Moving to Booker: the UIS reception team

Why was the project needed? The reception team at University Information Services (UIS) used Google Calendars to manage room bookings at the Roger Needham Building. While this was a cheap and accessible solution, it wasn't designed for centralised management of meeting rooms and this caused some issues. For example, Google Calendars doesn't allow for different user roles or a workflow for requesting bookings and approving them, and so it allowed multiple users to book the same room at the same time. The reception team were keen to try the new room booking service, 'Booker', to alleviate issues like these and gain additional functionality, such as comprehensive information about each room and its facilities.

How was it run? The Booker team worked closely with the reception team to decide the timing of the switch-over to the new system, which was carried out smoothly in the first week of January – traditionally a quiet time in the office. Before the switch-over, the reception team were given training in the new system, and the service team made sure that all of the meetings booked in Google Calendars were transferred over to Booker to ensure seamless continuity.

"The Booker team were brilliant," said Mac Ralph, senior member of the reception team. "Whenever I had a query, they helped me straight away and really listened. It gave me a lot of confidence as we switched over to the new system." Feedback from users at UIS was captured by the Booker team and used to refine the service in the run-up to its launch for the wider University.

What was achieved? The transition went smoothly and Booker has proved much easier to use – particularly when booking recurring meetings. It has also prevented double bookings, which was a frequent problem when using Google Calendars. "The application is easy on the eye," said Jacqui Browning, a member of the reception team, "and you can see room equipment, facilities and capacity, which is really useful when trying to find an appropriate room to suit a request."

Booker has also made it easy for UIS to share rooms with any of its neighbours on the West Cambridge site who adopt the system. Dr Rachel Hooper, Deputy Director for Departmental Operations at UIS, explains that the institution welcomed room sharing: "At UIS we generally have enough space for our needs, but room sharing will give us the reassurance that, on those rare occasions when everything in the building is booked out, we could quickly and easily find another suitable space nearby. We are happy to share our rooms with our neighbours on the West Cambridge Site and offer them the same reassurance in return."

"We haven't had many booking requests for our rooms from other departments yet," noted Mac, "but I'm confident we'll be able to manage any that come in. We get to approve all booking requests, so we can make sure our regular meetings are accommodated first."
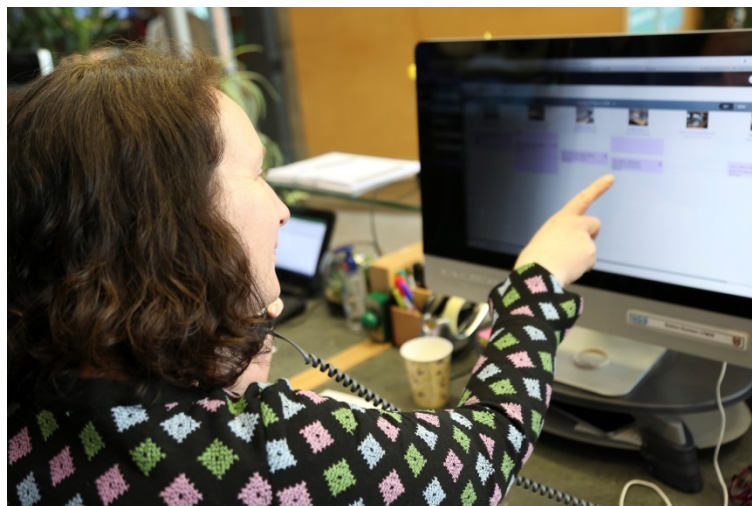
A member of the UIS reception team using Booker