

Notes of the StARs Forum - Thursday 5th November 2015

11:15 – 12:45 (EEG162)

Present:

52 StARs and Institute Reps (IRs)

Lewis Arnold - **LA** (Vice President Education)

Ross Renton - **RR** (Pro Vice Chancellor Students)

Kevin Pickess - **KP** (Academic Registrar)

Also in attendance:

Elise Masterman - **EM** (Assistant Registrar, Timetabling)

Catriona Fyffe - **CF** (StAR Coordinator, Institute of Science and the Environment)

Ruth Christie – **RC** (Membership Services Manager (Secretary))

Welcome and Introductions: LA welcomed everyone to the first StARs Forum of the 2015-16 academic year and introduced himself as the Vice President Education. He explained that the key topic for this forum was the University's new demand-led timetabling approach, as outlined in Registry Services Briefing Note: RS/15/01 - this was sent by email to StARs and Institute Reps in advance of the meeting and hard copies were also provided. LA said that he would be using the Twitter hashtag *#wsustarsforum* during the forum.

LA introduced RR, the University's Pro Vice Chancellor and KP, the University's Academic Registrar and invited RR to say a few words.

RR explained that he is relatively new in post, having started in August. He said that having a good student academic representation system is key to a university's success. RR highlighted the fact that the University of Worcester's results in the 2015 National Student Survey had been exceptionally good and said he was sure that the StARs system was a significant contributory factor to student satisfaction.

RR told StARs that he had been a course rep for biological sciences when he was a student at the University of Strathclyde, having discovered that a particular group of students were being supplied with lab coats and safety specs free of charge. On checking the rules, it was clear that all students were, in fact, entitled to free lab coats and safety specs and, as course rep, RR made sure this happened. He said how much he was looking forward to hearing from and working with StARs this year.

LA then invited KP to introduce the key topic.

Demand-led timetabling: KP thanked LA and RR for the invitation to talk about this significant change. He explained that there are a number of reasons for the change:

Students regularly report that the timetable does not work for them and this is evidenced by student responses in the National Student Survey. Up until now, the University timetable has been set in advance and this has an impact on choice and results in timetable clashes. It also means that there is an ineffective use of space, with allocated rooms not necessarily matching teaching and learning

needs. Before deciding on the implementation of the new approach, University and SU personnel visited a number of other universities that have adopted a demand-led system to research the advantages, disadvantages and operational challenges.

The changes will affect second- and third-year students. The University will ask students which modules they want to study first, which means there will be no limit on the numbers who can study any particular module. This means that the University will not have to estimate how many students might want to study a module and it also means that there will be no need for students to rush to pick modules (in the past, the dash to choose popular modules has led to the whole selection system crashing).

The final, clash-free timetable will be published in July, once all of the selections have been made.

The University has published revised University Timetabling Principles, which can be found by clicking the link near the bottom of this website

<http://www.worcester.ac.uk/registryservices/1045.htm>

This guidance includes the agreed principle that “No modules are normally timetabled on a Wednesday afternoon to facilitate student recreational activities, unless there is an alternative occurrence available to the student. Or all students on a module confirm that they could attend on a Wednesday afternoon.”

The University has also provided FAQs relating to the new timetabling approach on its website

<http://www.worcester.ac.uk/registryservices/727.htm>

StARs and Institute Reps were then invited to put their questions and comments to KP, RR and LA.

Questions/comments from StARs/Institute Reps	Response
What will happen if particular modules are selected only by a small number of students?	KP: There will be a minimum target of around 15, as there is now
On our course (Archaeology), we are in a different room every week, which is problematic for students.	KP: We understand that this is frustrating, but sometimes it is unavoidable. We hope and expect that better timetabling of rooms will result in improved consistency – staff would prefer this too. We will also be asking staff to ensure adequate breaks between sessions, rather than two- or four-hour blocks of teaching. Having the right equipment in the rooms is important too, so that the teaching environment matches the requirements of the particular session.
How will the new approach work for Joint Honours students?	KP: The University will timetable what students choose, so this should be much better for Joint Honours students. The timetabling office will issue clash-free combinations. Elective modules, which are currently run predominantly on Wednesday mornings, are likely to be timetabled differently in future.

