

**University of Exeter**

**TIMETABLING, ROOMS BOOKINGS AND  
RELATED SERVICES**

**Policy, Procedures and Responsibility  
Guidelines**

**July 2009**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

## Introduction

- 1.1 In 2004 the University decided that a new operational structure for space management was required, for two essential reasons:
- To optimise the utilization of space, in particular for teaching but also for other purposes, such as income generating activities (conferences, events etc)
  - To provide the highest levels of space-related services to the University community
- 1.2 The timetabling and room booking service is administered through the Timetable and Room Bookings Team, part of Registry Services, in the Academic Policy and Student Administration Division of Academic Services.
- 1.3 The major elements of process/systems support are provided through the Academic Systems Team, of Academic Services, through core IT systems already implemented (Kinetic, Scientia respectively). Process descriptions are provided in section 4 of this document.

## Purpose of Document

- 1.4 It is intended that this document serves two key aims:
- To state the University's agreed policies in the management of space, for the benefit of all service users and those involved in service delivery (the document will be maintained on the Web, and will reflect current policy, noting major changes/approval dates where appropriate)
  - To document the processes that taken together should ensure that space is used to best effect and that users get excellence of service

## Coverage

- 1.5 This document is aimed for the Exeter campuses only – Streatham and St Luke's. Separate documentation is available for service users/providers for the Cornwall campus, shared with University College Falmouth.

## Ownership and Oversight of the Policy

- 1.6 The original version of this document was approved by the University's Physical Resources Committee at its 16 November 2004 meeting, following widespread consultation with service users and provides across the University's Exeter campuses. The policy now comes under the Strategy, Performance and Resources Committee, following the re-organisation of the committee structure. Minor amendments will be approved by Chair's action; major changes will be approved by the Committee. The document will be maintained on the University intranet, and service users will be alerted to changes where necessary.

## 2 POLICY DRIVERS AND ASPIRATIONS

- 2.1 The major policy driver is to make the most efficient use of space for teaching. Additionally, there is the need to offer matching services to other University-approved activities, such as conferences, evening lectures and the like. Taking these demands together introduces a further driver - the need to provide a fair, transparent and flexible set of arrangements that manages the potential conflicts where different types of activities are competing for space and space-related resources.
- 2.2 The aspirations can be summarized as follows:
- **Optimised space use** – both for frequency and occupancy levels - to ensure that the most cost-efficient use of physical resources is made. Increased capacity should only be approved on the basis that the current stock is simply insufficient in volume/mix terms to meet projected growth
  - **One stop service to agreed standards of excellence** – service users should expect to receive a service in line with the agreed standards of excellence, and without pursuing different offices for service related to rooms bookings - the arrangements should make the fullest linkage between the services relevant to using space – space, layout, AV/IT, catering etc.
  - **Access to bookings information** – service users should have ease of access to real-time information on bookings made and space availability; given access to timely, accurate and relevant information, service users will be best placed to order services (whilst also reducing the load on service providers)
  - **Management information** - timely, accurate and relevant management data to inform short-long term management is a pre-requisite
  - **Exploitation of investments in core systems** – with significant IT investments already made in the implementations of Kinetic and Scientia, greater use of those systems would give better returns on prior investments into IT, and ongoing investments in staffing resources
- 2.3 Overall, it is intended that the University is recognized as being in the very top tier for timetabling and rooms bookings services and is seen as in the benchmark group that other Universities aspire to.

### 3 POLICIES

#### Preamble and Context

- 3.1 This section seeks to articulate the policies that will steer the activities of both service providers and service users. It has to be recognized at the outset that there are multiple demands on what are finite resources, most obviously space. Not only will teaching activities ‘compete’ for space, but also other activities, integral to the University’s Strategy, such as admissions events and conferences, will at times lead to potentially conflicting demands. This policy provides a platform for resolving these tensions, but only with a level of co-operation and, at times, willingness to compromise will all parties be provided with a service that meets their needs.

#### Categories of Space

- 3.2 Broadly, there are two categories of space, as follows:

- Centrally Bookable Space – this is space, typically lecture theatres, seminar rooms and the like, but also including committee rooms and other areas normally used for meetings, functions etc. These facilities are bookable only through the timetable and rooms bookings service (once the teaching timetable has been completed) and may be booked, in principle, for any event that would be considered appropriate for University space, be that for teaching, conferences, public events or other appropriate activities, normally income-generating.
- School & Service Owned Space – space will also be held specifically by individual Schools and Services. Most obviously this includes office occupancy, but also teaching labs, seminar rooms that are run by that School generally for that School’s sole use only, but with scope to directly ‘let out’ to other areas. Again, in principle this space could be used for teaching and non-teaching activities, but in most cases the emphasis would be much more on the former.

