

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. To schedule no more than four teaching hours without a break between timetabled activities
3. 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 for undergraduate sporting activities)

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
- Not being allowed to attend a particular seminar
- Changes occurring to what appears to be a set timetable

Clashes and Restrictions

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 the 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.

Seminar Allocation

For modules with multiple seminars the allocation of students to those seminars conforms to the main timetabling aims but is otherwise arbitrary. As a result some students' timetables may appear more favourable than others.

Students are allowed to request a move between seminars by contacting Central Timetabling up to the beginning of the academic year. The change will be made as long as it does not result in the 'overloading' of a particular seminar. However, once the academic year has begun the request must be made via the seminar / module tutor by completing a Seminar Change Form.

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 an alternative room at a different time

Seminar changes may also occur because –

- 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.

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 at any time to contact Timetabling with any queries or concerns regarding their timetable.