The University keeps expanding and can continue to take on more students. Will there be a maximum intake every year?	<p>KP: We plan to continue to grow in an organised way. The University recognises that classrooms need to be brought up to date and that planned, managed growth needs to be matched by infrastructure investments.</p> <p>RR: There are some Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) which have unmanaged growth, which has resulted in them having to timetable lectures beyond 9:00pm and at weekends in order to accommodate the increased volume of students.</p>
As a history student, I have a Wednesday evening lecture until 9:15pm. I am second year Vice Captain for hockey and the timetable means I cannot mix socially with my team after we have played matches. Around half of our team members are not sports students and cannot play competitively for the team because they have Wednesday lectures.	<p>KP: Academic Board agreed a policy some years ago, which the SU frequently reminds the University about, that lectures should not be scheduled for Wednesday afternoons. When you come to choose your modules in January, we may ask at the point of selection whether you would be happy with Wednesday afternoon lectures.</p> <p>Lewis: It is worth pointing out that this is a national issue, particularly as universities recruit more students.</p>
Flexibility is a good idea. How is it that we can now facilitate this?	KP: Previous technology would not allow this – three years ago, it would not have been possible to adopt the new approach.
Commuting students may not get home until 10:30pm if they have evening lectures – neither students nor staff should have early morning lectures the day after a late evening lecture.	KP: We agree and will aim to avoid this
As a Counselling Psychology student, I was on a 75/25 split.	KP: The system allows this currently. I cannot guarantee that this will be prevented in future, but we will provide more information and advice for students.
Won't splitting lectures and having gaps between lectures and seminars lead to a very fragmented timetable?	KP: We will seek to avoid a very fragmented timetable, but we do want students to be able to take advantage of all our facilities and help them to feel part of the student community. Course leaders will be expected to consider this.
What impact will the changes have on lecturers?	<p>KP: We expect staff to be well prepared. They will not be teaching a whole block in one chunk and we will work with staff on breaking up the blocks.</p> <p>Ross: Students will benefit from having time for reflection and relaxation between sessions.</p>
When will we know when and where our lectures are going to be?	KP: We know you have a less than perfect timetable this year and we are sorry about that. Movement between locations will be built in to the new timetable. Timetables will be published in early July, with module choice

	beginning at the start of February. It is worth noting that in the current system, there is a lot of movement in the timetable between Easter and September, so the timetable has not been set in stone when first published.
In psychology, we do not yet have our timetable for semester two.	KP: We will look into this.
Split lectures will have an impact on childcare arrangements and costs as well as travel times and costs and this will hit students who are parents and commuters in particular.	RR: It is important to understand that if you sign up for a full-time course, you are considered a full-time student. It is also worth noting that big blocks of lectures are very unusual in the Higher Education sector. We may look at building more flexibility into the nursery provision here. The nursery currently makes a loss and is significantly subsidised. Please continue to feedback students' concerns.
If the timetable is not to be published until July, this only gives students two months to arrange childcare.	KP: Both childcare and student employment frequently come up as concerns. We think that publishing the timetable in July gives reasonable notice and the timetable will be more stable from July to September than it has been.
As a parent, I would find it impossible to be on campus five days a week.	RR: There has to be a full-time timetable for full-time courses.
Having a lecture from 11:15 – 13:15 would mean I would have to pay for a whole day for my child at nursery.	RR: Where students are facing financial hardship, it is worth pointing out that the University has a particularly generous Access to Learning Fund to which students can apply for help. LA: We recognise that there has to be a full-time timetable, but it is not realistic to fit this into a 9-5 pattern. The SU is currently only staffed from 9-5 and we are looking at whether we can do anything to be more available to students outside these normal working hours.
Will students still be able to change modules at the start of the semester?	KP: Yes
The Integrated Working with Children and Families top-up course has been very accommodating for those of us who are parents.	
When precisely will module selection open?	KP: Monday 25 th January 2016, but please remember there will be no need to rush into this and we do not want the system to crash. There will be module selection clinics that week and programme advisors will be available.
In archaeology, we have field	KP: Tutors will be aware of this and the weeks when

