Interim timetabling policy for academic year 2020/21

Key dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timetabling data collection process</th>
<th>7-27 July</th>
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<tr>
<td>Target date for publication of student timetables</td>
<td>28 September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start of online and in-person teaching for standard UG programmes (new and returning students)</td>
<td>5 October</td>
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<tr>
<td>Start of online teaching for standard PGT programmes</td>
<td>5 October</td>
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<tr>
<td>Start of in-person teaching for standard PGT programmes</td>
<td>19 October</td>
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1. Purpose

1.1. This policy sets out how as an institution we will manage the scheduling of learning and teaching during the academic year 2020/21. This reflects the university’s overall approach to ensuring that appropriate social distancing measures are in place.

1.2. For 2020/21, the university will be adopting a blended approach to delivering its education offer. In practice this means:

   i. All programmes will be delivered in a way which enables students to engage remotely if they need to do so.
   ii. For students travelling to Bristol, some of their teaching activities may be delivered face-to-face and some may be online.
   iii. We will also need to accommodate students who may begin their programme online and travel to Bristol later (for example, international students with travel restrictions).

1.3. The interim timetabling policy aims to ensure that:

   i. All students attending the university in person get a meaningful amount of face-to-face teaching during the 2020/21 academic year.
   ii. As far as possible, activities which need to be delivered face-to-face for pedagogical reasons can be.
   iii. Students do not have clashing or overlapping synchronous teaching activities, whether delivered online or face-to-face.
   iv. The limited amount of available space on the main precinct is used as efficiently and effectively as possible. This may mean group sizes being amended in order to ensure efficient physical space utilisation.

2. What this policy covers

2.1. This document sets out the university’s policy on scheduling of all teaching and learning activities, whether delivered online or in-person and synchronously or asynchronously.

2.2. **Face to face or in-person** activities are those which are delivered on-campus to a group of students.
2.3. **Online synchronous** activities are live online events in which groups of students together with an academic participate simultaneously online at a set time, for example in a digital platform such as Blackboard Collaborate.

2.4. **Online asynchronous** activities are structured teaching and learning activities which are not live and which students complete in their own time. They often include some input and tasks for students to complete independently or with peer to peer interaction, such as through a shared document or discussion board.

2.5. Activities involving a single student – e.g. meetings with personal tutors or supervisors – or small groups of students for non-teaching activities are not covered by this policy and should be scheduled locally once the wider learning schedule is finalised.

### 3. Core scheduling principles

3.1. All synchronous activities, whether delivered face-to-face or online, will need to be scheduled by Exams, Timetabling & Graduation (ETG).

3.2. Our aim is to ensure that all students can be provided with a consistent view of their overall learning schedule so ETG will also collect details of asynchronous activities, although these will not need to be formally ‘scheduled’.

3.3. Data in relation to both synchronous and asynchronous activities will be collected through a revised Data Collection process. This process will close on 27 July.

3.4. Physical spaces will only be available for use in line with the university’s approach to social distancing. This means that capacities will be limited to allow for social distancing and that ETG, in conjunction with Campus Division, may need to put other restrictions in place to allow for safe entrance and exit.

3.5. The use of all available physical teaching spaces will be managed centrally (i.e. schools do not ‘own’ particular spaces), with the exception of specialist spaces.

3.6. The initial timetable build will focus on teaching scheduled for TB1 only, including for units which run on a TB4 basis. A data collection exercise for TB2 teaching will be conducted separately. This will enable teaching for TB2 to be scheduled later when we may have a different understanding of social distancing requirements. However, schools should not structure programmes on the assumption that significantly more in-person teaching will be available in TB2 (for example, by backloading in-person elements into TB2).

3.7. Where possible, when building the timetable ETG will apply a ‘travel constraint’ to allow students with back-to-back activities to move from a face-to-face to an online activity safely. In effect, this will mean that wherever possible students will have an hour free before and after face-to-face activities.

### 4. Scheduling different types of teaching and learning activities

**Guidance and support**
4.1. In designing online and in-person teaching, schools and programme teams should refer to a number of documents published alongside this policy:

   a. Guiding principles for education in 2020/21
   b. Norms for teaching and learning in a blended environment
   c. Guidance on designing for online and highly blended learning.

In-person teaching in generalist spaces

4.2. **Generalist spaces** includes all lecture theatres, seminar rooms and other non-specialist spaces. For TB1 of 2020/21 these spaces will have reduced capacities as a result of social distancing measures.

