



Data Management Services

THE BUSINESS OF EDUCATION

Options A Quick Guide

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The Software – Focus Buttons & Menus

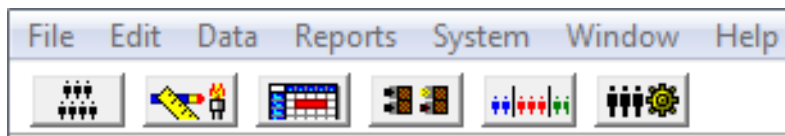
There are 5 Focus Buttons within Options:



Each button leads to a different area of functionality concerned with the Options process.

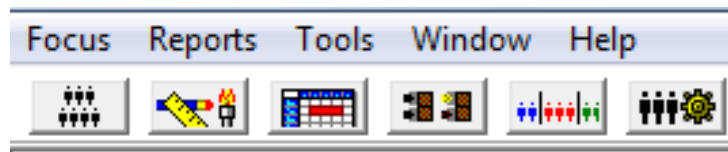
The **Menu** system comes in 2 versions (Process menu and Focus menu), each containing the same functionality but locating items in different places. It is recommended (and assumed in this booklet) that the **Focus** menu is used. This has similarities with the Nova-T menu system.

Process Menu



The Process Menu can be replaced by the Focus menu via **System | Focus Menu**.

Focus Menu



The Focus menu can be replaced by the Process Menu via **Tools | Process Menu**.

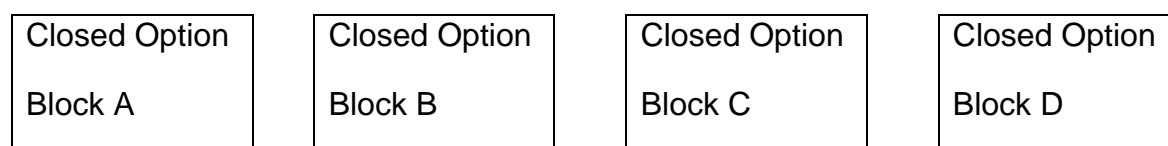
Please ensure that you maximise the Options window so that all buttons are visible in the Solution Editor window.

Differing approaches to options

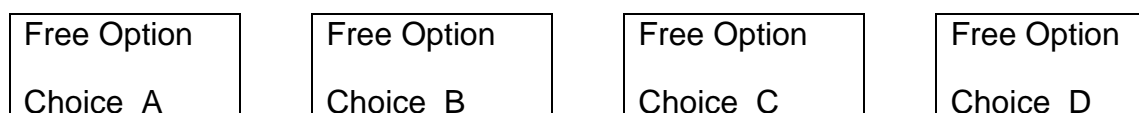
Options is a process that occurs once a year and primarily involves two year groups, usually the current years 9 and 11. It is designed to help organise the timetable structure so as to allow students to study their chosen subjects.

The aim is to ensure that all (or nearly all) students will, next year, be able to study the subjects of their choice. There may be limitations on these choices. For example, a school might dictate that students in Year 10 should study a modern foreign language, a technology subject and a science, although not all subjects will necessarily feature in the 'Options sorting' process.

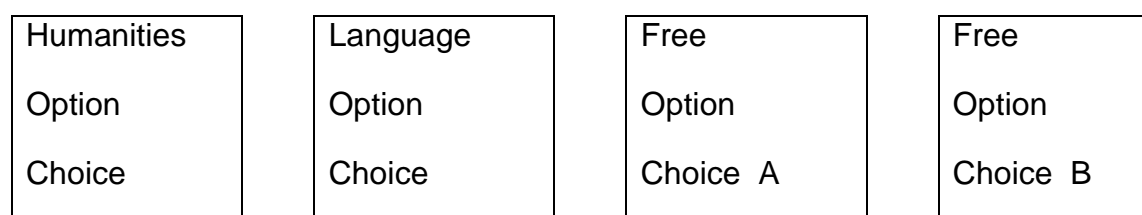
The imposition of these limitations has meant that some schools have opted for a structured approach. This may take the form, as shown below, of four 'blocks' of subjects from which students make their choice. This is known as a **Closed** system. In this system the subjects within each Option Block are predetermined.



Others have gone for a more '**open**' approach, which means that students can have a 'free' choice. The blocks below, start empty, and only become filled after the student's choices have been analysed. The numbers choosing each subject and the availability of classes determines the way they become filled.



The third model incorporates both of the above approaches:



In this system although all students must choose a Language and a Humanities subject, the school does not have to set up a Humanity block and a Language block on the timetable.

SIMS Options is designed to facilitate any of the above approaches, although it is arguable whether use of the software is really necessary if the school subscribes to the closed approach.

Terminology:

Bands - A band represents a population of students. In Year 10 commonly used structures include whole year groupings (everybody does Mathematics at the same time) or half year groupings (half of the year will do Mathematics whilst the other half are being taught a different subject). Students are placed into appropriate bands using the academic management routines in SIMS.

Blocks - A group of subjects that will be taught at the same time.

Sets - Groups of students studying the same subject (at the same time).

Classes - Groups of students not necessarily studying the same subjects.