trips. Having split lectures will impact on the feasibility of arranging these.	these are to happen will be adjusted to accommodate variable sessions.
Where Joint Honours students study across two institutes, how will variables such as field trips be accommodated?	KP: The new timetabling approach will mean that variables will be accommodated and clashes will be avoided.
Will room bookings improve? At the moment, history students have a three hour lecture in the Thomas Telford building which is squashed into one hour.	Tbc
Lots of students commute and we have a two hour lecture on a Monday and on a Tuesday. Is there any chance of having these on the same day?	KP: We cannot guarantee this.
Is there any chance of having a spare room available, so we can split when we have two tutors?	KP: We don't have sufficient spare rooms to do this, so module tutors must let timetabling know if they want an extra room for a particular session.
It is not fair that when a tutor cancels a session we are missing out (and paying a lot of money for our course). Should not cover be arranged on these occasions?	KP: There is a University class cancellation policy and all institutes have a version of this. Sometimes, cover can be provided, but tutors should tell students how they can catch up (for instance, materials may be made available on Blackboard), but it is up to the Institute's management teams to deal with this kind of issue.
Are postgraduate courses affected?	KP: Next year's PGCE timetable will be set in advance
What about WBS Masters courses?	KP: These are treated differently. The Wednesday afternoon commitment, for instance, does not apply to postgraduate courses.
How can too much fragmentation be avoided?	KP: The key is to work with the module leaders

LA thanked KP for answering questions and providing clarification on the new timetabling approach. He then invited StARs and Institute Reps to raise any other issues of concern to students.

Questions/comments from StARs/Institute Reps	Response
Why is it that when students in ISES had exams, some had receipts sent to them but others did not. Is any action likely to be taken to remedy this?	KP: The receipting of formal exams (as opposed to in-class tests) should happen automatically within 48-hours. Invigilators should pass confirmation of students' participation in exams on to the examinations officer. If students do not

	receive a receipt they should contact their module tutor.
Other universities provide free printer credit – why don't we?	RR: We do – every student has £10 credited to his or her student card at the beginning of the academic year. The University agreed to introduce this in response to the SU's lobbying in the previous academic year.
The Edward Elgar building was evacuated when the fire alarm sounded on the evening of Tuesday 27 th October. The evacuation was badly managed, with no staff to provide information or guidance. It was left to students to ensure that people gathered on the car park, where those affected had to wait for around 40 minutes.	RR: This will be taken back to the Head of Security and Campus Services and discussed at the Health and Safety meeting
Students are having problems with OpenSesame	RR: Please see me about this at the end of the Forum, as it doesn't affect students across the University
Students will not know where to look for housing, if they do not know in advance where their lectures are to take place.	KP: Students need to understand that teaching will be scheduled across all of its sites, so that full use can be made of teaching spaces.
An email was sent to students requesting special adjustments, confirming that required conditions would be in place, but they were not provided.	KP: There is a team involved in putting adjustments in place but we acknowledge that there have been shortcomings in terms of providing continuing support.
Feedback to SU on Tour from students using the Hive shows strong support for having dedicated study space available for students.	RR: The Hive is a unique building enjoying many benefits from having shared facilities. We would welcome help from StARs to identify how it can be improved. We now have additional space at the bottom of the Jenny Lind building and we want to develop more informal working spaces. Debbie: There are rooms set aside during peak assessment periods, which are for silent study. At any time, students, including for group work, can use free rooms – students should simply make the reservation with Hive staff.
Is Jenny Lind available 24 hours a day?	RR: No, but that is open for discussion. It would require security staff to be deployed.
It would be good to have a water fountain at Jenny Lind	It is being fitted today!

Written comments, questions and suggestions from StARs in attendance

Kathleen Winwood, Occupational Therapy year 1

- Is there any opportunity for students to access the timetable on one page for all modules? At present, we have to go into each module timetable to see the timetable for each module. Students have mentioned that this is not very easy at times and confusing. This is regarding room numbers and the lecture times.

