the Timetabling team will work with relevant stakeholders to identify alternative arrangements.

4.2.1 Pedagogic parameters

- a. Teaching and learning sessions should be scheduled in accordance with reasonable pedagogic sequencing requests (i.e., to timetable lectures before seminars).
- b. Any elective module should be scheduled in the four agreed elective slots:
 - Monday 9-11am
 - Monday 4-6pm
 - Tuesday 1-3pm
 - Thursday 11-1pm
- c. Per 2.5 of this Framework, credit bearing teaching activity is prioritised over non-credit bearing activity which is nonetheless strongly linked to teaching and learning (i.e., study skill sessions). Requests for inclusion of non-credit bearing events in the timetable can be discussed with the timetabling team and may be accommodated only where this does not present a conflict with credit bearing events.
- d. More general enrichment activities (i.e., career fairs) are not scheduled by the timetabling team and do not fall under this Framework; the room bookings service supports them.

4.2.2 Calendar parameters

- e. The University's core business hours are from 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday. All full-time academic staff are expected to be available to teach within these hours, except where approved constraints for individual staff dictate otherwise.
- f. All part-time academic staff should be available to teach within their specific contracted hours, except where approved constraints for individual staff dictate otherwise.
- g. Teaching will sometimes be scheduled from 6pm-8pm, Monday to Thursday, where the requirements of the course dictate this or where the constraints of the timetable make it impossible to schedule said teaching within core business hours.³
- h. Teaching will be scheduled on a weekend only at the request of the course where it is designed to be delivered in that format.
- i. Most courses adhere to a semesterised schedule and their teaching will take place during the two eleven-week semester blocks. Some courses use alternative structures and their teaching will be scheduled per their requirements outside of the two semester format.
- j. Wednesday afternoons should be kept free from undergraduate teaching to ensure extracurricular activities can be prioritised, unless otherwise approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Education & Students.
- k. Classes should start on the hour and finish promptly at 10 minutes to the hour to allow session changeover and staff/student travel time.
- l. Reasonable endeavours will be made to schedule no more than 4 hours of consecutive activities for students and/or staff, and to provide a 1 hour lunch break between 12 and 2pm. The constraints of the timetable may not always make this achievable.
- m. Should any member of teaching staff be timetabled to start at 9am following an 8pm finish the previous evening, they can request a change and reasonable endeavours will be made to accommodate this.
- n. Reasonable endeavours will be made to provide full-time academic staff with one day a week free from timetabled teaching activities but this is not guaranteed due to the feasibility of delivering this alongside other constraints.

4.2.3 Estates Parameters

- o. The timetable should be scheduled into rooms that are centrally managed, commonly referred to as general teaching space (GTS). GTS can include but is not limited to lecture theatres, seminar rooms, and computer spaces. Locally managed rooms may be utilised by negotiation and can include but are not limited to laboratory spaces or facilities with specialist equipment.
- p. Non-University managed facilities may be utilised where pre-existing arrangements are in place (e.g. The Keep).
- q. Planned Estates maintenance and/or project work should not be arranged to be carried during term time.

³ The University has made a commitment to remove the need for evening teaching (unless it is a requirement of the course) in the long term. The mechanisms to achieve this include the simplification of the module choice programme via Curriculum Reimagined, and the process and service design changes which will form part of the Timetabling Project. For the 25-26 year the expectation is that evening teaching will not exceed what was required in 24-25, which will allow the University to maintain its year on year trend of reduced evening teaching.

4.3 Data required to produce the timetable

There are several data sets that are required to produce the timetable. These are curriculum data, student data, staff data, and room data. The data are not owned or maintained by the timetabling team; they require it to be able to complete their work. All data must be maintained by relevant staff teams, checked and signed off annually for use in the timetabling process, and provided by the deadlines set out in the Timetabling Production Schedule. Inaccurate data, or data that changes after the deadlines will result in a poor quality timetable.