It should be noted that much of this policy document, for obvious reasons, covers only centrally bookable space.

#### Access to Space and Related Resources

- 3.3 In principle, provided the activity is one that would be considered appropriate to take place on University premises, a vast array of potential service users might be given access to the University’s rooms and facilities. It is not intended to try to define ‘appropriate’ within this document, but it would be evident that certain activities University management would not wish to see take place on campus. That broad proviso made, all sorts of activities will form a customer base – local organizations seeking space for functions, dinners etc., conference organisers wanting an appropriate venue, social events and so on.

#### Optimisation of Use

- 3.4 Consistent with the aspirations set out above, a key policy component is to make the best use of the University’s space. That is not just about trying to ‘sweat the asset’ of space by trying to have the space as fully occupied as

possible, but must also be informed by the intelligent use of the different types of space. For example, for facilities that have been built at relatively high expense and with high maintenance overheads, and possibly funded by a benefaction intended for specific purposes/usage, the best usage might be to avoid over-frequency of occupation and instead aim for higher-income activities/users. Other facilities might have very low ‘turnaround-rates’ and be easy and cheap to maintain, in which case high frequency of usage would be aimed for. There is no precise set of formulae that can guide the use of space, but intelligent use of management information must be made to drive the future of facilities management.

### **Prioritisation of Use by Building/Rooms**

- 3.5 There are a small number of individual buildings/rooms that have specific priorities on usage. For example, the lecture theatre adjacent to the Xfi building is set aside for higher fee usage, and for conferences, and will generally not be used as a standard lecture theatre resource. The bookings service will ensure that these priorities are recorded and available to users, and are the basis on which bookings for those facilities are accepted.

### **Prioritisation of Use by Time and Activity**

- 3.6 Some activities enjoy priority of use at certain times of the day, and during certain periods.
- 3.7 The University terms can be found on the intranet (via the timetabling website at <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/admin/academic/timetable>). However, there are a number of academic activities that take place outside of the core teaching period. For example, certain Postgraduate programmes have differing start-end times, such as the MBA and PGCE programmes. The Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry undergraduate programme also has different term dates. Similarly, Degree Day ceremonies and referred/deferred examinations will take place outside of term-time.
- 3.8 Normally, all programmes approved by the University have priority use of teaching facilities during the approved term-times that apply to those programmes. Schools are required to ensure that their requirements are made known to the rooms bookings service in accordance with the publicised timetable; where requests are not given according to deadlines, every effort will be made to accommodate these, but there is the risk that suitable rooms may already have been booked for something else.
- 3.9 It has to be recognized, however, that there are caveats to the principle of academic events having precedence during the teaching period:
- University-approved admissions events, such as Open Days, will be likely to require temporary usage of rooms otherwise booked for the term/year
  - Major “one-off” events might occur that are in the University’s interests to host – it is possible to foresee for example, a Government Minister wishing to launch a new HE policy from Exeter, and in such cases (which will be by definition very occasional) prior bookings would be superseded, and alternative arrangements made for the prior bookings

- Those teaching activities that fall outside the standard University term, are likely to be at the time (especially September and March/April) when the University will be seeking to maximize its conference bookings, so that the net revenues from these events can be ploughed back into University business. It is to be anticipated that during these times there is the likelihood of seeking compromise solutions so that all activities are suitably housed.
- 3.10 Outside of when academic programmes are officially being taught, the priority for usage is guided in the main by the administration by Corporate Services of conferences and other commercial bookings.