4.3. As a general indication, in-person teaching should be delivered in groups of eight to 20 students, with an absolute maximum of 50 where space and safety constraints allow. Depending on decisions around teaching space, we may have a very limited number of rooms with larger capacities so group sizes above 20 should be used rarely.

4.4. Schools should consider carefully which activities most need to be delivered in-person and indicate their priorities through the timetabling data collection process. More guidance on how schools should set out their priorities is included in Annex A.

4.5. Given limitations on space, it may not be possible to allocate teaching space for all requested activities. ETG will look to schedule all requested activities on a ‘best fit’ basis.

4.6. Wherever possible, schools should plan to be able to deliver any activities online as a fallback in case (a) it is not possible to allocate physical teaching space or (b) social distancing restrictions change and less face-to-face teaching is possible.

Face-to-face teaching in specialist spaces

4.7. **Specialist spaces** include laboratories, performance spaces, etc. As with generalist spaces, for TB1 of 2020/21 these spaces will have reduced capacities as a result of social distancing measures.

4.8. As specialist spaces are managed locally by specific schools, ETG will work closely with schools to agree how best to accommodate as much activity as possible within these spaces. In planning the use of school-owned specialist spaces:

   i. The owning school should consider any arrangements they have with other schools to share use of their space.
   ii. Wherever possible schools should avoid moving essential practical teaching to TB2 as social distancing measures may still apply or be more restrictive.

Synchronous online teaching

4.9. **Synchronous online activities** could include small or large live interactive sessions (for example, seminars, workshops or problem sessions, or shortened lectures with interaction in chat or break-out rooms).
4.10. Any synchronous activity will need to be formally scheduled by ETG to ensure that students and staff are available and do not have clashes with other activities.

4.11. As part of the data collection process programme teams will need to indicate how synchronous online sessions will be delivered.

Asynchronous online learning activities

4.12. **Asynchronous online learning activities** comprises ‘sessions’ made up of one or more learning activities that are facilitated online, which students access in their own time. They are part of a package of work that could include a pre-task, something to read, watch or listen to, followed by active online engagement including interaction with the tutor. They may involve students working individually or in groups.

4.13. While these activities will not need to be formally ‘scheduled’ as part of the timetabling process:
   
i. All sessions should have an estimated student time on task associated with them to enable students to see how much time needs to be spent on them.
   
ii. Information on these sessions will need to be submitted as part of the data collection process.

4.14. Where asynchronous activities are intended to feed into an in-person activity, schools should look to avoid putting restrictions around where in the week the in-person activity should be scheduled (for example, requiring that an activity is on a Friday). This is to ensure that we are able to use the available estate as efficiently as possible.

5. **Teaching hours and staff constraints**

5.1. Currently standard teaching hours (as at 1 July 2020) are Monday-Friday 9am-6pm (apart from Weds 9am-1pm).

5.2. The existing policy around acceptable constraints on staff availability is included at Annex B, as agreed in 2017.

6. **Changes to the timetable**

**Checking and post-publication changes**

6.1. Schools will see a single draft of the timetable before publication.

6.2. At this stage schools will be asked to:
   
i. Check that all requested events have been scheduled
   
ii. Check whether it has been possible to allocate a teaching space to particular events
   
iii. Highlight any concerns where necessary.
6.3. For the avoidance of doubt, checking of the draft timetable is not intended to produce requests for changes to dates and times. Large numbers of change requests at this stage will make timely publication of learning schedules for students impossible so it is vital that the data provided initially to build the timetable is complete and accurate.

6.4. Once published, changes to the timetable should not be made and will only be accepted in a limited range of circumstances:

i. Identified clashes for students or staff
ii. Unavoidable changes to staff availability
iii. Events no longer being required
iv. Health and safety reasons.

Changing mode of delivery

6.5. The initial timetable build will be done based on what we expect social distancing restrictions will look like in autumn 2020. As these restrictions change there may be a requirement to do less face-to-face teaching or an opportunity to increase the amount of in-person teaching for TB2.

Reducing the level of face-to-face teaching

6.6. Where we need to reduce the amount of face-to-face teaching we are delivering, this is likely to be in response to changes to the legal framework around the pandemic – for example, the reintroduction of restrictions on mass gatherings. In these cases, we will need to move activities online quickly. As far as possible, any face-to-face activities should be designed in such a way that they can be delivered online if necessary.