4.3.1 Curriculum Data

- a. All taught courses will be approved in accordance with the provisions of the Academic Framework⁴. This document sets out the criteria and rules for courses leading to awards of the University, including the rules for the designation of modules (i.e., core/option/elective) and the availability of modules to multiple cohorts.
- b. One part of the curriculum data is the confirmation of University's portfolio of courses, pathways, and modules that will be running in the forthcoming academic year, and therefore need to be timetabled. To establish this, it is necessary to undertake annual review of this data, in the student records system and validate its accuracy.
- c. This review must encompass a careful check of the 'syllabus rules' for every single course in order to confirm the correct suite of modules available to students and therefore how a timetable must be constructed to avoid clashes and enable module choices to be deliverable.
- d. Another part of the curriculum data is the approval of any changes (additions, amendments, withdrawals) to the University's courses, pathways, and modules. These must be approved via University curriculum change processes, managed by Academic Quality & Partnerships, and should receive input, prior to approval, from Estates & Facilities Management and the Timetabling team where the requested change could have implications for these services. These changes require system updates to be made in a timely manner to ensure curriculum data remains accurate.
- e. The final part of the curriculum data are the teachings methods. These are the detailed descriptions of the format of the teaching and learning delivery for each module. They encompass the teaching weeks, the session type and duration, the number and size of teaching groups, sequencing requests, and room requirements. This data forms part of the curriculum data set from the timetabling perspective and must also be approved and updated by relevant deadlines.
- f. Where any part of the approvals and updates of the curriculum data are not made in a timely manner and in accordance with Timetable Production Schedule, there is a considerable risk of timetabling requirements not being met.
- g. Responsibility for the accurate and timely provision of curriculum data is shared by Curriculum Managers (AQP), academic staff, Curriculum & Assessment Officers, and Course Co-ordinators (Schools)

4.3.2 Student Data

⁴ This document is published here: <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/documents> and approved annually by University Education Committee.

- a. The student data required for timetabling purposes consists of both personal data and number planning data.
- b. Personal data consists of name, registration status, course, level of study, and their module associations (including mandatory and chosen modules, and the indicator from the records system that signals a physical access requirement).
- c. Number planning data consists of predicted and actual cohort sizes. It is provided by both the Strategic Planning team (for admissions and recruitment) and the School (for progression and module choices) who liaise over estimates and tend to arrive at an educated prediction that informs timetabling.
- d. Student data is reviewed and verified by Schools and used by the Timetabling team to construct the timetable. The timetable is finalised by allocating individual students to their teaching groups; a collaborative process between the School and the Timetabling team.
- e. All returning students must have made their module choices in accordance with published deadlines for their selections to be accommodated in their timetable.
- f. Responsibility for the accurate and timely provision of student data is shared by the Strategic Planning department, academic leads and Course Co-ordinators (Schools).

4.3.3 Staff data and teaching availability

- a. Staff data is required in two parts. Firstly, the tutor's name, the modules they will be teaching on, and which elements they are allocated to teach, ideally including the weeks they are allocated to teach. This is provided via the teaching methods data that Schools complete in the Oracle database, by the deadline in the Production Schedule.
- b. Secondly, when any individual member of staff is not available to teach, this information must be provided to the timetabling team. The processes for providing this data in an accurate and timely manner are under review for 25-26.
- c. There are three reasons for a staff availability constraint. How the data is captured and provided varies:
 - (1) A reasonable adjustment, which could be permanent or temporary. Currently, these are provided via the timetabling team's Teaching Staff Availability Form (TSAF).
 - (2) A valid and agreed Flexible Working Request, which changes the overall contracted hours of work, start and finish times or places of work on a permanent basis or for a defined period. Currently, this data is not consistently provided. It is sometimes recorded on a TSAF, sometimes included within teaching methods, and sometimes unknown.
 - (3) A request outside of 1 and 2, which tend to vary widely and are mostly relating to a fixed period of time within the forthcoming academic year (i.e., a sabbatical). Currently, this data must be provided via the TSAF.
- d. Availability may be impacted by an approved reasonable adjustment or a Flexible Working Agreement but outside of this, and per section 4.2.2 (d and e), teaching staff are assumed to be available during their contracted hours and will be scheduled accordingly unless an approved Teaching Staff Availability Form is submitted by the relevant deadline.
- e. It is recognised that staff turnover, promotion or being awarded research grants or sabbatical leave may impact teaching availability after the point at which the data is

confirmed. In all such instances, the School must inform the Timetabling team immediately so this can be accounted for.

f. Responsibility for the accurate and timely provision of staff data and teaching availability sits with Schools and Faculties.

