Policy & procedure relating to faculty requests for special timetable constraints

This guidance has been drawn up by the Academic Registrar in conjunction with Heads of Schools

1. When a member of staff on a teaching contract requests not to be timetabled on a given day(s) or on specific hours of a day or days, this should first be discussed with the Head of School. The Head of School should consider the request and where necessary discuss with timetabling to establish whether it is likely that the request can be accommodated for that academic year. These considerations need to be weighed against the possible implications for other staff and students, in the context of the general management responsibility for delivering teaching. It is not possible for the timetablers to make guarantees at an early stage.

2. The Head of School should give a fair - but also balanced - consideration to such requests, on a case by case basis. The general benefits of a facilitative approach are acknowledged. However, when it comes to the delivery of teaching there are also business need considerations. The University policy ground-rules approved by Senate in relation to teaching timetabling make clear that the University cannot operationally support a scenario in which a large number of academic faculty restrict their availability for teaching e.g. around childcare commitments. That would require a combination of additional resources (more teaching space, more teaching staff) that the University cannot afford, and/or changes to other parameters that the community would not find acceptable (extension of the teaching day, radical curriculum change).

3. Relating this to teaching timetabling implies that particular consideration should be given to the logistic load of the member of staff who has requested the special arrangement, and how this may relate to the treatment of other staff. Timetabling constraints may mean that special arrangements for one member of staff may create/shift problems elsewhere, eg. teaching may have to be shifted to another member of staff because it can only occur at a certain time, or students and staff involved in other courses may be affected by an unreasonable knock-on distortion of teaching arrangements. The timetablers cannot provide detailed ‘what if’ guidance on the impact of any given request, or set of requests, so Heads of Schools should consider the situation using a general feel for the ‘tightness’ of local teaching allocations before discussing with timetablers. The timetablers will endeavour to accommodate special arrangements duly approved by the Head of School for that academic year. Please note that the timetablers will discuss these requests with the Head of School only and not with the member of staff concerned. Also, note that whilst the timetablers will endeavour to work to the constraints approved by the Head of School it may not be possible to facilitate ALL such requests.

4. The above procedure does not preclude a member of staff from making a formal flexible working request. Such requests for a permanent change to a member of staff’s working pattern are normally made on the basis of childcare or carer responsibilities and are agreed where permanent contractual changes can be accommodated. The procedure for making such a request is outlined at: http://www.sussex.ac.uk/humanresources/documents/flex_work_pol.pdf

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