Exam Constraints Policy – Final 15/16

Purpose of Update

The current Examination Constraints Policy has been in place for a number of years and whilst working well does require some amending in line with current practice. The main changes to this document are to the process shown below. The aim of this change is to avoid long, cumbersome spreadsheets and will now focus on providing to Faculty Executives only those modules that need approval.

What Are Constraints?

Constraints are conditions or rules which, when applied to the examination scheduling process, affect how an examination session is delivered. Common constraints include instructions on how an examination should be roomed, or dates which should be included or excluded in the scheduling of an examination.

Constraints in this instance are at module level and are set by the Module Leader.

System of Constraint Based Examination Scheduling

Constraints are requested by a deadline from Module Leaders through the Assessment Data Checker prior to the commencement of the Academic Year. This information is then input into ISIS including any hard constraints (e.g. Postgraduate exam period)

After the deadline, the data is downloaded into the exam timetabling software (Exam Scheduler 3), modules are scheduled guided by these constraints, clashes at an individual student level are identified and a timetable is produced.

Staff should be mindful of hand-in dates as once the timetable is published we are unable to move exams.

Module constraints should not be set in isolation and need to be considered against other modules within the same level and programme of study otherwise it can adversely affect the exam timetable and ultimately the student experience e.g. bunching modules or grouping together assessment dates.

Process

I.   All examination constraints to be input to the Assessment Data Checker by Module Leaders before teaching starts in that Academic Year e.g. mid-September. This should cover all four exam periods - January, Summer and Resits.

II. Once the deadline passes, the Exams Team will check constraints against the "Acceptable Constraints" and "Unacceptable Constraints" categories in this policy.

III. Module Leaders whose constraints are deemed "Unacceptable " will be contacted by the Exams Team to advise them of the policy and asked for an explanation for the request.

IV. These explanations will then be collated into a spreadsheet per Faculty and issued to Faculty senior stakeholders: Associate Deans/Faculty Business Managers

V.   Faculty senior stakeholders will consider the raft of constraints and their explained justification from a Programme/subject level view and approve or make recommendations for changes.

VI. Prior to publication an Exam Timetable Preview will be sent to all ADs, FBMs, HODS, AHODS. Its purpose is to highlight and identify any obvious issues such as missing modules, non-simultaneous modules or modules that do not need to be examined, and also provides a Programme Level view. It is not

anticipated that the Timetable will be adjusted without a clear and carefully considered reason and only for the purpose of enhancing the student experience.

Acceptable Constraints

i. Modules that should be timetabled together because the examination paper is the same.
ii. Modules that must be examined in certain rooms due to software/equipment requirements.
iii. Modules that should be examined in a way that is non-standard, for example a presentation/practical or Viva which takes place over a number of days.
iv. Modules that must be examined sequentially e.g. before or after certain other modules.
v. Modules whereby student availability is restricted e.g. students undertaking mandatory placements during assessment weeks.
vi. M Level modules for Summer Examination periods will be scheduled in the first two weeks to coincide with the PG examination period.

Unacceptable Constraints

i. All other requests – except those approved by the Associate Dean or other key Faculty Senior Stakeholders

Benefits

I. Programme level coherence is less likely be sacrificed for isolated module level constraints
II. A strategic overview of the crucial inputs into an essential function, which UWE is scored against in the NSS – the examination timetable.