Timetabling Management Group

Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 8th February 2018

Present: L Walmsley (Chair), M Atiq (Secretary), J Ashley, P Brierley, B Caswell,
              M Cheslett, C Cooke, L Dawson, A Entwistle, J Giblin, P Hills, L Ingleby, R Keeling,
              R Kenwright, R Maddocks, A Partington, P Poole, N Prideaux, B Quick, O Sumner,
              J Starr, S Wadsworth, A Webb

Apologies: C Charters, J Hornsby, H Jalil, J Livesey, T Macarthur, F Moss, S Nightingale,
              P Rowbotham, C Sales, A Taylor

1   Minutes from previous meeting
The minutes of the 5th December 2017 meeting were agreed and the following matters arising, not covered elsewhere in the agenda, were noted:
- Some Schools have provided an updated list of their timetabling contacts and these have been gratefully received. Schools can still send their updated contact sheets to the Timetabling Team, but where an updated list has not been provided the Timetabling Team will assume the list is correct.
- PB sent each School their Change Request statistics before Christmas.
- The Timetabling Team received one request for specific reports to be created. The reports have been created and are included in the Timetabling Data Health Checks in Report Manager (see Item 2 for details of the reports that can be found in Report Manager).

2   Timetabling Update
PB presented a paper entitled 'Timetabling Update'. In particular he noted:
- The number of Timetable changes received for 2017-18 to date is down from the same period last year – with 7739 changes requested so far this year compared to 8500 in the same period last year.
- Feedback from Schools has shown that attendance monitoring is carried out in a variety of ways across the University. PB discussed some specific examples of attendance monitoring and the challenges and opportunities each method presented. The Chair informed the group that a spin-out project from the Student Lifecycle Project will look at systems to support attendance monitoring with an aim to implement an initial improvement for September 2018. The recent UKVI visit highlighted the different methods currently in use. AE stated that SEES are using a system that employs hand-held devices and can communicate with Syllabus+. **The Chair asked AE to email the details of the SEES attendance monitoring system to her and PB.**
- There is potentially a shortage of small teaching spaces, but the lack of visibility of non-CTS teaching rooms makes this hard to confirm. As a result of this a decision was made by the Capital Planning Sub Committee that all non-CTS rooms are to be recorded and managed in Syllabus+. This includes casual or ad-hoc, non-teaching room bookings. PB added that the forthcoming purchase of a new I.T. solution for Web Room Bookings will assist with the management of non-CTS rooms in Syllabus+. PB assured colleagues that the ownership of the rooms will not change and the new I.T solution would allow for better visibility and reporting of room usage. LI enquired about the booking procedure of Computer Clusters – PB stated that cluster bookings for teaching will be processed similar to how CTS room are allocated; Schools input

their data in Syllabus+ and the clusters will be allocated based on activity size and the availability of specialist software. Details of this will be provided in the Timetabling Briefing sessions before the data entry period for 2018-19 academic year. The Stopford PC Cluster is still outside of this process, but discussions are taking place within the Faculty about the management of bookings for this room. OS informed the group that room bookings in the School of Health Sciences are processed by reception staff and also School Timetablers. OS enquired about the potential duplication of data entry with the new web booking system being used alongside Syllabus+. PB advised that processes within Schools would need to be looked at, but duplication of data entry can be easily avoided. RM added that Computer Science use a bespoke web boom booking system similar to the proposed new system and whilst it initially requires a period of adjustment it is a good system that works very well. AE enquired about maintaining control of room bookings within SEES and the ability to view room availability and move bookings around on an ad-hoc basis; PB informed the group that it will be possible to set up specific permissions to allow control of who can use the new web booking facility. It will even be possible to allow students to book specific rooms via the new system – the system is very configurable.

- Following a demonstration of Report Manager, PB explained that the reports that have been set up can be used as a contingency for when MyManchester is not working. The reports are also a quick and easy way to check room bookings, student, staff and Course Unit timetables. A group of reports called 'Timetabling Health Checks' has been set up to assist School Timetablers to check for problems with their timetables such as unallocated student sets, double-bookings of staff, students or rooms. The reports can also be used to identify problems with the data structure such as Activity Templates that have not been set up correctly. There is also an Attendance List report which will replace the MyManchester Class List facility which is due to be withdrawn soon due to data protection issues. This report can also be used as a sign-up sheet for students as well as a way to export the student email addresses to Microsoft Excel.

