

Planning for Teaching in 2022-23

Introduction

The vision outlined in the L&T Strategy is for more student-centred active learning and more use of learning technologies and online learning where they enhance education as part of a blended learning experience. Central to that is focusing on how best to use the time we have with students on campus in ways that support in-depth engagement with the discipline and making effective use of digital resources and approaches, many of which were developed during the pandemic. The transition to more pervasive active learning will occur over time and will require greater provision of collaborative and technology enhanced teaching spaces. However, it is possible to begin the transition incrementally now and some areas already have.

This document focuses on academic session 2022-23 and does so with this overall strategy in mind. It suggests how Schools can incrementally adapt the teaching model and draw on the digital resources created during the pandemic, whilst recognising that we are still in a pandemic and need to incorporate some ongoing flexibility in our approach. It also captures some of the enhancement work that is addressing challenges (short and longer-term) in relation to timetabling, enrolment and reporting of student numbers.

Planning for Teaching in 2022-23

For the last two years, the University has developed planning principles to help guide teaching planning and teaching timetabling activity. The principles have established baseline assumptions about teaching in the pandemic, and have evolved as the external guidance from Scottish Government has altered. For 2022-23, we will be working within a Scottish Government framework that will align Higher Education with other sectors. This is different to the previous two years where there were often notable differences.

For 2022-23, there will be: (1) changed expectations of the use of face coverings; (2) no upper limit on group sizes; and (3) adoption of public health measures that are consistent with other settings. With that though, remains the need for flexibility in the event of future outbreaks or new variants such that face coverings could become mandatory and some other limitations (e.g. on larger gatherings) could be put in place. The specific wording in relation to face coverings both in classes and when moving around, will be updated as required in advance of Semester 1 to ensure consistency with wider University public health measures and messaging at the time.

Planning Principles for Academic Year 2022-23 are proposed as follows:

- The upper limit of 150 on large classes no longer applies. There will not be a specific upper limit although pre-pandemic teaching space capacities will also no longer apply – they will be reduced due to the measures outlined below.
- CO2 monitoring will continue, and capacities in teaching spaces will not exceed any limits determined by a ventilation assessment.
- Capacities in teaching spaces will be set based on collaborative-learning norms of 2sqm/person (min) except in fixed-seat lecture theatres. This allows more space per student than traditional capacities would allow. This additional space both enables more scope for

collaborative opportunities and provides ongoing comfort for students and staff around class sizes amidst the ongoing pandemic situation. Face coverings will not be required but can continue to be used at individuals' discretion.

- Colleagues whose courses are evolving towards more active learning experiences and seeking to alter traditional teaching norms/patterns of use, will be given priority in the allocation of collaborative teaching spaces.
- Fixed-seat lecture theatres will be roomed to 80% capacity to allow for some additional circulation space¹. Although reduced capacity is not required, it is thought to be a helpful measure in easing a transition for students and staff into larger class settings and allows some opportunity for vulnerable students to maintain distance from others. Face coverings will not be required but can continue to be used at individuals' discretion.
- Laboratory teaching planning can proceed as it did pre-pandemic given additional circulation space typically already available in a lab setting, whilst incorporating new approaches and lessons learned during the pandemic that enhanced lab-based teaching. Face coverings will not be required but can continue to be used at individuals' discretion where PPE or other protective equipment is not otherwise required.
- Wholly online teaching is not expected as a pandemic contingency unless there is a future lockdown. Some online support for late arriving students will be in place on pre-agreed programmes as an interim measure. This need not be equivalent to the on-campus experience but should be sufficient to support them to achieve the ILOs during the period that they are reliant on this online support. For other UG and PGT programmes, registration, enrolment and arrival dates will revert to the normal calendar dates.
- Planning for exams will assume a mixed-diet of online and on-campus exams with the criteria for on-campus exams continuing to evolve.

Altering the Teaching Pattern and Approach

One of the opportunities facing us in 2022-23 is to reflect on how best to use our time with students when we are on campus and begin to alter teaching patterns accordingly. That may still mean meeting in large groups as well as small groups and this is particularly the case in pre-honours years and large PGT classes where the pattern of teaching means that without some large-group activity on campus, students would have only 2 hours or so per course on campus per week. As outlined in the strategy, an active learning approach advocates the use of online resources and interactions (synchronous and/or asynchronous) as part of an on-campus learning experience.

Introducing major changes whilst still operating within a pandemic is likely to prove challenging for staff. Therefore, the figure below offers an **example** of one way in which incremental but meaningful changes could happen without significant imposition on staff time to redesign teaching. It is purely illustrative and may not directly apply to courses with different teaching patterns, but the intention is to support discussion. Based on a 20 credit UG course we could envisage an incremental move from predominantly large lectures to more interactive seminars and concurrently, a greater use of structured online learning as part of a blended and active learning experience.

¹ It may be that in some spaces, alternatives such as a linked, over-flow room would be possible thereby avoiding automatically having to double teach every session.

