

A College-wide audit of Wednesday Afternoon Timetabling for Postgraduate Taught Students

Background

University students should have the chance to develop academically, personally and professionally. It is vital that there is sufficient space in the timetable to provide them with a balanced educational experience, including opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities during their time at Imperial College London.

The Academic Timetabling Policy¹ aims to address this issue by keeping Wednesday afternoons free for all taught students². Both undergraduate and taught postgraduates should not have any timetabled teaching from 12:00 onwards¹. These 'protected Wednesday afternoons' offer a number of benefits, including the opportunity to: participate in clubs and societies; interact with undergraduate students; meet with tutors; and reflect and digest course content.

Despite the benefits of protected Wednesday afternoons, there is evidence that the Academic Timetabling Policy is not being adhered to for all postgraduate courses. In a paper presented to VPAGE in October 2016, the then Deputy President (Education) demonstrated almost half of MSc and MRes students were affected by infringement of the policy.

This paper, co-authored by the Deputy President (Education) and Graduate Students' Union President, seeks to establish the current status of policy adherence within postgraduate courses – specifically MSc and MRes – across the College.

Methods

We worked with the Head of College Timetabling to obtain the data. Firstly, all event data was extracted from the room booking system, Celcat. This data was then filtered to include only "student event" data. A manual pass-through was performed to remove all non-teaching events. A second database from Registry was generated, listing programmes to which students were registered. These databases were cross-referenced to show which departments and courses had scheduled teaching on Wednesday afternoons.

Data from the Faculty of Natural Sciences, Faculty of Engineering and Institute of Molecular Science and Engineering were included in the analysis. Recorded numbers were rounded to the nearest integer. As the Business School is exempt from the Academic Timetabling Policy², Business courses were excluded from the analysis. Finally, the Faculty of Medicine and Centre for Environmental Policy were excluded from analysis due to issues with data quality.

¹ <https://tinyurl.com/AcademicTimetablePolicy>

² Except Business School postgraduates, who are exempt from the policy
Nick Burstow, Deputy President (Education) and Luke McCrone GSU President

Results

Timetabled hours of teaching and numbers of sessions after 12:00 on Wednesdays for MSc and MRes courses by faculty are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Number of hours and sessions timetabled after 12:00 on Wednesdays for MSc and MRes courses by faculty

	MSc Timetabled		MRes Timetabled		Total Timetabled	
	Hours after 12:00	Sessions after 12:00	Hours after 12:00	Sessions after 12:00	Hours after 12:00	Sessions after 12:00
Faculty of Engineering	351	107	36	17	387	124
Faculty of Natural Sciences	138	79	57	31	195	110
Institute of Molecular Science & Engineering	-	-	12	5	12	5

Results continued overleaf...

Further breakdown of timetabled hours of teaching and numbers of sessions after 12:00 on Wednesdays for MSc and MRes courses by department and course are shown in **Tables 2-4**.

Table 2: Timetabled hours of teaching and numbers of sessions after 12:00 on Wednesdays for MSc and MRes courses in the Faculty of Engineering

	MSc Timetabled		MRes Timetabled	
	Hours after 12:00	Sessions after 12:00	Hours after 12:00	Sessions after 12:00
Faculty of Engineering	351	107	36	17
Aeronautical Engineering				
<i>Advanced Aeronautical Engineering</i>	12	6		
<i>Fluid Dynamics Across Scales</i>			3	1
Total	12	6	3	1
Bioengineering				
<i>Biomedical Engineering</i>	1	1		
<i>Human and Biological Robotics</i>	1	1		
<i>Bioengineering</i>			11	3
<i>Neurotechnology</i>			15	6
Total	2	2	26	9
Civil Engineering*				
<i>Engineering Fluid Mechanics for the Offshore, Coastal and Built Environments</i>	32	2		
<i>Environmental Engineering</i>	22	11		
<i>General Structural Engineering</i>	2	1		
<i>Soil Mechanics and Environmental Geotechnics</i>	31	12		
<i>Structural Steel Design</i>	21	7		
Total	108	33		
Computing				
<i>Computing science</i>	35	16		
<i>Advanced computing</i>			7	7
Total	35	16	7	7
Earth Science Engineering				
<i>Petroleum Engineering</i>	86	18		
<i>Petroleum Geoscience</i>	28	6		
Total	114	24		
EEE				
<i>Analogue and Digital Integrated Circuit Design</i>	31	11		
Total	31	11		
Energy Futures Laboratory				

<i>Sustainable Energy Futures</i>	30	13		
Total	30	13		
Materials				
<i>Advanced Materials Science and Engineering</i>	16	1		
Total	16	1		
Mechanical Engineering				
<i>Advanced Mechanical Engineering</i>	3	1		
Total	3	1		

*: Transport MSc has been excluded from analysis as it is jointly offered by Imperial and UCL

Table 3: Timetabled hours of teaching and numbers of sessions after 12:00 on Wednesdays for MSc and MRes courses in the Faculty of Natural Sciences

	MSc Timetabled		MRes Timetabled	
	Hours after 12:00	Sessions after 12:00	Hours after 12:00	Sessions after 12:00
Faculty of Natural Sciences	138	79	57	31
Chemistry				
<i>Chemical Biology: Multi-Disciplinary Physical Scientists</i>			6	3
<i>Bioimaging Sciences</i>			2	1
<i>Catalysis: Chemistry and Engineering</i>			3	3
Total			11	7
Life Sciences				
<i>Applied Biosciences and Biotechnology</i>	14	8		
<i>Bioinformatics and Theoretical Systems Biology</i>	2	1		
<i>Systems and Synthetic Biology</i>			11	4
Total	16	9	11	4
Life Sciences (Silwood Park)				
<i>Computational Methods in Ecology and Evolution</i>	10	8	13	7
<i>Conservation Science</i>	18	6		
<i>Ecological Applications</i>	22	7		
<i>Ecology, Evolution and Conservation</i>	4	2		
<i>Ecology, Evolution and Conservation Research</i>			16	7
<i>Ecosystem and Environmental Change</i>			1	1
Total	54	23	30	15
Maths				
<i>Mathematics and Finance</i>	24	11		

Total	24	11		
Physics				
<i>Bioimaging Sciences</i>			5	5
<i>Optics and Photonics</i>	23	16		
<i>Quantum Fields and Fundamental Forces</i>	21	20		
Total	44	36	5	5

Table 4: Timetabled hours of teaching and numbers of sessions after 12:00 on Wednesdays for MSc and MRes courses in the Institute of Molecular Science & Engineering

	MSc Timetabled		MRes Timetabled	
	Hours after 12:00	Sessions after 12:00	Hours after 12:00	Sessions after 12:00
Institute of Molecular Science & Engineering				
<i>Molecular Science and Engineering</i>			12	5
Total			12	5

Conclusions

It is evident that there is non-adherence to the Academic Timetabling Policy across the College. Given the importance of this subject it is vital that steps are taken to significantly reduce the amount of teaching that infringes upon this policy.