- Whilst there is still no immediate solution to the issue of PGR Student Registrations that run across multiple academic years, it is hoped that future Syllabus+ upgrades and the Student Lifecycle Project will address this problem.

- Staff members requesting to change the layout of a CTS room to a non-standard room layout for teaching are preventing the room from being used for up to two hours due to the time required to set up and then set down the rooms. The additional workload for House Services staff is also not sustainable. As a result of these problems, this issue was taken to the Learning Spaces Group. LSG ruled that any changes to the room layout must be carried out by the staff member using the room and that any room layout changes must be made and reinstated within the allotted time of the room booking. In an effort to assist colleagues in Schools, CTS will look at more flexible furniture with wheels when replacing it in future. PB also reminded colleagues that there are a suite of CTS rooms on the 4th and 5th floor of the Simon Building which already have this flexible furniture and that these rooms can be requested for teaching activities that require a non-standard room layout. The Timetabling Team will also be changing the Room Suitabilities in Syllabus+ which will make it easier to request rooms with flexible furniture.

3   IT Update
PH provided an oral update on IT issues surrounding timetabling including:
- Enterprise Foundation upgrade to version 3.13 was completed as planned on the week before Christmas closure.
- The problems that occurred last week with MyManchester were related to a problem with the Scientia Reporting Database which was rebuilt during the Enterprise upgrade. Indexes in the database that improve performance were lost during the re-build and this resulted in degradation of performance, which eventually resulted in the MyManchester timetables going down. The indexes have been put back and performance is now better than ever.
- Integration was disrupted as a result of the monthly patch – PH has recommended that the patches are not run during busy times of the year.
- The University is close to the purchase of the latest Scientia products including a Syllabus+ web room booking solution called Resource Booker and a product called Publish which is designed to publish timetables.

4   Timetabling Changes process
Following a request to discuss the process of CTS Changes the following was noted:
- It was felt by some members that the Change Request form was not fit for purpose as the fields on it are unhelpful and other fields are missing.
- PB informed the group that CTS need to be able to log, prioritise, manage, share and report all Change Requests. The use of various other solutions has been investigated (such as Google Docs), but University Data Governance stipulates that the data cannot be shared with external corporations. Another option looked at was using Microsoft SharePoint but this would require a large IT project to implement and the technology is not going to be supported by Microsoft in the near future. The reason why LanDesk is used is because it is compliant with University Data Governance and it was the best available option. Unfortunately the look and feel of the LanDesk form did not meet some of the promises made to the Timetabling Team during the consultation process.
- The Chair noted that there were some feelings among the group that improvements in the form were required and that whilst the system needs to be improved; the Change Request process needs to be properly governed. **The Chair agreed to escalate the request to improve the CTS Change Request Form outside of the TMG and will report back on the progress to the group.**

5   Estates Update
JA provided an oral Estates update including:
- A successful bid for a £2.5m endowment fund will mean the refurbishment of twelve rooms (six in Ellen Wilkinson Building and six in Simon Building) will go ahead. The project will target older rooms near improved teaching spaces.
- Bring Your Own Device technology will be rolled out to all central teaching spaces in 2018.
- Coupland 3 refurbishment project - The contract has now been awarded. The scheme has been scaled down and effectively the stock lost during the closure of Coupland 3 will be re-instated.
- Summer 2018 small works in teaching spaces will include: light uplift and AV upgrade in George Begg rooms, a light uplift in The Mill B19, University Place light

review of AV and décor and light uplifts to rooms not upgraded since before 2004 in Mansfield Cooper Building.

- MECD project works are ongoing.
- Henry Royce Institute project – works are ongoing. There is monitoring of works in terms of proximity to Alan Turing Building.
- Brunswick St / Brunswick Park – The next phase is underway and being monitored.
- A query was raised about signage and wayfinding in the Samuel Alexander Building and also other buildings. JA informed the group there was a successful Wayfinding project in the Simon Building and perhaps this could be done in other buildings. **JA agreed to feed the comments about the lack of clear directional signage in buildings to the Estates team that look at the University Signage Strategy.**

7   Any other business
- PB demonstrated an early developmental version of a Timetabling Chatbot. The Chatbot uses Artificial Intelligence to answer queries from users on Facebook and Telegram.

8   Date of next meeting
The next meeting will be on Tuesday 10th April 2018, 2-3.30pm in John Owens Building Ken Kitchen Committee Room.