

New Features in *Options 2013*

Three New Rules for Patterns



In *Options 2013* there are 3 new Rules that you can apply to the way that your option blocks are created (in addition to the existing 4 Rules).

Rule 5 : Limit the Number of Groups in any block, for this subject.

ie. You can say that a specific Subject cannot appear more than once (or twice, etc) in any given Block.

Example 1: In smaller schools there may only be one Music teacher. If you only have 1 Music teacher, but 2 (or more) Music groups, you can use this rule to say only 1 Music Group per Block.

Example 2: There are 2 Food Technology Teachers and 2 (or more) 'Food' Groups, but there is only one 'Food' Room – so you need to set a Rule for 'no more than 1 Food group per block'.

Example 3: Similarly if you have 3 Art Teachers but only 2 Art Rooms you need to set a Rule for 'no more than 2 Art groups per block'.

Rule 6 : Limit the Number of Groups in any block, for this Faculty.

ie. You can say that the Subjects grouped together in any 'Faculty' cannot appear more than once (or more than twice, etc) in any given Block.

Note: the 'Faculty' does not have to be a real faculty in school ...it is just a convenient grouping of subjects for the purposes of designing an Options Pattern.

For example, If you are offering Spanish and French and Italian but you only have 2 MFL Teachers to teach these 3 subjects, then you don't want more than 2 groups of any MFL subject in any block.

Rule 7 : Use student 'Pathways'.

For example,

- some students are on a 'Blue' Pathway (with choices from one list of subjects), and
- other students are on a 'Green' Pathway (with choices from a different list of subjects), but they have some subjects in a common block.

The new HelpScreens give more details of each of these examples.

Maximum Group Sizes

Max. group sizes: 1. Apply loosely & use own judgement later ▼

You now have 4 choices

on the Customize Auto-Create Screen:

1. Apply 'loosely'. (This is the default, see below and was the only possibility in earlier versions),
2. Apply strictly (limit cannot go over by even 1 student).
3. Allow up to +10% (so if the limit is 20, then up to 22 students allowed in a group).
4. Allow up to +20% (so if the limit is 20, then up to 24 students allowed in a group).

The reason why we normally recommend 'loosely' (the default) is:

If you said a max. of 20 students can take Art, then a group of 25 students might still be created in the pattern, but it is highlighted in red to warn you that you need to look at this group, and decide what to do:

- Can we allow more than 20 students after all? (Perhaps it's a very able group of well-behaved students?)
- Can the group be split into 2 groups?
- If we really can only allow 20 students, which 5 should we disappoint?
- What Reserve Choices do those 25 students have – could some be satisfied by their Reserve Choice?

We still take the view that 'loosely' is the best way forward, because it allows you to answer these questions and to consider all the possibilities, whereas a 'strict' interpretation of the Max. Group Size would simply say that 5 of those students could not be satisfied, with no human judgement applied.

However, the other (stricter) settings are now available if you feel differently about how to handle group sizes in your school

continued...

We have continued to develop our unique **TOOLS** system ('TimeTabler Options On-Line System').

- The web-pages that the students/parents see can now be customized in more ways. You can easily add your own header and your school's logo/badge.
- It's easier to enable/disable TOOLS at the start/end of the period during which you allow students/parents to enter their Choices on-line. (Any student/parent who logs in after the expiry date sees a customized message from you, telling them what to do now.)
- It is now easier to see which Students have not yet made their choices and need chivvying.
- You can see the 'Popularity' of subjects at any stage, so you can see how the popularity of subjects is shaping up as students/parents make their choices on-line.

| Subject No. | Abbreviation | Name | Popularity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Art | Art | 13 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 0 |
| 2 | Dr | Drama | 6 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| 3 | Fr | French | 11 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | Fo | Food Technology | 8 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| 5 | Gg | Geography | 12 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 0 |

- The letter that you can send to parents (telling them what to do) can now be adjusted better.
- A list of passwords/PINs can now be printed out so (while kept securely) you or your office staff can more easily help any students who have lost/forgotten their password/PIN.

(As before, if you or your IT Manager don't want to host the TOOLS system, it can be hosted for you for a nominal fee by MIST Services Ltd.)

Other new features in Options 2013:

- There are new enhanced HelpScreens.



- Better reporting of Students who have not yet made all their Choices.
- The Clash Table has been improved in 3 ways:

- (i) It can now be sorted by subject or by popularity.
- (ii) An extra column now shows the average group size to make it easier to spot any problems.
- (ii) There is an extra column of Comments to warn you of potential problems. For example:
 - 42 students means 3 groups (not 2) ! (ie. needs more groups that you said you could afford)
 - only 2 students want Latin (ie. fewer than your stated minimum group size)
 - no-one wants Italian (ie. an extreme case of the example above)



- If you don't have an MIS you can print out Set Lists for Core Subjects as well as for option groups.
- If you accidentally or deliberately break a Rule that you have previously set up, there is now better reporting of the reason.
- Longer Subject Codes are now allowed, to aid exporting to an MIS.
- There are even more Exports to Excel, HTML, CSV.