Simplifying our Processes

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Timetabling process improvements

(Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics)

Thanks to April McIntyre, Sam Oliver and Mel Parker

MMLL is not always an easy Faculty to timetable for due to the complexity and range of undergraduate and post-graduate courses. Across the Faculty there are different methods for keeping timetable records.

The main problem we needed to overcome was the duplication of work and the decentralised way the faculty was managing this information.

Who was involved?

Our initial working group was made up of three experienced administrators from the Faculty.

The draft was approved by our Faculty Manager, and then presented it to our colleagues at a Faculty-wide Professional Services Staff Meeting in December 2019.

Going forward, we will work with each individual administrator and also plan to present it to our Directors of Section.

What did you aim to achieve?

Our main goal was to create a single, centralised Faculty timetable that everyone could use: we wanted a single live source of information for our administrative staff throughout the faculty.

We wanted it to be easier and routine for administrators to create, distribute, and represent this information. We also wanted to have a richer source of searchable information for everybody involved in timetabling, including students.

What did you do?

As a team, our approach was to take an existing, personalised document and expand it, creating a single resource that contains all teaching that takes place in a given year. It was moved to a central, cloud-based drive to ensure the document remained ‘live’.

This meant cutting away individual section timetables, and getting rid of anything student-based other than the Online Timetable.

The new, centralised timetable:

What was the immediate impact?

We have a Central Timetable for all staff and an Online Timetable for students - and nothing more. In a shared, accessible location we now have a single source of data for:

- All lectures, language teaching, seminars, and film screenings
- Details on under- or postgraduate, which section each set of teaching is in, which part of Tripos it is in, the paper code, who is convening it and so on
- Disability/access information (e.g. PEEPs) we need to be aware of

So far, it seems to have been received positively by members of the Faculty.

And plans for the future?

We do want to do a full draft for the current academic year and will continue gathering feedback, strategising for potential difficulties, and ultimately prepare it for replacing existing systems in the following academic year.

If you’d like to learn more, please contact us at ourcambridge@admin.cam.ac.uk or refer to our Toolkit for some handy techniques to review your own processes.

Why did you need to do this?

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