University of Cambridge

Planning and Resources Committee

Teaching Space Utilisation Working Group

A meeting of the Group was held on Wednesday 4 July 2012 in the Old Schools.

Present: Professor Young (in the Chair); Dr Cowley, Dr M Edwards, Mr C Edwards and Mr Walston with Ms Higazi and Mr Wilson (Secretary).

Minutes

1. Background

1. The Group noted the origin and purpose of the group set on in TSUWG 1 and the five point strategy for reducing the provision of teaching rooms and improving utilisation rates:

   (1) Implement a really good room booking system which covers all teaching/seminar rooms in the University. Use the system initially for centrally managed teaching rooms only but make the system sufficiently compelling that those involved in room management will want to use it for their own rooms.
   (2) Implement a cost effective system for real-time monitoring of actual room occupancy. Initially focus on the main lecture theatres, but aim to roll out to all teaching rooms over time.
   (3) Implement a package of incentives to encourage reassignment of teaching rooms for other purposes, and penalties for inefficient use.
   (4) Improve timetabling flexibility
   (5) Improve access to all teaching/seminar rooms.

2. The Working Group was chaired by the Chairman of the PRC with the following members:

   Dr Stephen Cowley, DAMTP, and member of the PRC and RMC.

   Mr Chris Edwards, Deputy Director MISD.

   Dr Malcolm Edwards, Head of the PRAO

   Mr Tom Walston, Head of Business Services, Estate Management

   Secretary: Nick Wilson, PRAO

3. The PRC had not set a timetable for the work.

2. Workplan

1. The Chairman said that the oversupply of teaching space was a long standing issue but some measures had been taken to limit it, such as the guidance limiting new teaching space in new and replacement buildings. The strategy should have three stages:

   (1) To introduce a University wide room booking system that all would wish to participate in, leading eventually to every bookable room being included and much more sharing;
   (2) Extensive monitoring of actual usage;
   (3) Lastly: incentives and penalties.

2. The Group noted that unused space was not necessarily expensive to keep empty and might not easily or cheaply be put to other use, but the University's current utilisation rates were not helpful when making the case for capital funding.

3. Room Booking Systems

1. The Estate Management Division (EM) had until now used Planon as the space database. The licence expired in July, with limited support thereafter, and EM was migrating to a new system – the more versatile Micad, which they had purchased and was now live. Software options were limited – Planon and Micad were the only two sensible alternatives. A report would be presented to the next ISSS on the change.

2. It would therefore be necessary to discontinue the Planon room booking system but Micad also included a room booking module which was much more versatile. New fields could be added to Micad by the user; booking restrictions and the assets and attributes of bookable rooms could be recorded. The obvious missing option was room utilisation but Micad was aware of the gap and of its significance to clients; a fix was expected.

3. EM intended that the current users would migrate to Micad room booking over the summer of 2012 when examinations had finished. Users numbered some 500, but most were occasional.

4. The Group urged caution. Micad was not the only room booking system and may not be the best. Micad and alternatives had not been evaluated by users; it seemed the University was not tied to the Micad module – data could be exported to other systems. An interface with the Lecture List should not be overlooked.

5. Micad might therefore not be the permanent solution and it would irritate new users to be introduced to one system only to have it replaced later. Current users were, however, a suitable pool for evaluation. The Group suggested the aim should be to decide on the definitive system within one year. That would allow six months to review the market and six months to consult users. The aim should be a further report to the ISSS before Christmas.

6. Room booking should be a properly defined project with the Group acting as the project board. David Peet and John Norman would be asked if they were willing to join the Group[1].

7. For the next steps the Group wished to:

   (1) Understand the alternatives to Mi-Cad room booking
   (2) Understand the limitations of Mi-Cad and whether they could be fixed

8. The Group agreed that the roll out of the room booking module should be to current users only at this stage and that usability tests should be performed before rolling out any further. EM were encouraged to seek the advice of Dr Alan Blackwell, an expert in human/computer interaction at the Computer Laboratory.

9. Electronic entrance/exit counters should be installed at a large lecture theatre and a small seminar room and their accuracy assessed by comparing the records they generated with those of people stationed at the door.

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[1] Post meeting note: they are.

10. Next meeting

The next meeting has been arranged on Monday 22 October 2012 at 15.00 in the Treasurer's Room, The Old Schools.)

Teaching Space Utilisation Working Group: contact details

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PRAO
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