Josie Hartnett, Psychology year 2

- We have a large proportion of mature/parent students and so are only in 2 days a week which current mature students love (9-3 Tuesday and 9-6 Thursday). Thanks for this so far, but removing this may cause more problems.
- Also, we currently have the same timetable sessions as last year, 30 credits where 30 credits were, only 1 seminar changing. People love this at present. Was this planned or just coincidence as other than the room CC004 everyone but Joint Honours love this timetable which is surprising.

Suggested topics for future StARs Forums

Worcester Week

Submission and use of external platforms ie Open Sesame, PebblePad

Taylor Cornes, PITE 2nd year and Institute Rep for Education

- More information for clarification sent out to all students prior to changes – collate all information discussed today

Lucy Warren, Media and Cultural Studies year 2

- If lectures and seminars are split, I know that for me personally, I do not always understand what is taught in the lecture, however when I then apply it in the seminar it starts to make sense. This split would disrupt that as the lecture would not be fresh in the mind and so key points for understanding may be forgotten.
- In regards to not knowing the times and dates of lectures, many people may change their modules once the timetables are released to fit the dates and times they would find more agreeable.
- Before coming to the forum, we asked others in our course whether they would agree with this change and the answer was a unanimous “no”, based on the issues mentioned above.
- For evening modules, the train (for commuters) stops running after 9:30pm and in cases it is not possible for the students to get to the train station in time. I also feel (as well as others) that it is unsafe (particularly in winter) for students to be walking and waiting around alone in the dark.
- For drivers, driving late at night is also dangerous (particularly in winter) as tiredness does cause accidents – especially if the student has been at University all day (from early in the morning).
- Also, as a commuter (and knowing many others on my course who commute), the fragmentation of lectures and seminars would create a disruption in terms of travelling times and work. This may result in some students not seeing the point in travelling for certain seminars to which the lecturers just give out handouts. These could instead be emailed, which saves time and travelling. It also saves money on petrol and train tickets etc.

Francesca Collins, English Literature year 2

- Is this new system just going to increase the number of people who change modules at the start

of the year? One of the appeals of Worcester University is the ability to commute; a lot of the University's income is from commuters should we not be arguing for their needs on an equal basis to those living in?

- Suggestion

Could we not collect the data of who wants to do what, then construct timetabling based on that data and then put that up on SOLE for students to then select modules definitely with knowledge of time?

- For commuting students, emailing assessments allows pointless travel and time to work on more research, reading or other assessments. Is emailing assessments going to happen in the future?
- How come institutes are not having their lectures taught in particular building eg English in English block?

Millie Davies, Media and Cultural Studies year 2

- If lectures and seminars are split (no structure), the course argued that the learning would be fragmented and wouldn't flow. And they admitted that they wouldn't attend both slip up on a different day. We like the way it was.
- Our course admitted that even though they pick the modules they like, they pick them due to the times and days. So if that is taken away – when given new timetable – students argued that they would just request a module change so their timetable suits them = the timetable approach would be wasted?? My course are very against it. We like the freedom to know the times of our modules – seeing as we pay so much money.
- Commuters are worried about late lectures the dangers ... late night driving especially in winter unsafe conditions. After half 9 from the train station now, trains run less frequently. Waste of petrol would be argued as coming more times a week?
- Living on campus – dangerous walking home at 9pm alone at night. Additionally, 2 mandatory modules clashed this year, so our lecturer put on another lecture specifically for 6 of us so we could do our mandatory module. Why can't other lecturers be this flexible (very helpful and appreciated that lecturer is)?

Roda Abdulcadir Ali, History year 3

- Looked at my timetable for next semester and there is a class that takes place on the City campus at 9:15am. Now for myself and other students taking this module who are primarily based on St Johns campus, this is quite inconvenient to have to travel so far at such an early time in the morning.

Martin-Mario Salvato de Filippi, Marketing, Advertising and PR year 2

- Avoiding 3 hour blocks you will double the times students will have to go to a class. Assuming that a student has 4 modules, he will end up having 8 times lectures a week. Given that lectures are taught 5 days a week, how will that not generate a highly fragmented timetable?