

Science Revision Weekend

A guide for those with special needs

We are pleased that each year students with special needs book on the weekend. Before the event, we often field questions about certain aspects of the weekend relevant to those special needs. Although some of those questions may be answered in the FAQs (see main website), we thought it was a good idea to provide a more detailed guide.

This document is divided up into various sections.

The Venue

Yarnfield Park Conference Centre is located roughly half-way between Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent, near a small town called Stone. Stafford, Stone and Stoke-on-Trent all have railway stations, but Stone is not suitable for those students who require a wheelchair, as steps are required to cross over platforms. It is very rare for Railtrack not to inflict engineering works during our event, so each year the arrival and departure situation is a little fluid. Assuming we provide a shuttle bus for pick-ups from Stone on Friday and drop-offs to Stone on Sunday, we will reimburse the cost of a wheelchair taxi from Stafford or Stoke-on-Trent railway station and vice-versa, subject to receipts, assuming the cost is not covered by your fare.

The reason we offer a shuttle is because Yarnfield is around a 10 minute drive from Stone station. There are few buses on Friday and none on Sunday. The site itself is located in the small village of Yarnfield. There are few facilities in Yarnfield Village and it is about a 10 minute walk from the conference centre. Due to the nature of the weekend, there is little time to explore the surrounding area.

Arrival by car is more straightforward, although subject to the difficulties of using the M6 during Friday afternoons. Sunday afternoon traffic is usually light. The car park does have a few disabled spaces nearest the reception centre, but these are on a first-come first-served basis and are sometimes full, as we do not have exclusive use of the whole site.

The centre itself is a former British Telecom national training centre – you will pass all the telegraph poles when you journey in from the car-park. Whilst once very large and open-plan, in recent years most of the land has been sold and houses built, and the training centre opened up to public use, although it is still used by BT Openreach. Nonetheless, it is still a large site. As far as we know, everywhere is wheelchair accessible. The distance from the car park to reception, even from the disabled spaces, is close on 100m. Once at reception, all the classrooms are located in the main building.

Also in the main building is the restaurant where all meals are served – please see the section under meals for more information.

All the bedrooms are located in four large three-story blocks, located under covered walkways, once again about 100m from the main reception exit, and total some 320 rooms.

The rooms themselves are mostly small. Usually our allocated rooms all have a double bed with en-suite bathroom, a wardrobe and a desk. Although we cannot book them, a number of bedrooms have twin beds but, if so, usually do not have a desk. There are several rooms available, on a first-come, first-served basis, which are larger and designed to accommodate wheelchairs. If you need one of these, please specifically request one on your booking form.

A standard double or twin room is not big enough for a cot. If you do need a cot then please let us know and we can provide a slightly bigger room. We can also request a small fridge and microwave if needed – usually in a separate room nearby.

In addition, Yarnfield as an organisation offer a special rate for a ‘helper’ in a room of their own close to your room. We have to negotiate this separately, but will do so if asked. It is usually much cheaper than booking a room separately on your own. This is intended for those who require a chaperone, care giver or child-carer to enable them to attend the weekend. We are told these are limited but have never been refused!

The Revision Sessions

We hand-out feedback forms each year and comments on the nature of the revision sessions feature frequently in those returned. For some students, the weekend is not long enough, for others too long with not enough breaks. For some we do not cover enough and for some we cover too much. So, perhaps we have it about right....

The sessions themselves are 9 x 1.5 hour sessions from Friday at 7pm until Sunday at 3pm, with late nights until roughly 9pm on Friday and Saturday. The intention is to offer revision of topics already studied for the impending exam, so sessions specifically cover those topics which are examined, and given the time are intense. For 60 point modules this can be difficult, and perhaps the depth is not always what students might expect.

What it is not, and this is very important, is to go over TMAs, nor an opportunity to be lectured on specific non-examined topics to increase understanding, or to go over topics which you have forgotten or which you have not had time to study. It is assumed that all TMAs/CMAs have been submitted and you are sufficiently motivated and prepared to sit the exam. It is very unlikely the sessions will take you from a point of no understanding to a point of fielding exam questions and you should not expect them to do so.