Example of Timetable Evolution

Wk	Conventional Approach			Potential new approach – Incremental change			
1	Lecture 1hr x 4			Online, asynchronous, structured learning (sl). (Core concepts). Equivalent of 4 hrs.			
2	Lecture 1hr x 4	Seminar x 1h		Lecture 1h x2*	Seminar 2h		1 hr asynch, structured online
3	Lecture 1hr x 4		Tutorial x 1hr	Lecture 1h x3		Tutorial x 1hr	1hr sl online
4	Lecture 1hr x 4	Seminar x 1h	Tutorial x 1hr	Lecture 1h x2	Seminar 2h	Tutorial x 1hr	1hr sl online
5	Lecture 1hr x 4		Tutorial x 1hr	Lecture 1h x3		Tutorial x 1hr	1hr sl online
6	Lecture 1hr x 4	Seminar x 1h	Tutorial x 1hr	Lecture 1h x2	Seminar 2h	Tutorial x 1hr	1hr sl online
7	Lecture 1hr x 4		Tutorial x 1hr	Lecture 1h x3		Tutorial x 1hr	1hr sl online
8	Lecture 1hr x 4	Seminar x 1h	Tutorial x 1hr	Lecture 1h x2	Seminar 2h	Tutorial x 1hr	1hr sl online
9	Lecture 1hr x 4		Tutorial x 1hr	Lecture 1h x3		Tutorial x 1hr	1hr sl online
10	Lecture 1hr x 4	Seminar x 1h	Tutorial x 1hr	Lecture 1h x2	Seminar 2h	Tutorial x 1hr	1hr sl online
11	Lecture 1hr x 4		Tutorial x 1hr	Lecture 1h x3		Tutorial x 1hr	1hr sl online
Tot.	44	5	9	25	10	9	14
	Formal on-campus teaching hrs for students = 59 per week			Formal on-campus teaching hrs for students = 44 + 14 hrs required structured learning online			
				Teaching contact may remain the same or reduce depending on class size and the number of seminar groups.			

In the example above, variations on the incremental change could be:

1. Retaining 3x1hr lecture slots but having one hr every other week for skills-related activity, employability related sessions
2. Adding in weekly 2hr sessions but using alternate sessions for employability/skills-related sessions.

The incremental change in the new approach has the additional benefit of offering staff week 1 with no on-campus or synchronous teaching which, if this occurred after the Christmas break, would allow students to work through introductory material. It might also permit an extended welcome week/induction (in Semester 1) and a refreshers week (Semester 2).

The shift in contact pattern, emphasises the smaller group activity and allows for more active/in-depth sessions, but also makes use of self-directed learning using asynchronous learning materials (a blended approach). Time is required to create those asynchronous materials but much has been done during the pandemic and those online resources could be refined and reused. There are more

radical shifts that some are adopting and ultimately, the teaching pattern needs to reflect the learning design, but the example above illustrates some changes that are consistent with the L&T strategy, and yet are achievable without major course changes prior to next semester. There will be a plan of work with timetablers and academic colleagues to develop a shared understanding of possibilities and associated changes to the timetabling processes and rooming requests.

It is not the intention to add to teaching loads hence the importance of approaching changes from a learning design perspective but where additional resources would support a better learning experience, there should be discussion with L&T Leads and Heads of School as soon as possible. Deans of Learning & Teaching would welcome a discussion with any course team keen to change their approach in the short or long term. Meanwhile, we will engage with a small number of first year UG course co-ordinators in particular, on this evolution in teaching to support the planning, preparation and scheduling activity, enabling us to learn from the process and ensure appropriate teaching space is secured ahead of time.

Strategic Enhancements that Impact on Teaching

Teaching planning conversations are typically vexed because of uncertainty about expected student numbers and because of recurring shortcomings in how the timetabling process works from the perspective of all parties involved. Developments that should benefit planning for 2022-23 are:

1. Activity underway to recategorize teaching activities so that room requests better reflect the type of teaching staff wish to undertake.
2. College-specific conversations (already underway in advance of formal timetabling processes opening up) that are focused on trying to understand the aspirations for teaching next year and how these might be accommodated.
3. More joined-up reporting of student numbers through new, shared, datasets that ER and PIA are using along with (a) a new admissions and clearing committee that the Colleges are represented on; and (b) earlier confirmation of targets.

Other Developments and Considerations

Key questions remain in relation to the Winter 2022-23 exam diet and the extent to which exams can be accommodated on-campus. This is a much more substantial challenge than for the Spring exam diet. Further information about the ongoing planning mechanisms for those decisions will be available shortly.

It has been suggested that one response to the pressures outlined here would be to start Semester 2 later than currently scheduled. To do so would not be straight-forward, would cause additional changes later in the session and could simply compress timescales further down the Semester associated with graduation. Even if it were to be changed, it couldn't be done in the short term. It is understood that a key pressure on the start of Semester 2 is the marking timeframe over the Christmas period. Some of this pressure is impacted by the typical pattern of end of course assessments being submitted as well as exams taking place. There is work underway to explore where this is particularly problematic, and to see whether adjustments to assessment planning could alleviate the difficulties. Please speak to your Dean of Learning and Teaching to explore further.