Increasing the level of face-to-face teaching

6.7. Increasing the level of face-to-face teaching – for example, if social distancing measures change and make additional teaching spaces usable – will require a new process of data collection and timetabling build.

6.8. To give certainty for planning purposes, we will not look to make changes within a Teaching Block. The initial timetabling build process will focus on TB1 (and TB1 elements of TB4 units). We will then review assumptions around social distancing and room availability and capacities prior to starting to build the timetable for TB2.
Annex A: guidance around prioritising activities for in-person delivery

1. Schools should plan a small number of activities which could be delivered in-person, depending on the availability of space. These should cover all years of all programmes. This does not mean that every unit must include plans for in-person teaching, but all students should have the opportunity to engage in in-person sessions.

2. Programme teams should consider what activities they would prioritise for in-person teaching. As part of the data collection process for timetabling, we will then ask for requests for in-person teaching to be put into one of the following priority groups:

   - **Priority group 1**: this should be the activities which programme teams identify as their highest priorities for in-person teaching for each year group. There should be only a small number of activities in this priority group, but these should ensure that all students have regular in-person teaching throughout TB1 (usually weekly although this may vary in particular circumstances). In considering what falls into the group, programme teams may want to take account of:
     - Activities which can only be delivered in person and are essential to achieving professional accreditation
     - Activities which can only be delivered in-person and are essential to meeting learning outcomes
     - Activities on mandatory units.

   - **Priority group 2**: this should be a small number of additional activities for first-year undergraduate and PGT students which programme teams would prioritise for in-person teaching if additional space is available beyond the allocation of space to priority 1 activities. We will collect this information at a unit level but thinking should be done at the programme level around what to prioritise.

   - **Priority group 3**: this group should include a small number of additional activities for students in other year groups which programme teams would prioritise, space allowing.

3. When building the timetable, ETG will schedule as many of these activities as possible within the space available, taking into account schools’ priority rankings in the order of scheduling and looking to ensure a fair distribution of space across programmes. In line with the general principles for on-campus education for 2020/21, ETG may also take other factors into account when allocating available space:

   - Priority for space will be given to first-year UG, PGT and taught elements of PGR programmes
   - Generalist spaces will be prioritised for small-group teaching of those students whose programmes do not require specialist spaces.
   - Mandatory units will be given a higher priority for space than optional units.
Annex B: staff constraints policy as at 1 July 2020.

Constraints that may be accommodated as far as possible

- Staff with a part-time contract, they should indicate on the on-line constraints form which days and times of the week (if specified in the contract) that they are unavailable to teach.
- If a member of staff has a formal flexible working application already agreed and signed off by HR and the Head of School, the detail on resultant availability or restrictions to teach should be provided on the on-line constraints form.
- Some staff may have individual circumstances covered by the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 including a disability, caring responsibilities (beyond child drop off and pick up), pregnancy/maternity, and religion/belief. If these circumstances have an impact on availability to teach, details of the request should be provided on the on-line constraints form.
- If staff have regular internal University commitments that are scheduled at the same time/day of the week, these should be indicated on the on-line constraints form providing as much detail as possible. Examples may include SPARC and other committees, regular departmental or school meetings, widening participation or admissions activities.

In addition, the following circumstances will be considered and accommodated as far as is possible without the need for a formal flexible working application but will need to be detailed on the on-line constraints form:

- Requests to not teach before 10.00am as a result of school or nursery drop off
  OR
- Requests to not teach after 5.00pm as a result of child pick up
  OR
- Requests for childcare constraints at both ends of the day on a part week basis rather than purely a morning or an afternoon basis (e.g Monday and Tuesday not before 10.00 or after 5.00pm)

Such requests from part time staff will also need to be considered in the wider context of their existing part-time working arrangements.

Constraints that may not/will not be accommodated

- Requests to not teach before 10.00am AND after 5.00pm across the entire week.
- Requests to not teach at the beginning and/or the end of the day without explanation
- Travel and commuting restrictions, including living a significant distance away from Bristol, unless it is part of a relocation plan agreed in writing on appointment.
- Requests for a specific teaching free day for research purposes will not be accommodated unless, exceptionally, there is a justified or programmed requirement for this e.g. engagement with external bodies or activities away from Bristol. Such requests need to be detailed on the on-line constraints form, but specific research days cannot be guaranteed.