University of Kent Process for Timetable Managers

Process overview

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Timetable rollover
September/October

The previous timetable dataset is copied into the new timetable to provide a basis to start work. Technical setup, data transfers and data cleaning is undertaken by the Timetabling teams to get the database ready. All one-off non-modular bookings except those that are pre-planned for the year – such as UCAS / Open days, cinema operations – are removed from the timetable to make clear space for scheduling teaching. Week ranges and dates are checked, bank holidays altered and strategic changes are made, such as rooms added or removed.
Module Session Running
November – December

Schools must determine during November and December which module deliveries they plan to run for the next academic session.

This data should be checked and submitted to the refdata team in the Central Student Administration Office so they can update the information in SDS.

The VPOS (verified programme of study) must also be setup. This is the set of rules which list which modules are available or compulsory for a particular programme. The VPOS then builds the rules about which compulsory modules cannot clash within the timetable.

Note: Module Session Running also informs:

- Student Data System which modules should receive module registrations
- Online module catalogue which modules to advertise
- Moodle, the virtual learning environment, which modules to synchronise

New modules are automatically transferred into the timetabling database once they have been ticked as running. However, the Timetabling Office does not check for new modules so please ensure you supply the necessary information for classes to be scheduled. If the module does not require teaching, for example a year abroad module, please let the Timetabling Office know so we can flag the module correctly.

What do I do if there will be new modules which do not yet have a code on the Student Data System?

If the new module is replacing an existing module, inform the Timetabling Office of the old code that is being replaced. The Timetable Officer may choose to leave the old module’s events in place temporarily on the draft timetable so that the data can be held and module code swapped in later once the new module is approved. If it is a completely new module wait until you have a module code and submit the information to the Timetabling Office together with the new module code. Consider how the new module might affect student registrations on other modules and inform the Timetabling Office e.g. if the new module will cause a substantial reduction in another module.

What do I do if my school has not yet planned next year’s modules?

Complain! It is important for the strategic planning of the teaching space, the timetable and all downstream teaching planning such as module registration, library resources, budgets, that the teaching programme is developed between November and February before the start of the next academic year.

There is always an expectation that some of the teaching will change, but in general 90+% of the teaching timetable should be known during this initial planning.
Block 1
This is a simple submission to the Timetabling Office of:

1) Which modules are and are not running in the forthcoming academic year: indicate if any modules being withdrawn will be replaced by another module with the same delivery.
2) Who the convenor will be for each module
3) Approximately how many students will be on the module. This is important for draft scheduling of rooms and numbers of groups required.

The Timetabling Office will supply the appropriate Block 1 submission form.

Lecturer Constraints
February

Lecturer constraints allow the Timetable Officers to see when staff are available to teach. There is a university constraints policy but your school may also have a local policy on how constraints are to be administered.

A spreadsheet of teaching constraints will be sent to each School for completion and return to the Timetabling Officer. The teaching constraints should be agreed by the Head of School in line with the Constraints Policy before submission to the Timetabling Officer.

What do I do if I will have new staff not in this list?

Add the new staff to the spreadsheet even if you do not have a login and the Timetable Officer will add them to the database, using a surrogate id until they have a contract with the University.

What do I do if we use lots of sessional teachers?

Try to specify how many distinct sessional teachers you will use, naming them if you can, and supplying constraints. You might wish to allocate certain slots to specific roles e.g. Graduate teaching Assistant 1, GTA2 etc. and then substitute names at a later date. This will help you plan their workload once they have been appointed. Ask your sessional teachers to supply their constraints to you where you know them. The draft timetable will be available by June, and there can be modifications at this point. Any information upfront is better than none.

Block 2: new module specifications / Changes to module specifications / Delivery changes
February

This part of the process involves Schools going through their module offering module by module to check the following for each module:

- **Forecast module size** – how many students are expected on the module.
- **Correct number and length of whole group events** e.g. Lectures, seminar, classes
- **Correct number of seminar groups** and preferred size and absolute maximum size of groups. The maximum size might be determined by the availability of teachers or pedagogical
reasons, or staff-student ratios as determined by professional accreditation bodies. It is crucial these are as accurate as possible to avoid unnecessary consultations at busy points later in the year.

- **Correct week pattern** Please make your week patterns as accurate as possible e.g. week 1-6 and 8-11 rather than simply 1-12 if this is not what is taught. The timeslots should be as regular as possible from one week to the next as one-off events result in inefficient use of the space and more erratic timetables for the students which are unpopular. If you know there will be an enhancement week please indicate which week it will be for each module.

