For APRC APRC.13.05.**09**
16th May 2013

Request for Enforcement and Amendment to the current 'Wednesday Afternoon Timetabled Teaching' Policy

1. Purpose of Paper

APRC is asked ***to consider***, and, if thought appropriate, ***to approve*** in principle to enforce and amend as recommended the 'Wednesday Afternoon Timetabled Teaching' policy. The policy needs to be adopted by all schools and colleges.

In addition to this, there some minor amendments to the policy that this paper seeks approval for.

2. Proposal

2.1 That point 2 be amended as follows (amendments underlined):

*If an identical seminar is planned for Wednesday afternoon**, students should not be penalised in anyway for choosing to attend the non-Wednesday afternoon seminar** and the Timetabling Office should be made aware that alternatives are available so that this can be noted in the booking detail.*

2.2 That point 4 be removed entirely are the document (as seen below):

If informal seminars are arranged for Wednesday afternoon, students must unanimously agree to this timing.

3. Background

In most Universities, it is generally accepted that that the policy of keeping Wednesday afternoons free from academic activity (teaching etc) to allow all students to participate in extra-curricular activities, such as sport, societies and volunteering is a good thing. Indeed the University of Birmingham approved a policy, supporting this in 1999- see attached Appendix 1. This paper serves to remind academic colleagues that such a policy should be adhered too, and also to update the policy.

It is worth noting that many students who represent the University in competitive sport are often required to travel to away fixtures, of which most involve many hours travel, often leaving Birmingham in the early hours of Wednesday morning, or even the evening before to compete, and returning late into the Wednesday evening. The current policy does not address this particular issue, but it is hoped these students are supported by their respective college to manage their timetable appropriately.

3.1 The issues that are faced here can be split, quite clearly, into two separate problems: Firstly, Wednesday afternoon lecture timetabling and placements on Wednesday afternoon. On the first point (as seen in the Appendix 1) there are a number of schools booking lecture rooms on Wednesday afternoons. The numbers of students affected by this action are likely to be in excess of 1000 students. The University policy states clearly: "*Undergraduate teaching should not be timetabled on Wednesday afternoons*".

The policy further states that even if there is an "*identical*" lecture/seminar at another point in the week or students "*unanimously*" agree to Wednesday afternoon classes it is felt that this puts too much pressure on individual students to accept Wednesday afternoon teaching even when actually may wish to participate in sport or other extra-circular activities.

On the second issue of degree courses that include clinical placements – paragraph 5, Appendix 1, this is a more widespread problem, in that across schools that offer courses that include placements students are often entirely unaware of the flexibility that should be offered to them. The policy asserts: "*In clinical years, every effort should be made to keep Wednesday afternoons free*" as well as "*students who have Wednesday afternoon sporting or other extra-curricular activities should be given as much flexibility as possible"*. At present certain schools and colleges appear to be ignoring this. It seems to be a particularly prevalent in the Medical and Dental School. Schools and Colleges are not making students aware of the flexibility they are entitled to during their studies which involve placements. Not only is this very worrying, it is clearly unfair on those students who wish to participate in extracurricular activity.

4. <u>Arguments in Support of Proposal</u>

4.1 Currently around 70% of Russell Group Universities have Wednesday afternoons strictly free of scheduled timetabling.

More encouragement for students to get involved in CV boosting extra-circular activities which in turn boosts graduate employability statistics for University of Birmingham.

BUCS (British University and College Sport) points gaining enhances University of Birmingham's reputation and a large number of these points are achieved through Wednesday afternoon sport league fixtures.

Students are not put under any unnecessary stress and pressure to avoid teaching on Wednesday afternoons from lecturers/Departments/Schools.

Encourages students to get involved in volunteering through society project which spread out across a range of areas.

James Hughes, University of Birmingham, Guild of Students
21/03/13

Appendix 1

Wednesday afternoon timetabled teaching: guidance for Schools

The University recognises the value of student participation in sport and other extra-curricular activities. It also wishes to attract high achieving athletes and students with talents in other areas, and make it possible for them to pursue their sport/interests while studying. The opportunities for such participation are limited if required teaching is timetabled for Wednesday afternoons.

These guidelines have therefore been approved by the Academic Board for Schools to adhere to when timetabling classes:

Undergraduate teaching

- Undergraduate teaching should not be timetabled on Wednesday afternoons, with the exception of classes with an identical alternative. For the purposes of timetabling, Wednesday afternoons start at 1.00pm.
- If an identical seminar is planned for a Wednesday afternoon, the Timetabling Office should be made aware that alternatives are available so that this can be noted in the booking details.
- It should be made clear that there should be no exception for slightly less orthodox learning experiences, e.g. visits to engineering sites.
- If informal seminars are arranged for Wednesday afternoons, students must unanimously agree to this timing.
- Particular circumstances apply in the case of the College of Medical and Dental Sciences, due to clinical years and placements.

The following best practice should therefore be followed:

- Wednesday afternoon teaching in pre-clinical years should not be timetabled, and Schools should adhere to points 1-4 above.
- In clinical years, every effort should be made to keep Wednesday afternoons free.
- Students who have Wednesday afternoon sporting or other extra-curricular activities should be given as much flexibility as possible, and should be able to re-arrange Wednesday afternoon academic commitments where possible. The arrangements for flexibility during clinical years should be well advertised to students.
- The Timetabling Office should liaise with Schools throughout the summer vacation to resolve timetabling difficulties and to prevent infringements to the Wednesday afternoon teaching guidelines. The Timetabling Office should inform the Guild of unresolved difficulties at its earliest convenience.
- It is recognised that timetabling decisions are also made at the start of each session (e.g. to resolve clashes in students' timetables and for small group teaching). In the event of timetabled hours not being satisfactorily allocated by the end of the first fortnight into session, the School concerned should liaise with the

Timetabling Office and the Guild to resolve the problem. All parties should attempt to exercise the utmost goodwill and flexibility in finding a solution.

Postgraduate teaching

There is value in giving taught postgraduates the same extra curricular opportunities as undergraduates. Schools should make every effort to keep Wednesday afternoons free for taught postgraduates, and should not schedule compulsory or core modules on Wednesday afternoons. Flexibility should be exercised for individual students where the School is unable to keep Wednesday afternoon free.

If late bookings need to be made because of a greater than expected demand for a particular course, every effort should be made to find out which students require Wednesday afternoons to be kept free, and the extra rooms booked with this in mind.

It is legitimate to prioritise the timetabling of undergraduate courses over postgraduate courses in terms of avoidance of Wednesday afternoons.

It is recognised that the nature of certain programmes may necessitate classes being scheduled on Wednesday afternoons. The following are therefore exempt from these guidelines:

- Highly intensive and vocational programmes (e.g. MBA programmes).
- Part time postgraduate programmes (programmes on which the majority of students are employed and their employer sponsors their studies.)
- Block teaching

By following the above guidelines, Schools will be able to facilitate students' participation in sport and other recreational activities. Schools are also encouraged to emphasise to students the positive role that extra-curricular activities play in building up a CV and in acquiring skills which will be valued by future employers.