

Timetabling at the University of Northampton – Approach and Processes

Aims

The primary aims when building the academic timetable each year are –

1. That for all single honour courses the compulsory and designated modules are available in any combination for each level of teaching
2. That for all joint honours courses the compulsory modules between subjects are available in any combination for each level of teaching
3. That for all joint honours courses where the compulsory modules take place on different campuses travel time between sites is catered for
4. To schedule no more than four teaching hours without a break between timetabled activities
5. That part-time students' timetables are condensed as much as possible within the confines of the full-time timetable

It is not always possible to create a timetable to suit all students. To do so would require limitless space. This document tries to explain the nature of timetabling and the potential for the timetable to change.

Standard Schedule

The University of Northampton timetables Undergraduate teaching within the following schedule –

Monday	9am to 6pm
Tuesday	9am to 6pm
Wednesday	9am to 1pm*
Thursday	9am to 6pm
Friday	9am to 6pm

(* - Wednesday afternoons are kept free as much as possible for undergraduate sporting activities)

Joint Honours subjects are controlled by a blocking system to help avoid clashes between compulsory modules from different blocks.

At level 4 the subject blocks are linked to a particular day.

Block A	Monday
Block B	Tuesday
Block C	Thursday
Block D	Friday

The only exception is any level 4 module that is shared between subjects and therefore linked to more than one block. In that case the module is either repeated on each block day or instead runs on Wednesday morning to avoid clashes.

For level 5 the blocks move on a day; Block A to Tuesday, Block B to Thursday, etc. The same shift in days happens again for level 6. The shift in days is made to avoid the overloading of staff workloads and allow fair access to resources. However, these are guide days for the compulsory modules on each subject and to achieve the second timetabling aim.

Publication of Timetables

Once a timetable is constructed, populated with returning students and checked by tutors / module leaders it can be published online around mid-July each year. However, the published timetable is still considered draft and subject to possible changes right up to the start of the academic year.

Individual timetables for returning students will also be available for mid-July provided they have completed their module choices for the coming year and once that detail has been fully loaded into the Student Record System. The individual timetables for new students or students on new courses will be available online in August / September once their module choices have been submitted and that detail has been fully loaded into the Student Record System.

Problems and Issues

Common issues as to why a timetable appears uneven include –

- Unable to take a combination of modules as they clash on the timetable
- Large gaps in the timetable or the timetable is spread too much across the week
- Changes occurring to what appears to be a set timetable

Clashes and Restrictions

For Joint Honours at levels 5 and 6 each subject includes multiple designated modules as well as the core compulsory modules. It is therefore not always possible with the weekly standard schedule for all the modules of one subject to avoid all the modules of the other subjects, particularly when a subject has a large number of designated modules. As a result there might be designated modules on the award map which are unavailable to a student due to the modules choices from their other subject.

If such a clash occurs it is not possible to incorporate it into the award map as in subsequent years the timetable can change again.

Split level students are likely to find clashes between modules for different levels. This is because the timetable is constructed to work within each teaching level. It would be impossible to construct it around every module combination within all three levels.

Gaps and Spread

Course award maps contain multiple modules which can be taken in various combinations. As the modules are spread across the week, due to such factors as staff and room availability, some combinations can appear to be better timetabled than others.

Less favourable combinations may result in module activities taking place at the start of the day for one module and the end of the day for another module, leaving a large period free within the middle of the day.

Sometimes the gaps are a result of seminar allocation (see below) when a module has a large number of students and multiple seminars taking place.

Changes to the Timetable

Changes to the draft timetable can be made for any number of reasons and can happen at any time. Module activities could move to different times or students moved between seminars.

Module activities might move because –

- Staffing availability changes
- An increase / decrease in module sizes necessitates finding a alternative room at a different time

Seminar changes may also occur because –

- A student changes modules which then clashes with the original seminar
- Seminar is cancelled due to lower than expected student numbers and students are reallocated to remaining seminars
- Seminar is added due to higher than expected student numbers and students are reallocated to new seminar in order to balance the sessions

Prior to the start of the academic year it is not possible to inform all students of every alteration that might occur so it is recommended that students check weekly for any changes. During the Academic Year students will be notified of permanent or temporary cancellations / changes to their timetable within certain time-scales.

An email alert will be sent of changes happening with less than two week notice. A text alert will be sent for changes happening with less than 24 hours' notice.

Failure to receive alerts may be a result of:

- Incorrect email address and / or mobile number in student's record
- Student attending a seminar / lecture group other than that allocated to them on their timetable
- Unavoidable disruption to University's IT / Data Systems

Changes covered include:

- Cancellation of classes
- Changes in teaching location
- Changes in teaching time

Summary

The Central Timetabling Unit is aware that students would prefer a neat, orderly timetable and endeavour to achieve this where possible given the restrictions mentioned. Students are welcome to contact the Timetabling Team with any queries or concerns regarding their timetable. timetabling@northampton.ac.uk