

Notes on the Recommended Patterns of Teaching (RPT) exemplars

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A. Introduction

1. This set of notes is designed to be read in conjunction with the RPT exemplars provided on the *P&G course info* webpage¹. Section B provides a narrative account of the process of working on the exemplars, highlighting the different challenges presented by each course. Section C identifies some of the key issues encountered during the piloting process.

B. Notes on each of the exemplars

2. To test whether or not the template was suitable for the broad range of courses offered by the University, it was piloted with eight courses (two from each academic division, identified by Divisional colleagues as 'easy' and 'hard' ones to capture teaching patterns for). At the end of May 2017, five of these (at least one from each division) were complete. Each of the completed course pilots (Biochemistry; Computer Science; Jurisprudence; Philosophy, Politics and Economics; Theology and Religion) offered challenges of its own.
3. At the pilot stage, each course presented challenges in figuring out the best way to include information on specific aspects of its teaching offer. Even courses for which teaching is delivered largely via compulsory courses, such as Biochemistry, also contained elements such as practicals which might be incorporated in several ways. Since the key purpose of the template is to give students a clear overview of how much teaching they can expect, in which formats and at what point in their course it will be delivered, whilst at the same time ensuring that departments and colleges have the flexibility to vary teaching patterns as circumstances require, those objectives broadly shaped responses to the challenges.
4. For **Biochemistry (Exemplar 1)**, most of the teaching in the first three years is delivered through compulsory papers, which makes this part of the table comparatively easy to complete – no long list of optional papers need be considered. However, some discussion was required concerning the correct way to document practicals, as well as the 4th year research project, which doesn't have set teaching hours as such but rather includes ongoing contact with supervisors.
5. In **Computer Science (Exemplar 2)**, the first and second years of the course were straightforward to record, however teaching in the third and fourth year of the course

¹ <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pandgoncourseinformation/>

is mostly organised through the department rather than the colleges. It was possible to indicate this by listing in the Faculty/Classes column, whilst additionally noting that teaching is provided by the department in the 'Notes' box to account for the blank cells in the college teaching columns. Teaching for the 4th year practical project was likewise listed in narrative format in the 'Notes' box as this was felt to be the most logical place for it.

6. For **Jurisprudence (Exemplar 3)**, challenges included capturing the structure (a two-term FPE and four-term Part I FHS), as well as the third year options papers. The structure was dealt with by removing the Trinity term rows for each paper of the template for the FPE table and adding an additional Trinity term row to each paper for the Part 1 FHS template. Working out how to record the optional papers was more complicated: it was initially thought that doing this in narrative format (as was done for the PPE options for FHS – see Exemplar 4) would be the best way of doing so.
7. However, the teaching patterns for the Jurisprudence FHS options differ widely between papers in terms of both amount and mode of teaching; it was thus agreed that listing each option along with its particular teaching pattern would give students a more realistic indication of the teaching they might expect for each course. In contrast, however, the 'mini-options' offered in FHS part I were not listed in full as the range of options changes each year: rather the standard teaching patterns were given but students were referred to the Faculty website for precise details of the available mini-options.
8. As might be expected, recording teaching patterns for **Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE: Exemplar 4)**, which is run by three departments, presented a number of interesting puzzles. The first of these concerned the spatial presentation of information – whereas with the other pilots, teaching for each year was presented in a separate table, dealing with the separate papers provided by each department over the three years in this way would have produced nine separate tables. It was therefore decided to combine the teaching information into a single table per year, whilst retaining clarity by listing courses by subject (first Philosophy, then Politics, then Economics). As the FPE courses for all three subjects are largely compulsory, the combined list is modest; this may not be the case for all joint schools courses, for which a different spatial arrangement may work better.
9. For the FHS courses there were the additional problems that a) there are dozens of optional papers available across the three schools, and b) tutorial teaching often takes place in a different term to the lecture series for a paper. In response to problem a), it was agreed that despite the extensive range of options available, these generally conform to a standard set of teaching patterns for each subject; consequently, these have been listed in narrative format in the 'Notes' box, and only courses which deviate from the norm are given an additional listing. To resolve problem b), the 'term' cells in the College/Tutorials column of the FHS table are all merged to indicate that the expected teaching may take place in any term, and this condition is flagged in the 'Notes' boxes, a separate one of which has been created for each subject.

10. The final course piloted, **Theology and Religion (Exemplar 5)**, was largely straightforward. For this course, the compulsory thesis has been listed as a paper, as this was felt to be the most appropriate way to record it. For the FHS (3rd year) teaching, some classes delivered by the Faculty are 90 minutes long rather than the standard hour; it was agreed that noting this as '8 x 90 minutes' in the Comments column rather than writing the equivalent '12' in the (hourly) Faculty/Classes column would give students a clearer guide to the teaching that they should expect for those papers. In the FHS (2nd year) table, some of the term cells in the Faculty/Lectures column are merged as the final schedule for delivery of those papers has not yet been confirmed.

C. Key issues encountered during the piloting process

Combining or summarising sets of optional papers

11. Done in two different ways: where teaching patterns are broadly the same for each option paper (i.e. 12-16 lectures, 6 tutorials), then this can be summarised in narrative format in the 'Notes' box, as has been done for the PPE FHS options (Exemplar 4).
12. A smaller range of papers with identical or very similar teaching patterns might be combined within a row of the table, as with Theology and Religion FHS Year 3, where four courses with identical teaching (3109-3112: New Testament Theology; Study of a New Testament Book; Afterlife of the New Testament; The Old Testament in Early Christianity) occupy a single row.

Labs and practicals

13. One question which came up in several guises was that of how to deal with practicals and lab work. Resolving this may be a question of scale: where the lab or practical constitutes a sub-element of a single paper, it may be best to include them as a note in the 'Comments' column of the paper in question. However, where labs or practicals are regular and/or constitute a significant part of the course workload, these can be added as a row of the table (see Exemplar 1).

Incorporating room for inter-college variation

14. Several departments voiced concerns regarding the specification of exact hours, especially for example where a course is new and some flexibility may be required. There were also worries that variations in college provision of teaching in some subjects would make it difficult to stipulate college tutorial teaching without opening the department up for complaints by students who suspect that they are getting less teaching than those in other colleges. The template was used to respond to those concerns in different ways. Firstly, the number of lectures, tutorials or classes can be entered into the table as a range rather than a specific number (i.e. 16-18 lectures). In addition, disclaimers advising students that exact teaching patterns may vary by college or tutor should be added to either the Comments column or the 'Notes' box at the foot of each table (whichever is more appropriate for the course concerned).

Variation in the timing of delivery

15. Uncertainty regarding the final schedule for a course or one element of it, such as a lecture series, or college tutorials, was dealt with in the following way. If a precise schedule was not available, for example where a course has been newly created or has undergone significant change (as was the case for the new BA Theology and Religion course – see Exemplar 5), and the teaching patterns have not yet been finalised, the cells in the Faculty/Lectures column were merged across terms to indicate that lectures might take place in either of those terms.
16. Another issue arose where tutorials are not necessarily given in the same term as the lecture series for a course. This has been indicated by including words to this effect either in the Comments column (e.g. for a compulsory course) or in the 'Notes' section at the foot of the table (e.g. for optional papers listed there in narrative format).

D. Further information

Further information is available from Dr Rebecca Ehata (rebecca.ehata@admin.ox.ac.uk, (2) 86604) in Education Policy Support.