**UNISON RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON KEEPING WEDNESDAY AFTERNOONS FREE FROM TEACHING**

Unison’s position is that we do not oppose in principle the proposed move towards keeping Wednesday afternoons free from teaching. None of our members has voiced outright opposition to the proposal. Indeed, some of them have voiced strong support for the idea. Reasons cited by members include the potential benefits for students in terms of sporting participation and other opportunities to cooperate, as well as benefits to staff of having a known slot during the week that could be relatively free for staff development.

However, if this change is to proceed we believe those implementing it must take into account the rights and needs of staff and must also consider a number of potential negative impacts on service standards.

We would like to make the following specific points:

1. We welcome the commitment to keeping teaching hours Monday to Friday.
2. We note that Fridays are a very common day off for those on PT and flexible working contracts, and those taking annual leave. This reality needs to be recognised when considering professional service provision for those who are suddenly required to teach regularly on Friday afternoons.
3. We further note that many professional services staff are on contracts which mean finishing work at 5pm, even though more classes will now end at 6pm. For example, AV technicians may be required, perhaps beyond anything planned as part of the current changes to IS staff contracts. Also, staff with family or other arrangements which currently are compatible with their contractual obligations must not be made to feel that they need to work non-standard hours.
4. Greater use of early and late teaching slots will mean that regular IT downtime will be somewhat more disruptive for service users and require unanticipated additional flexibility from IS staff.
5. A new timetable will require a fair distribution of teaching. This does not just apply to academic staff- technicians and demonstrators should not be earmarked for unpopular Friday afternoon teaching slots simply because those with more power and influence wish to avoid such slots.
6. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Friday is a common day for students to work- at least in the late afternoon or evening, and that the numbers of students gaining work experience and income in this manner outnumbers the proportion of students participating in inter-university team sports on Wednesday afternoons.