### **The Teaching Period**

- 3.11 The current teaching terms are as set out through the timetabling website.
- 3.12 The standard teaching week is as follows:
- Monday – Friday (inclusive)
  - 9.00 a.m – 6.00 p.m. (inclusive)
  - Wednesday p.m. (1.00 p.m. onwards) is normally reserved for sport and other enrichment activities (but may be used for teaching as a last resort, following appropriate consultation).
- 3.13 A lecture/seminar should start five minutes after the hour, and finish five minutes ahead of the hour to enable the next lecture to also start on the hour.
- 3.14 Lunch-times - where at all possible, one hour between 12 noon and 2.00 p.m. for each student or staff member will not be timetabled.
- 3.15 Wednesday afternoons - the timetabling process will be administered so that all efforts are made to avoid timetabling teaching activities for Wednesday afternoons. However, evidence from recent years suggests it is unlikely, given the other constraints at play, that Wednesday afternoons will be free of all teaching.
- 3.16 The full teaching week will be utilized, and student services (such as catering in halls of residence) will be organized in the context of students being required to be available for teaching in all hours of the teaching day/week.
- 3.17 Every effort will be made to accommodate the constraints that Schools have. For example, certain ½ days or full days are set aside for either individuals or groups of academic as protected research time, and it is acknowledged that for areas that require hourly paid teaching, it is generally easier to do so at times other than (say) Friday 4.00 p.m. However, the policy of assigning teaching activities is a student-led one, and in that context it is vital that the full teaching week be utilized.

### **Oversight of the Teaching Portfolio**

- 3.18 With ever greater modularity and increasing levels of inter-Departmental and inter-School programme collaborations, the creation of a workable teaching timetable would become either impossible, or would effectively undermine the efforts to provide inter-disciplinarity through module clashes, without effective consultation with the Timetable and Room Bookings Team.
- 3.19 The DVC (Education) is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the management of the teaching portfolio, and will need to have access to the right levels of management information to enable decisions to be made in planning academic developments. As part of the annual reporting system, the

Timetable and Room Bookings Team will provide both snapshots and forward projections of timetabling constraints, to help guide policy-making.

### **Accessibility for Students and Staff**

- 3.20 Every effort will be made to best accommodate the needs of students and staff with disabilities. The most obvious example will be placing teaching activities in the most suitable space, where it was known that students/staff with mobility issues would be involved.
- 3.21 The delivery of this policy will be dependent upon high quality information being available and being utilized within the timetabling and rooms allocations processes.

### **Facilities Related to Rooms Bookings**

- 3.22 All services related to rooms bookings – room layout, AV and IT provision, catering etc – are provided centrally, mainly through Corporate Services and Academic Services.

### **Charging**

- 3.23 Schools are charged within the Income Distribution Model for use of centrally bookable space.
- 3.24 In principle, all ad-hoc bookings for centrally bookable space for University business (committees, student society meetings, etc.) are made free of charge. Bookings for external customers/events are subject to charges. Where such bookings are made through Schools, charges will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Additional charges will apply for catering, and it is possible that further charges would be applied for portering overtime if this is needed to keep buildings open, provision of AV/IT, specialist support staff.
- 3.25 More details on the charging policy may be found in Section 4.

### **Issue and Conflict Resolution**

- 3.26 Inevitably, there will be times when issues will emerge, and possibly these could escalate into conflicts, in particular should any of the processes (as set out in Section 4) fail to work. For example:
  - A high profile event may seek to use Exeter facilities, but creating potentially major problems for accommodating teaching activities, (most obviously outside of the standard term, but where teaching is taking place)
  - Two activities appear to have been booked for the same venue at the same time, without close-by or appropriate alternatives available
- 3.27 The process section documents the basis for issue and conflict resolution.



## 4 PROCESSES

- 4.1 The following process descriptions should be taken as descriptions of current practice for Exeter only. The Cornwall campus, and elements of PCMD, are timetabled separately and follow different processes.

### Creating the Teaching Timetable

- 4.2 Outline of process, as operated for 2009/2010 – see the ‘Process Schedule’ link on the timetabling website for details.
- Web-based data update tool ready for use (early February)
  - Data update tool closed for changes (early March)
  - Data converted and loaded into timetable database
  - Interpretation reports produced (mid March)
  - Changes made in response to feedback (late March)
  - Teaching events generated, student groups attached to them
  - Scheduling
  - Draft timetable available (early May)
  - Changes in response to feedback (early May)
  - 'Working' timetable available (all outputs, except student personal timetables) (early June)
  - Ad-hoc bookings service commences (June onward)
  - Regular synchronisation with SITS, student personal timetables start to become available (after progression)

### Avoiding Clashes

- 4.3 Optional modules cannot be guaranteed clash free, though every effort will be made to avoid clashes at School/module level in the production of the timetable.
- 4.4 After the draft timetable is published, a School that initiates a change is responsible for avoiding clashes, and should liaise with other Schools to avoid clashes where possible (with the assistance of the Timetable and Room Bookings Team).