- **Teaching equipment requirements** – without teaching equipment specified, rooms without equipment may be assigned. This information is also used to inform capital spend on teaching rooms. If there is no demand for equipment it will not be provided; if we see a growing demand we will endeavour to provide it more widely.

- **Teaching room layout requirements** – e.g. classroom format (rows), seminar room format (around a table), café style (small group tables), terminal (computer on each desk) etc. Again, this information is used to inform changes to teaching room stock. If there is no demand – or growing demand - for a particular layout we will amend the estate accordingly. More information on room layouts can be found [here](#).

- **Teaching staff teaching convening the module, teaching the whole group and seminar group events where possible** – it is recognised that some of this detail will be known later in the planning cycle, but as much as possible early on makes all the difference to planning the timetable. If the teacher is not known this can be left blank. Events and modules with no teacher attached can be readily reviewed in OTIS.

The Timetabling Officers will send a spreadsheet to each school to record this information in a way which makes it clear for both the School and the Timetable Officer to read. This is called ‘Block 2’.

Make amendments on this spreadsheet in conjunction with your Director of Learning and Teaching / Head of School as appropriate, then send to the Timetabling Officer.

If a module structure is being changed, you should check here on the CMSDS support site about the correct administrative and quality assurance procedures to do this.

### Data Accuracy

Many of the computer systems across the university are inter-dependent and the timetable database makes a significant contribution to this process. Information held on the timetable database drives Moodle, the Module Catalogue, Module Handbooks, room booking screens, records for security and card access, attendance registers, Tier 4 reports and several university webpages, among other sources of information. Any inaccuracy in the timetable information has consequences in a host of other areas key to university business.

### On-line module registration – returning students

**March – May**

In March each year, online module registration opens to returning students allowing them to choose their optional modules through the student data system. These choices are governed by:

- Student Data System module session running – which module deliveries are available
• Student Data System v_pos_module, the system that manages the programme-modules structures. The details of this administration are not covered here, but it is essential that this data is checked and amended against the Programme Specifications in the period before online module registration opens. See relevant instructions on this on the CMSDS user support site here.

• Once students have registered on their modules, the data automatically transfers to the timetabling database

**Stage 2 & 3 seminar group allocation**

May onwards

After stage 2 & 3 module registration, the Timetable Officer can begin allocating the students to seminar groups. This process involves:

• Reviewing any students who have been assessed as having special requirements by Student Services, and allocating them to sub-groups manually, then fixing them in place

• Allocating all modules where the allocation has been requested by the school using the Scheduling software which provides clash-free allocation of students to subgroups

Note: If a special allocation is required e.g. all students on a particular programme into specific subgroups, please specify this to the Timetabling Officer with the Block 2 information who can incorporate this into the allocations

Please ensure the Timetabling Office has been notified of all modules requiring central seminar allocation. Only modules with this field updated in OTIS will be processed in this way, as indicated in the modules list.

The process of allocating students to seminar groups will identify module structures where there is insufficient or excess subgroup capacity and the Timetable Officer will contact Schools to resolve these issues.

Once the students are allocated to seminar groups in the timetable database, the data is automatically transferred into holding tables ready for module group administration on the Student Data System in August/September – see below.

**Room Allocation**

June

The allocation of rooms to teaching events is done using the timetabling software as follows:

• Pre-booked non-modular events such as UCAS / Open days and concerts have the rooms fixed
• Any special teaching events where a specific room is required e.g. lab are also fixed
• All events with central teaching space have the rooms removed
• Rooms are allocated to events using the allocation software which takes into account:
- Access requirements for staff and students
- Equipment, layout and room-type requirements
- Capacity
- Proximity to the school

Capacity fills are applied incrementally – overfill factors are applied to larger events to take account of no-show students – e.g. 5% is used for lecture theatres. This is based on room audits that demonstrate poor room utilisation as attendance is rarely 100% of the forecast module size.

Note: module sizes and room capacities are re-checked later in the process once students re-register since there are significant changes to module sizes during the August-September period before the start of the new academic year. However, if you know that there will be a significant change in numbers, e.g. due to unprecedented first year intake, please inform the Timetabling Office so that the additional work can be undertaken.

**Teaching staff online timetable review**

In July the draft timetable is published to lecturers. Each lecturer can view his/her personal timetable using the draft timetable review system (OTIS). If the lecturer requires any changes he/she should contact the school’s timetable administrator.

This feedback route is important so that:

- School administration has an overview and agrees with any changes requested by the teaching staff
- The replies from multiple staff are collated to provide more efficient data updates by the Timetable Officer

The personal timetable view in OTIS shows what the lecturer is recorded to teach and can be viewed in a list or grid format, and also identifies any constraint violations or clashes from the system.
New student on-line module registration
August/September

This process is similar to the returning student administration – see above – but for new students. Compulsory modules are automatically added to new student records when they transfer into the Student Data System. Optional and wild modules can be selected by the students using the same rules previously described.