4.3.4 Room data

- a. The room data is the list of rooms, both GTS and locally managed, that are used for teaching in the forthcoming year. The associated data is the location and description of the room. This includes the type of room, the building it is in, the facilities it has, the approved capacity and any accessibility or availability constraints.
- b. Room data for GTS will be reviewed by Estates and Timetabling and the correct pool of rooms to be prioritised for teaching will be agreed for the forthcoming year by the relevant deadline.
- c. Room data for locally managed spaces that Schools wish to be used will be provided as part of the teaching methods data set by Schools or communicated separately as necessary.
- d. Planned maintenance of any scale of GTS rooms will be scheduled outside of standard teaching weeks to avoid impacting the availability of the room for teaching.
- e. Unplanned works, as a result of an emergency issue, must be discussed, prior to being scheduled, with Timetabling and Schools in order to assess the impact on teaching and agree the necessary actions.
- f. Responsibility for the accurate and timely provision of room data is shared by Estates and Schools.

4.3.5 Internal approval for data sets

The owning Faculty, or Professional Services team as specified above, is responsible for checking and signing off the validity and accuracy of these data sets. In doing so, the data owner is accepting responsibility for errors, omissions, or data that was not approved by the deadline, all of which will impact the ability to produce the timetable and/or the final quality of the timetable.

For 25-26, as part of the drive to improve consistency of approach and overall quality of data, each Faculty is required to hold two internal approval processes; one at data submission stage (Jan/Feb) and one during the Review Period (July).

4.4 Timetable Construction

- 4.4.1 The process of constructing the timetable takes about nine months, beginning in January and culminating in an operational timetable available to staff and students at the start of term. The data gathering and verification described in section 4.3 allows for the construction of a draft timetable by the Timetabling team. Specialist timetabling software is used for this task. This then enters a review period with the School to check for accuracy and completeness. Errors and omissions are resolved and the data is imported from the scheduling software into the Oracle database to allow for the final stages of the process to be carried out by Schools. These last tasks are the check of returning student data, the allocation of new students to their teaching groups, and the allocation of staff across new and returning teaching groups.

The timetable then enters a maintenance phase and should there be unforeseen issues with the Estate, during the academic year, requiring updates or amendments these will be made.

It is acknowledged that local issues may occur that would require changes to the timetable in-year, i.e. staff sickness or inclement weather. It is important that all such changes are communicated to School staff (course co-ordinators) so that the changes can be reflected in the timetable. School staff are responsible for updating Sussex Direct and the Timetabling team, who then update Syllabus+.

4.4.2 **Constraints on the timetable**

The process is driven by various constraints; the following list is not exhaustive but indicates the factors at play that create complexity in the creation of the timetable:

- The obligation to schedule teaching into accessible spaces for staff and students that need them
- Curriculum structures
- Pedagogic requirements for the sequencing and method of teaching and learning delivery
- PSRB requirements where these dictate a certain staff : student ratio
- A high degree of module option choice
- A range of reasonable adjustments requested by staff and students
- Factors that reduce staff availability
- Fluctuating student numbers
- Desired group sizes and the fit with the estate
- Specialist resource availability
- Limitations of estate in terms of quantity/capacity/type/accessibility/facilities of GTS

The Timetabling team, prior to commencing the scheduling, take account of all these factors in how they prepare and set-up the curriculum, staff, student, room and teaching activity data. This ensures that the scheduling process allocates days, times and spaces to teaching activities in accordance with the parameters set out in 4.2 and the data provided in 4.3. It also means that appropriate GTS will be generally allocated by prioritising optimal space use and clash checking can be applied.