The Options Process

An options process can be seen as falling into 10 stages. For the purpose of using **SIMS Options** the process is referred to as an **Implementation**. The steps below illustrate an Implementation. Each step is given more detailed explanation immediately following this summary:

1. Set up Nova-T6 and SIMS ready for the next Academic year
2. Create a new implementation

Either:-

- a. Set up Options Offer in SIMS
- b. Enter student choices in SIMS
- c. Import Options Offer from SIMS into Options 5

Or

- a. Import the Curriculum from NOVA-T6
- b. Import students from SIMS
- c. Enter Student choices in Options 5
3. Analyse student choices
4. Automatically and/or manually create classes
5. Set up the structure of the Curriculum, placing classes in blocks
6. Allocate students to classes
7. Edit the block structure and re-allocate
8. Transfer the Curriculum to NOVA (Optional)
9. Export the Curriculum & Timetable from NOVA to SIMS
10. Transfer the Student Class Membership from Options to SIMS

Or

Use Options Online – please refer to document **DMS015 A Guide to setting up SIMS Options Online** available at

<http://www.thegrid.org.uk/info/traded/sitss/timetables/options/>

Set up Nova-T6 and SIMS ready for the next Academic year

The next Academic Year must be created before attempting to use Options. As the option process often begins before that of the timetable, it is crucial that there be close collaboration between all staff concerned with each process. It is more than likely that the Nova-T6 routine Transfer Curriculum will be used to pass parts of the current structure into the next year's dataset. Empty option blocks should be set up in the new dataset. New subjects should be added in **Plan | Subjects**. There should be a new academic year in SIMS and the Pastoral Promotion routine should have been carried out. The Curriculum and Timetable (although still very provisional) should be sent from Nova to SQL using an appropriate date range for the following academic year unless you are using SIMS Options Offer. Students involved in the options process should have been placed in appropriate bands (for next year) via the academic management routines within SIMS.

Create a new implementation

Tools | Implementation Manager | Create New

(Process Menu | File | Implementations | Create New)

There are two methods of starting the options process:


- Using students and their choices from Options Offer
 - Once the Implementation has been created, the students and their choices are imported from SIMS
- Using students from **SIMS** and curriculum from Nova-T6
 - Once the implementation has been created, the Curriculum is imported from Nova via the route **Tools | Transfers | Import Curriculum from Nova-T6** (File | Import | Curriculum from Nova-T6) and the students are imported from SIMS via the route **Tools | Transfers | Import Students** (File | Import | Students)
 - Student choices are entered on the Student focus. Note that the software thinks the subject at the top of the choice list for a student is the subject they most want to take. This means that you must put compulsory choices in first for a student

Analyse student choices

Reports | Course

Many schools will want to control the classes being set up, mainly because of the difficulty of scarce teaching resources, so some analysis is recommended. Reporting facilities are available for senior staff, HoDs, Form Tutors and Parents.

Automatically or manually create classes

Once students choices have been entered, the software can predict the number of classes that are required if the class size parameter has been set up.  (Course Focus), double click on course to edit class size parameters.

Where it is known beforehand how many classes of a subject are to run, these can be created manually. Alternatively, the software can be used to create classes automatically.

 (Class Focus) | Class | Generate Classes from Choices)

Process Menu (Class Focus) | Process | Generate Classes

Or  (Solution Editor) |



Set up the structure of the Curriculum

Once choices have been recorded and analysed, users will be ready to enter the classes into the blocks. This can be carried out automatically, or manually, or a mixture of the two approaches could be employed.



(Class Focus) | Class | Auto Place into Blocks

Process | (Class Focus) | Process | Block Assignment | Automatic



(Class Focus) | Class | Manual Place into Blocks

Process | (Class Focus) | Process | Block Assignment | Manual

Or  **(Solution Editor)** | 

Allocate students to classes

This is the process of putting students into classes and the parameter that is mainly considered is class size. In Options this parameter is given as 3 numbers - the first is a minimum size of the class; the second is a preferred class size and the third is a maximum class size. In allocating student choices, the software will try to work to those constraints and will only exceed the maximum if it is necessary. However, class size **will** be exceeded if this allows the application to successfully allocate students.



(Student Focus) | Student | Allocate

Process | (Class Focus) | Process | Allocate

Or  **(Solution Editor)** | 

Edit allocations

This allows you to edit any allocations already made. It may be simply a case of changing from one set to another within the same block or, where there is more than one way of satisfying the choices of a particular pupil, to swap between blocks. It is recommended that once the transfer into SQL has taken place, further editing be carried out in SIMS and not Options.



(Solution Editor)

Transfer the Structure to Nova

Once the options process is complete it is necessary to transfer the curriculum so that the classes created in Options populate the appropriate blocks in Nova-T6. It is entirely possible (and is unlikely to cause problems) that the Timetabler may manually have entered the groups into the blocks in Nova, thus replicating the block structure in Options. This being the case, there is no need to export from Options to Nova-T6 but users are advised to ensure that the class names in Nova-T6 match the class names in Options as far as possible.

Export Curriculum & Timetable from Nova to SQL

The curriculum structure (now containing the groups within the option blocks) must be sent from Nova to SQL. If users fail to carry out this step, then Options will be unable to send the class memberships into SIMS (because there won't be any groups defined).

Transfer the Class Memberships from Options to SQL

The final step is to transfer the class memberships from Options to SIMS via the appropriate routine in Options. This populates the appropriate classes in SIMS with students.

Tools | Transfers | Export Student Allocations

Further Reading

See the documentation on the website at

<http://www.thegrid.org.uk/info/traded/sitss/timetables/options/>

SIMS Homepage | Documentation | Handbooks | Timetabling and Curriculum



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