Note that students must be registered on their modules for them to be allocated to groups by the Timetabling Office. The transfer from SDS to the timetable database takes overnight so module registrations must be completed no later than Tuesday of Welcome Week. Schools are advised to encourage their students to register for their modules as soon as possible from receipt of their offer.

Changes to student module registrations after online module registration has closed have to occur manually by the Central Student Administration Office or school administration as appropriate.
New student seminar group allocation
September

Timetable Officers allocate students to subgroups using the scheduling software as per returning students (described above).

Student Data System group administration
Summer - September (specific timings depending on stage and faculty)

Once the Student Data System annual roll-over has occurred – (around 1st August) – then the Student Data System group administration can begin.

The Timetabling Office is solely responsible for Master Group Create, Sub-Group Create and Sub-Group Visibility. Dates will be advertised by the Timetabling Office and depend on the level of the module e.g. if it is aimed at first year, second or third year students or postgraduate taught students. The data from the timetabling system including the allocation of students to sub-groups will be built into the Student Data System group structure and displayed to students.

Note that modules are not available in SDS until the specified dates. A great deal of work is generated if work on modules is undertaken in SDS before these dates. Look out for messages from the Timetabling Office in the summer explaining the dangers of undertaking work out of step with the process.

Room bookings
It is really important for the efficient and workable use of teaching space that room booking requests during the standard teaching day weeks 1-12 and 13-24 are held until the timetable planning process has been completed. Otherwise, one-off bookings block whole strings of events. Therefore there is a process for handling room bookings in a structured way.

Non-teaching bookings for Welcome Week, or evenings, weekends or Wednesday afternoons during term-time can be submitted at any point during the planning process. Any non-teaching bookings during regular teaching time can only be submitted once the timetable has been published to students in September. Exceptions to this process are only events which are strategically important to the University such as Open days, University concert and open lecture series.

Once a booking request is received by the Timetabling Office they are prioritised by which week the booking is required.

Non-modular events can be broadcast to students via their personal timetables using the Student Data System (web) > Group Administration > Non-modular event administration. Instructions for this functionality are here.
**Student texting service**

Students can be contacted by text using the text facility in SDS. There is a cost associated with this so check with your senior school administrator before using it.

**Key things to remember about timetabling**

1) The Timetabling Office cannot clash-check for every eventuality. The Timetabling Office can only check where one or more modules is compulsory and the other optional (i.e. not wild) and where one or more events are for the whole cohort of students on the module. It is not possible to check for clashes with optional/optional module combinations or sub-group/sub-group combinations. Equally, it is only possible to identify these clashes where an event is manually moved. This means that most of the clashes generated by Kent’s offer are invisible to the Timetabling Office and therefore the school timetable administrator must check for clashes carefully using local knowledge e.g. what are likely to be common module combinations. The module choice combinations tool in OTIS may be helpful but cannot take into account where modules have been added or withdrawn. Once students are registered on modules the Timetabling Office produces regular clash-check reports which are sent to schools. Note that first year and postgraduate modules will not be included over the summer since students have not registered.

Clash-checking can be performed at event level where the combinations are indicated in green:

This means that the majority of Kent’s timetable cannot be clash-checked by an automated system and requires local specialised knowledge to identify problems.
2) Building the timetable is an iterative process: whatever information done first may be affected by the very last piece of information. It takes many attempts to build the timetable.
3) It is not possible to build a timetable which accommodates everyone’s wishes: everyone has a different idea of what a ‘good’ timetable looks like.

Useful Information Points

Timetabling Office webpage - [www.kent.ac.uk/timetabling/](http://www.kent.ac.uk/timetabling/)

This has, amongst other things, information on teaching rooms such as size and location and a link to reporting room problems for staff.

Online – Timetable Information System (OTIS) - [www.kent.ac.uk/timetabling/otis/otis.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/timetabling/otis/otis.html)

This is where you and members of teaching can view the current timetable and the draft timetable for the coming academic year. It is also the starting point for submitting bulk information changes.

Module Catalogue - [www.kent.ac.uk/courses/modules](http://www.kent.ac.uk/courses/modules)

This is the students’ view of all information about modules. It gathers data from a number of locations including timetable information. Between January and until the schools release groups around the start of the academic year students can only view the lecture timetable.

SDS handbook - [www.kent.ac.uk/cmsds/secure/](http://www.kent.ac.uk/cmsds/secure/)

This is a comprehensive guide to SDS and its administrative functions.