

11.19 Evaluating your timetable

Many timetablers are easily tempted to ignore this topic, partly because it is a difficult thing to do satisfactorily. However, it ought to be attempted, preferably during the first half-term of its operation. Inevitably the result will be a matter of opinion.

You'll need to decide who to ask and how to ask them. The boxes (on this page and opposite) show some possibilities:

Among the criteria that you might consider are essential for a quality timetable are the following:

1. The timetable should enable, support and project the school's educational philosophy. It should comply fully with the required setting and option structures. All constraints imposed by part-time teachers and fixed points (e.g. linked courses) should be observed absolutely.
2. There should be a good distribution, rhythm and pattern of subjects throughout the school week. Students should have a good balance of staff (age, expertise, gender, teaching style). Each day should have a balance of types of activity, and academic subjects should not appear consistently late in the day. No class should have two teachers for the same subject unless this was planned.
3. Staff timetables and individual teaching loads should be as close as possible to those requested by the Head of Department, in terms of classes, period-breakdown and rooms requested. Each teacher's timetable should be well distributed, with a good pattern of 'PPA' or free time. Part-timers should not have unpaid 'trapped time'.
4. There should be optimal use of the school's resources, particularly specialist rooms. Travel, and particularly hurried movement, should be kept to a minimum.

See also the list in section 11.17.

You mean that merely because the Head of Science can't be in two places at once, you want me to change all this?



Evaluation methods:

1. You could give all the staff a questionnaire, though this may inadvertently raise expectations for next year.
2. Keep your ears open in the staffroom.
3. Raise it casually with individual Subject Leaders, particularly those that are well aware of their colleagues and are also analytical and not unreasonably demanding.
4. Analyse (with the clarity of hindsight) the printed timetable, looking at bad (and good) patterns (eg. only 2 lessons for a teaching group with both of them in the afternoon).
5. Analyse the patterns of PPA time and 'free' periods.
6. Analyse traffic patterns between lessons if yours is a school with widely separated teaching areas.
7. Analyse commuting patterns if yours is a split-site school.
8. Use some shoe-leather to walk the corridors, both during lesson-change-over times and during lesson-times, observing the timetable in action.
9. Where there are restricting structures on the timetable (eg. setting in French in Year 7) investigate whether your colleagues are actually using the possibilities of this structure ...if not, then before next year's timetable you can discuss abandoning that structure in order to implement someone else's request for something new.
10. At a meeting of Subject Leaders in the Autumn Term, have an agenda item 'Good things about this year's timetable'.
11. Ask some Heads of Year to have a look at the timetable from a student's point of view (maybe talking to a few students) to get their perspective.
12. Ask the School Bursar / Admin Officer to conduct a survey of all non-teaching staff, to see how the timetable impacts on their work.



Did you know that if you read this backwards it says something quite rude about the Head?