4.4.3 **Scheduling Priorities/Process**

The scheduling of the timetable is an interactive process utilising the professional expertise of the Timetabling team and the specialist timetabling software, Syllabus+. The work is approached in the following way:

- a. Semesters 1 and 2 will be scheduled simultaneously, term 3 may be scheduled at a later date.
- b. Teaching activity requiring specific fixed days/times will be scheduled first
- c. The largest lectures will be prioritised in the scheduling order
- d. Elective teaching will be scheduled into the agreed elective slots
- e. Teaching activity requiring computer space will be scheduled
- f. Smaller lecture activity will be scheduled in order of decreasing cohort size and teaching duration
- g. All other teaching activity will be scheduled in order of decreasing cohort size, teaching duration and number of weeks.
- h. The time of day or day of the week into which teaching activity is scheduled is driven only by the calendar parameters expressed in 4.2.2. This means that the scheduling software does not see 4pm on a Friday any differently to 10am on a Tuesday; it will look to use all available

spaces and times with equal priority to ensure the estate is fully utilised. In turn, this allows for all activities to be scheduled and for clashes to be minimised.

- i. All requirements for accessible teaching spaces have already been flagged and will be given priority in the above scheduling process.
- j. Best endeavours will be made to accommodate requests for other types of reasonable adjustments, for staff and students, during the scheduling process.

4.4.4 Review period

With the draft timetable scheduled, it is shared with Schools to facilitate a review period. The purpose of this period is to identify errors and omissions and correct them. It is not an opportunity to make revisions to any data that was verified during the data gathering phase. In particular, it is too late by this stage to change teaching methods and so engaging with these data sets at the right point in the process is essential.

Academic staff are required to check the draft timetable carefully, with input from Course Co-ordinators. Where errors or omissions are identified, the School must immediately submit a change request form to flag the issue with the Timetabling team who will assess these, in live time, processing reasonable changes and challenging others that may present wider issues. It is essential that requests are not accumulated and submitted only at the end of the review period.

4.4.5 Timetable import and final tasks

After the Review Period, the timetable (and all associated student/room data) is exported from Syllabus+ and imported into Oracle. This allows for the Schools to complete their final actions. These consist of the clash checks of returning student data, the allocation of new students to their teaching groups, and the allocation of staff across new and returning teaching groups.

This work is complicated by any changes required as a result of Clearing but mainly because the University does not have a fixed year one curriculum for undergraduate courses, and so new students must choose their module options during the registration window. Until all new students have selected their modules, the timetable is still subject to change. This is also the case for postgraduate taught student who also have a high degree of module optionality.

4.4.6 Timetable finalised and available to staff and students

Because of the work required in late August and September to accommodate the tasks in 4.4.5, there is no official “publication” date when the timetable is live and final for everyone. It is largely complete by late August but still subject to various changes.

The timetable is provided to staff and students via Sussex Direct, where each individual can see their personalised schedule of teaching activities for semester 1 and 2.

Term 3, which has far less teaching activity is then scheduled and imported later in the autumn.

4.4.7 Student requests for changes to their published timetable

4.4.7 (i) Students who have already been through the module choice process can request a change up to the end of week three of each semester. Any change is subject to there being room on the module they wish to move to, and that the change can be accommodated within their personal timetable. If a timetable clash is created by the change, it will not be agreed as modules cannot be rescheduled at this late stage. Requests are made via the School Office.

4.4.7 (ii) Changes to teaching group allocation will be made on the grounds of reasonable adjustments where possible and within the currently scheduled timetable. Other, exceptional, reasons must be accompanied by supporting evidence and will only be accommodated where practicable. Schools retain some flexibility but must apply consistent decision making.

5. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 The University is committed to developing, promoting, and nurturing equality, diversity, and inclusion across the whole community. Within timetabling, this commitment means the provision of physically accessible teaching spaces for all who require them. It also extends to endeavouring to find solutions to accommodate other types of reasonable adjustments requested by staff and students.

5.2 Other constraints on student and staff availability which may mean they are unable to attend activities at certain times of day are also recognised with the acknowledgement that they cannot always be accommodated.

5.3 The teaching timetable is the product of an institutional process to deliver an operational resource that works across all courses, modules, and buildings for all staff and students. The complexities of delivering a timetable for 20,000 students and 1,800 academic staff will mean that bespoke individual arrangements will not usually be deliverable even where they are desirable. As with the whole Framework for 25-26, this document is recording current practices and constraints and acknowledging that these do not always allow for perfect solutions.

5.4 An equalities impact assessment was considered as part of the approval of this Framework and is published here: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/ssro/timetabling>

END

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