Queen Mary
University of London

Senate

Paper Title	Timetabling Working Group Update Report
Outcome requested	Senate is asked to **note** this report.
Points for Senate members to note and further information	At its last meeting, Senate received an update on actions taken following the implementation of the new timetabling system.
Questions for Senate to consider	• Do members have any comments on the report? • Is the proposed publication date (soft and hard) reasonable?
Regulatory/statutory reference points	The Timetable System responds to internal constraints around space, requirements of schools and the curriculum.
Strategy and risk	QML has identified the importance of providing on-line, personalised timetables to students and staff (if possible), and improving management information about the use of teaching space.
Reporting/ consideration route for the paper	The report provides an update following a report at the December 2013 meeting of Senate.
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Timetabling Working Group – Update Report

Introduction

This paper provides an update to Senate on the new timetabling system, My Timetable.

Update

The Timetable Working Group (TWG) has met regularly since its establishment in October 2013. The TWG has active representation from all three faculties. In the first instance the TWG considered issues that affected Semester 2 timetables and actions still required following the SMART project. More recently it has been developing the timeline for the production of the 2014-15 timetables and considering the use of MyTimetable beyond 2014-15.

Semester two timetables

The start of Semester Two, on the whole, ran smoothly. There was much improved performance of the timetabling system due to actions taken forward by IT Services to address the speed of the system and data feeds. Schools/institutes were also able to use 'add and drop' to make changes to students module selections, which had a positive knock-on impact on timetables, and there was very close liaison by ARCS with the Study Abroad Office. Overall familiarity with the system has also helped users in their understanding of how it works.

2014-15 Timetables

The TWG identified the aim of embedding use of MyTimetable across all of QML and improving familiarity with the system as the key aims for the production of the 2014-15 timetable. It was felt that it would be overly ambitious in a short space of time to seek to drastically change the way in which schools/institutes planned their timetables although the requirement to adhere to the timeline might present significant change for those areas that did not fully adopt MyTimetable for 2013-14. In relation to the operation of the MyTimetable IT system, the priorities are to improve the look at feel of the output, the speed of operation and data feeds and reports for schools/institutes.

The first stages that lead to the production of the 201-15 timetables have taken place in the form of the provision of information about the modules to run next year and updating the academic model accordingly.   MyTimetable is now available to schools/institutes to input their timetabling requirements.

The overall timeline for 2014-15 follows broadly the same schedule as the production of the 2013-14 timetables, apart from the final publication date (see below). The final timeline will be presented to QMSE for approval.

ARCS has established a list of key users in each school/institute to enable clear and comprehensive communications. Training has been arranged and ARCS has met with staff in a number of areas where there was less engagement with MyTimetable last year.

The Students' Union has undertaken a space audit and identified that there are certain times in the week, particularly on Mondays and Fridays, when space is available that might be booked by

students for individual or group study activities. The TWG is looking at how QML can operationalise making this space available to students to book for study purposes.

Publication date for 2014-15 timetables

After some debate at its meetings, the TWG decided to seek wider views on the proposed publication date for the 2014-15 timetables. In doing so, TWG was conscious of the need to balance the interests of students, who typically wanted timetables as early as possible, and schools/institutes, who felt that leave, clearing and other summer activities would impact on their ability to support publication in August. Three options were put to schools/institutes and student representatives; the middle ground option of a publication date in early September was the preferred option.

Student representatives suggested that 'soft' and 'hard' publication dates should be adopted. Therefore, the timetable will go live a few days before the announced date. This is to allow time for any schools/institutes who are behind schedule to catch up. The proposed dates are: 1st and 4th September 2014. These will be supported by close monitoring of the development of timetables and associated reports back to HOS/faculties if it appears a particular school/institute will struggle to meet the deadline.

Outstanding issues for 2014-15

There are still a number of outstanding issues that the TWG is overseeing:

- Provision of reports from MyTimetable – the reporting package is yet to be installed by ITS; we are also exploring using the new business intelligence tool to provide reports from MyTimetable to create class lists, registers etc
- Look of the final output timetable – ITS are working on this
- Ongoing programme of training – ARCS has put a bid into PSPAR around this
- Building names and information – TWG has been reviewing this and QMSE is looking at alternative names where similar building names cause confusion
- Link between study abroad versions of a module and the core version – ARCS is looking at how it can help schools with this
- Staffing levels in schools/institutes to support timetabling, which is variable across QML and not always reflective of the volume and complexity of the timetable in any given area – ARCS will raise this with the relevant managers
- Teaching room quality – this is being taken forward by Estates and Facilities

2015-16 Timetables

For 2015-16 timetable construction, TWG has discussed steps to move to greater use of the auto-scheduler potential of the MyTimetable. It is planned that more information will be entered into MyTimetable with associated parameters to avoid a situation where fixed requirements are made manually. This should improve the efficiency of the use of space.

In this respect, the inclusion of staff information, reflecting parameters for staff availability agreed by schools, has been discussed as the next logical step. This will allow MyTimetable to match teaching activities, staff availability and rooms in constructing the timetable rather than these matches being undertaken manually before entry into MyTimetable. The inclusion of staff

information creates the potential for staff to have a personalised timetable too. While debating this step, TWG has noted the different practices that operate across QML in relation to staff availability to teach. Therefore TWG saw the role of MyTimetable as using the constraints/parameters set by schools/institutes rather than one of seeking to impose any particular working patterns on staff without the agreement of the relevant school/faculty executives.

Recommended action

Senate is asked to **note** the report.

Wendy Appleby
March 2014