### Requests for Changes to the Teaching Timetable

- 4.5 Changes to the Teaching Timetable after publication should be kept to a minimum, as the timetable is used to inform decisions regarding family, childcare and work commitments, as well as enrolment decisions.
- 4.6 Changes should only occur for the following reasons:
- Staff clash with other teaching
  - Approved changes in staff hours
  - Student clash with another teaching activity
  - The number of students exceeds the capacity of the allocated room
  - The room is, conversely, too large
  - The location becomes unavailable owing to maintenance or related issues

- The required facilities are not available in the allocated room
- Cancellations
- Staff sickness

All change requests should be submitted directly to the Timetable and Room Bookings Team via e-mail.

### **Making an Ad-hoc Room Booking**

- 4.7 To make an ad-hoc room booking users are asked to visit the website ([www.exeter.ac.uk/admin/academic/timetable](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/admin/academic/timetable)), here they will find a booking request form and are given the opportunity to check room availability as it currently stands. This service should not be used to request timetable changes or additions.

The request form allows a user to request a room booking - once the request has been made they will receive an automated email receipt of that request and must then wait for the booking to be confirmed. They cannot assume the room booking is valid until they have received confirmation, usually by email. Generally the user can expect a confirmation within 24 hours of request.

Users are strongly encouraged to use the web based request form, however, it is appreciated that this cannot meet all needs. Should a user wish to make a late booking where a speedy confirmation is required, they are welcome to contact the room bookings office by telephone. Also where a request may seem too complex to specify by means of the form the user is welcome to either email or telephone the office to seek advice for their booking needs.

Users are strongly advised not to assume they can use a room without confirmation, even if vacant slots are shown for a room, particularly where reference has been made to a paper copy of a room timetable (as shown on some room doors) that could conceivably be out-dated. Time and dates are shown on all room availability reports.

Bookings can only be made and confirmed in this way for the current academic year. Bookings required for the next academic year cannot be confirmed until the teaching timetable for that year has reached 'working' status, usually by early June (see 4.2).

### **Requesting Services associated with Room Bookings**

- 4.8 Where additional portable AV/IT equipment, catering of any kind, or additional service is required, users are welcome to make their needs known when making an ad-hoc room booking request. Should these additional needs be realised later the user is welcome to notify the room bookings service by making reference to their confirmed booking or booking request. It is essential that requirements are indicated at least 5 working days in advance of the booking date/time. Similarly, ample notice is required if equipment is to be cancelled.

For any other associated services the room bookings service will be happy to advise or help where possible.

### **Schools/Services wishing to Release or Acquire ‘Space’**

- 4.9 A document detailing the processes involved in the release or acquisition of space was published in March 2009.

### **Charging**

- 4.10 Charges for use of centrally bookable space may be found in the document entitled ‘Room Charging – Policy and Application’ on the timetable website.

### **‘Conflict Resolution’**

- 4.11 The system depends on three key matters – provision of accurate and timely information to service users, the co-operation of all service users in sensibly negotiating any conflicts that arise, and an arbiter provided with sufficient authority to resolve otherwise unsolved disputes.
- 4.12 It is hoped that the provision of clear and timely information to all service users gives a sound platform for avoiding the confusion that is the source of most disputes. Information available on the Web and shown on individual room doors should clarify what is booked and what isn’t booked – though changes may have occurred since printing.
- 4.13 Service users are required to be sensitive to each other’s needs. Most disputes will be ‘immediate’ and about who has booked what and when. The on-line/hardcopy information should clarify that. Where there remains confusion, colleagues should refer to staff in the Timetable and Room Bookings Team for clarity.
- 4.14 In other cases, there will be disputes over who has priority to actually book a room in any given time, or who can over-ride an existing booking. For example, whilst it is clear that teaching holds priority during the stated teaching hours/terms, it is easy to envisage an event being planned that might be either massively high profile (a Prime Ministerial visit, for example) or a big income-earner, or indeed both. All parties affected will need to be sensitive to the requirement to both conduct teaching but also engage in outreach/income generating activities. Where satisfactory solutions cannot be found through colleagues working with one another and the Timetable and Room Bookings Team, the issue will require escalation. The arbiter of such disputes will be the DVC (Resources). However, in the first instance the Director of Planning will on the behalf of the DVC seek to find a solution; where that is not possible the DVC will decide how the matter should be dealt with, without recourse to any form of further ‘appeal’.
- 4.15 It goes almost without saying that one of the aspirations for the community as a whole is to ensure that these ‘conflicts’ in fact are satisfactorily managed at the local level, within Schools and Services, and that arbitration processes are rarely if ever invoked.

