

Horizons Exam times for 2015/16

For Education & Representation Board

Summary

Horizons exam times have been in flux over the past few years. This summer, I was approached by staff from the Center for Languages, Culture and Communication (CLCC) for consultation on a number of proposals for when to organize Horizons exams this year. Suggestions that the CLCC put forward included hosting exams on two consecutive Wednesday afternoons and two consecutive Saturdays (or both days of the weekend). They also put forward suggestions that they were clearly unable to deliver on in the first place. In the end, after going around different Faculties and Departments to understand student timetables this year, I gave support to one option while noting to the CLCC that there may be other options to consider.

Suggestions from the CLCC

#1: To provide Horizons exams during lunchtimes across a number of days.

- **Pro's**
 - Potentially students are all free one point or another during exams
 - Students have the opportunity to pick and choose exam times (albeit within a limited range of options)
- **Con's**
 - Students would sacrifice their lunchtimes to sit exams which last two hours
 - Huge logistical and practical nightmare for CLCC staff
 - This would clash with teaching in departments
- **Feasibility**
 - CLCC are clearly unable to deliver on this due to criticism from external examiners, due to the vast number of exam scripts that they had to write for each exam period
 - There will be even more students than 2 years ago that would need to be accommodated

#2: Continue hosting Horizons exams from 18:00-20:00 (and later, for extra time candidates)

- **Pro's**
 - Potentially all students are free during this time
- **Con's**
 - College policy won't allow this to happen for a second year?
 - Criticism from students
 - Disadvantage to students with a full working day, and to students requiring special arrangements e.g. extra-time
- **Feasibility**
 - CLCC are unable to deliver on this due to College policy
 - Disadvantage for candidates with extra-time, or those who have had a very long day

#3: Have Horizons exams on two consecutive Wednesday afternoons

- **Pro's**
 - Potentially all students are free during this time
 - Space will be available
- **Con's**
 - Exams will most certainly take place during the second last and last Wednesday of the Spring term; this is when major sports tournaments are likely to take place

- The last Wednesdays will often see celebrations for clubs & societies, as students 'wrap up' for the academic year
- Violate long-standing College policy to keep Wednesday afternoons for extra-curricular activities
- **Feasibility**
 - CLCC can't deliver on this because of College policy on Wednesday afternoons
 - Not good for us as it may affect whether students can show up for sports and celebrations?

#4: Have Horizons exams on two consecutive Saturdays, a Saturday and Sunday, or one big exam session on the Saturday

- **Pro's**
 - Potentially all students are free during this time
 - Space will be available
- **Con's**
 - Students expected to study and revise at the end of a working week, and also have to come in for something that can have significant impact on their academic performance on a weekend; students deserve to have a break as does anyone who studies and works
 - Lack of staff (and resources to hire staff) to supervise exams outside the working week from the CLCC
- **Feasibility**
 - Not keen to support this as it could set a bad precedent in College
 - CLCC doesn't seem like they can deliver on this because of College policy and because they don't feel they have the resources to do this

#5: Move all Horizons exams to the first or second week of the Summer term

- **Pro's**
 - Students may be on study leave, hence may be available
 - Less teaching during this time, and therefore easier to get away with granting students lecture exemptions
- **Con's**
 - Students may not want to prepare for more exams than they already need to; CLCC exams may also clash with other exam schedules
 - Reduced time for marking, second marking, external examiners approval, and return of grades to home Departments. CLCC think this would be impossible to get the grades on time as we are dealing with over 1,000 exam papers.
 - Exams in some Departments
- **Feasibility**
 - Unlikely to happen due to increased time pressure on CLCC staff and markers, many of whom don't work on a full-time basis at Imperial

#6: Host all Horizons exams during one (or two) 16:00-18:00 sessions, one each on the last Monday and Tuesday of the Spring term

- **Pro's**
 - Less teaching during this time, and therefore easier to get away with granting students lecture exemptions
 - No risk of policy violations as long as there is Faculty/Department understanding.
- **Con's**
 - Teaching may still occur during this time, so the CLCC will have to negotiate with Departments and Faculties for exemptions
 - Some students will have fixed commitments, e.g. fieldtrips, lab practicals, absolutely unmissable special lectures
- **Feasibility**

- Having understood this year's timetables from talking with Department and Faculty staff, this seems the most (and only) sensible suggestion that they had given me
 - Students would be allowed to miss lectures that afternoon to attend their exams
 - If they have an academic commitment that they absolutely can't miss, e.g. labs or exams, the CLCC has indicated that they will organize an alternative exam session during the first weeks of the Summer term as an exceptional circumstance

I understand the CLCC has been pursuing #6 and have given my support to that as the arrangement seem most sensible, but have noted that we will continue to consider other options.