During the first session, the tutor will introduce themselves and may have already provided an outline timetable to you via email. The timetable will probably evolve over time as you and your fellow students request changes. It is very unlikely, given the needs of your fellow students, which may number close to 40, and our instructions to your tutor to cover all examined components, that you will be able to dictate the timetable.

Whilst there may be time during breaks to ask your tutor further questions, it is the tutor’s break as well, so you should not assume he or she will always be available to answer them. In addition, SRW pays the tutor for the weekend only so, unless the tutor agrees or is already your OU tutor, it is not possible for them to field questions after the event.

Each year, students request the use of audio recording devices to help them understand the sessions. In all cases, it is up to the entire class to agree unanimously that they are happy for this to occur. If there is anyone who objects, it will not be possible for recording to take place. Therefore, please do not book if audio recording is a requirement, as you may be disappointed. Video recording is subject to the same criteria, although the technical difficulties of recording and the format of the room make video recording unlikely to be successful.

Breaks are taken reasonably frequently, although not frequently enough for some students. Of course, it is always possible to leave the room discretely at any time, but revision will continue. We do have use of a number of small syndicate rooms which we can reserve for an individual student's use. These have been used in the past for nursing mothers and those who find the noise of the event sometimes overwhelming. Please do ask, if you think this would be useful to you.

As mentioned earlier, we do not have exclusive use of Yarnfield during our weekend. Whilst we stagger breaks, there are still close on 250 attending the weekend, so social times such as meals, quiz night and breaks are very busy and noisy. In addition, there may be other, non-SRW guests using the remaining accommodation and social areas, including the restaurant.

SRW means lots of different things to different students. For a significant proportion, it is the only opportunity to meet other students and socialise with them during the year. This can sometimes extend late into the night. Although there are security patrols, with an almost full event, it is not possible to guarantee quiet in the accommodation blocks at an early hour. If you are particularly disturbed by noise, then it is recommended you consider other non-residential options.

The Restaurant

Free-flow tea & coffee is available all day. Decaffeinated varieties are also available. These drinks are free. There is also a Costa serving a wide variety of other drinks at normal Costa prices.

The venue as a whole is managed by the Compass Group – one of the largest catering and venue management groups in the country. For most people, the food would be described as average to good, and would not seem out of place in a workplace setting.

We always pass on your special dietary requests to Yarnfield a few weeks before the event, and ask them to acknowledge they have received them. The general response is that they understand the requirements and will be able to provide for all. However, the word 'provide' means different things to different people. The core of the meals presented are 3 meal choices of which one is vegetarian. There is a salad bar and a jacket potato bar with various fillings as well as a wide selection of desserts and a choice of fruit. So, if your special need can be accommodated, as an example, by choosing fruit rather than a dessert containing milk, eggs and cream, then this is considered 'provided' for. In effect, this reduces your choice but we are afraid there is little we can do about this.

Whilst the core of the meal is served by staff at a counter, all the rest such as soup, dessert, knives & forks etc. are self-service and are not always wheelchair accessible. If you do need help with this then please do let us know.

Financial Aid

Each year we offer a £50 reduction in the cost of the weekend to certain students. We do not have the means or expertise to construct and maintain an assessment regime, so have tended to offer the reduction to those students who are receiving financial grants from the OU towards the course being studied at the revision weekend. We do not require, nor do we want to know, on what basis these have been granted, but do like to see the grant letter or email itself. We will extend this to students who receive grants from other charitable bodies on a case by case basis. The reduction is not applicable to repayable loans.

How to Book

The information in our booking system is available to everyone on the committee and is distributed to Yarnfield as well as your individual tutor. We would prefer you describe what you need rather than why you need it on your booking form.

If you feel you need to discuss your needs more fully, then please do email using the link on the website. This email is only viewed by those directly responsible for booking, contact with tutors and Yarnfield – four people. We will only share this information more widely if you give your consent to do so.

When you complete a booking form we do not confirm your place until we receive a £50 deposit. We do hope that when you first fill in the form you let us know all the special requirements you need. We will do the very best to provide them, but it is possible they will not all be provided. In particular, we cannot guarantee that you will be able to record the revision sessions.