

The background of the entire page is a grayscale, close-up photograph of intricate watch gears and mechanical components. The gears are of various sizes and are interlocked, creating a complex, circular pattern. The lighting is soft, highlighting the metallic textures and the fine details of the gear teeth and bearings. The overall tone is technical and precise.

PPTA

**It's
about
time**

2013

TOOLKIT

Stages of Timetabling (Section 6)

Section 6: Stages of Timetabling

Who should be involved

The timetable should not be the responsibility of one or two teachers working in isolation. While the process of setting up an option grid and allocating learning groups and students to option lines involves technical skill, this should not prevent a range of interested parties being involved in the decisions that underpin this process.

A timetable committee should be established which incorporates those with the technical expertise in the timetabling process, as well as representatives from each of: the departments, senior management team, the general teaching staff and the school health and safety or workload committees. Meetings of the committee should be open to all teachers.

There needs to be clarity around how the committee operates and how it will communicate with all teachers and the PPTA branch.

Severe stress can be placed on schools when timetabling expertise is concentrated in a few people who subsequently leave. Schools should seek to train new people each year in the processes of timetable development to spread the risk, the workload and the understanding of the processes and its limitations.

Obviously there will be instances when circumstances necessitate compromise, and in these cases if all the information has been made available and people understand the issues, the fairest outcome to all concerned can be negotiated, particularly where there is an agreed arbitration process.

Steps

The policies that a school establishes will be reflected in procedures it puts into place. A known timeline should include the following:

- ❖ Policy setting or review
- ❖ Subject scoping
- ❖ Data dissemination and gathering
- ❖ Decision making
- ❖ Timetable construction
- ❖ Audit
- ❖ Adjustment

Policy setting or review

Schools should establish timetable policies in the first or second term or, where these policies are already established, review or modify them in the light of the previous year's experience. The policies would be made available to new teachers or new board members.

A policy setting processes is outlined in this toolkit

Subject/programme scoping

Ideally no later than the end of the second term, there should be a process for nominating potential new subjects/programmes or suggesting the alteration or disestablishment of existing ones. Proposals would be assessed against established policies and best change management practices.

Data dissemination and gathering

Preferably in Term 3 advice will be offered to students on the range of proposed options which might be available to them. Schools tend to provide some form of options booklet coupled with advice from deans, HODs and careers advisers. The booklets will also indicate entry requirements for any option, procedures for approval of subject choice, indications of where each option leads in future years, qualifications associated and how to seek guidance.

The school will collect back from students an indication of preferences. Frequently students rank in preference more options than they will be taking to compensate for the loss of what become non-viable choices when the timetable is created.

Gathering information on student preferences will lead to the identification of potential subject staffing needs.

At this time it is also a necessary part of the process of consultation to ask teachers what they would prefer to teach or what they can teach in the following year.

A useful exercise at this stage is to use the CAPNA process to analyse staffing usage in the school that year. However, schools anticipating a falling roll in the following year are strongly advised not to undertake this exercise at this time.

Decision making

After the information has been gathered initial decisions need to be made about viable options, the number of learning groups in the same or in

different subjects and at various levels, and which learning groups would or would not run. There may need to be some anticipation of changes - this will require the experience of seasoned timetablers. For example certain options are likely to lose numbers over the rest of the year, while others would be likely to increase in popularity as non-viable first choice subjects were deleted, or as examination results bring the sting of reality to the choices.

HODs, following discussions with their teachers, may begin to indicate their recommendation for allocation of staff to options or learning groups.

Timetable construction

With the collected information the timetablers can put together the preliminary timetable. At this stage the school's policies on learning group size, viability, option width, and the indicated preferences of teaching staff and the recommendations of HODs will guide the construction of the timetable. The anomalies will be exposed and a range of decisions will be required to resolve these. Again, these decisions would be guided by the established policies and discussions with individual teachers and HODs.

At the end point it is likely that details needed for the composition of the timetable, including learning group allocations to particular teachers to suit teaching qualifications, strengths and interests and their teaching load, as well as the needs of differing groups of students, will be included for consideration. In most schools much of this information would be provided by HODs after consultation with teaching staff.

Consultative processes would be set up to deal with the problems that are bound to arise, with an arbitration process that participants have faith in.

Audit

The next step is the running of an audit process over the whole timetable to check for potential problems, such as:

- ❖ a teacher with an excessive number of total student-contact hours,
- ❖ a learning group with all male/female teachers, particularly in a co-ed school,
- ❖ a learning group with all beginning teachers or teachers new to the school,
- ❖ all afternoon/morning periods for a learning group or subject,
- ❖ a teacher's non-contacts bunched at one point in the timetable cycle,
- ❖ a beginning teacher exceeding the 16 hours teaching,
- ❖ a teacher with too many large learning groups.

Displaying the timetable in the staffroom may be sufficient for this, if people are told what they should check for within their own lines. It may require deans to review the timetable in relation to its impact on specific learning groups.

Adjustment

Following the audit, adjustments may need to be made and the revised timetable should again be displayed. Further adjustments may be needed to accommodate changes in student expectations, examination results, student intake changes, unexpected staffing changes, etc.

There will need to be a review process to allow people to comment on the timetabling process to identify areas which can be improved or stressors which may be reduced or eliminated in the next timetabling cycle. This may be, for example, a discussion during a staff meeting or teacher-only day in Term 1.

Possible timeline

Term	STAGE	ACTION
Term 1, current year	Policy setting or review	Establish or review policies. Review previous year's process. Make available to new teachers or board members.
Term 1-2	Subject scoping	Nomination of potential new subjects, or alteration to or disestablishment of subjects, for following year. Assessment of proposals.
Term 3	Data dissemination and gathering	Advice to students on option range. Indication of preferences back to school. Identification of subject staffing needs. Identification of subjects teachers can take.
Term 3-4	Decision making Timetable construction Audit Adjustment	Decisions about viable options, number of learning group, etc. HODs indicate recommendation for allocation of staff. Preliminary timetable constructed. Identification and resolution of problems identified. Audit timetable for problems. Display timetable for checking. Adjustment of timetable.
Term 1 following year	Adjustment Policy review Adjustment	Adjustment of timetable. Display timetable for checking.