

# Heriot-Watt University

## Handbook on External Examining For Taught Programmes (Undergraduate and Postgraduate)

### ACADEMIC QUALITY



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## Foreword

On behalf of Heriot-Watt University, may I welcome you as a new External Examiner and thank you for undertaking this valuable role, which is an integral part of our quality assurance processes.

This *Handbook on External Examining for Taught Programmes (Undergraduate and Postgraduate)* has been produced to provide you with guidance on your role as External Examiner. If there is any aspect which is unclear or has been omitted, please do not hesitate to contact us (see below for contact details).

This Handbook and the External Examiner Report forms have been produced in accordance with the University's Charter, Statutes, Ordinances and Regulations. They have been informed by relevant external guidance, such as the UK Quality Code.

Fiona Menzies and Jenny Walker  
Academic Quality

## Contact Details

For matters related to appointment, payment of fees and expenses, reports and responses, please contact:

Meg Henderson, Senior Administrative Assistant  
Academic Quality [externalexaminerstaught@hw.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminerstaught@hw.ac.uk)

Kim Peebles, Senior Administrative Assistant  
Academic Quality [externalexaminerstaught@hw.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminerstaught@hw.ac.uk)

For matters related to the programme which you are examining, please contact the relevant Programme Director of Studies or Academic Operations Team:

For exam related enquiries (i.e. scripts, materials etc) please contact:  
[ras-examinations@hw.ac.uk](mailto:ras-examinations@hw.ac.uk)

For other enquiries (i.e. access to Canvas, Exam Board Dates etc) please contact:  
[ras-acops-support@hw.ac.uk](mailto:ras-acops-support@hw.ac.uk)

## Information for External Examiners

### Heriot-Watt University

With a history dating back to 1821, Heriot-Watt University has established a reputation for world-class teaching and practical, leading-edge research, which has made the institution one of the top UK universities for business and industry. There are three campuses in the UK: Edinburgh, Scottish Borders (in Galashiels) and Orkney.

The University has a campus in Dubai (established in 2005) and a campus in Malaysia (established in 2012). International in-country degree programmes are also delivered through more than 20 Approved Learning Partners and by independent distance learning.

All activities of Heriot-Watt University aim to embody the institution's four Values: Belong; Inspire; Collaborate; Celebrate.

Heriot-Watt University's mission is to create and exchange knowledge that benefits society. The University's vision and its objectives to 2025 are outlined in *Strategy 2025*.

Heriot-Watt University is organised into six Schools, with each having multiple academic disciplines:

- School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society
- School of Engineering and Physical Sciences
- School of Social Sciences
- School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences
- School of Textiles and Design
- Global College

Further information on Heriot-Watt University: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/about/profile>

### Purpose of External Examining

External Examining is an integral, core part of the quality assurance processes of the UK HE sector and of each Higher Education Institution. The main purposes of the External Examining are:

- To verify that academic standards are appropriate, and comparable with other UK HEIs, for the award or award components which the External Examiner has been appointed to examine;
- To help Heriot-Watt University to assure and maintain the academic standards of its awards in accordance with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and applicable subject benchmark statements;
- To help Heriot-Watt University to ensure that its assessment procedures measure student achievement robustly and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and are conducted in accordance with the University's policies and regulations;
- To identify good practice and provide advice on the enhancement of programmes.

The effectiveness of Heriot-Watt University's external examining process is evaluated as part of the periodic Institutional Review as conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland.

## External Examining of Multi-Mode, Multi-Location Programmes

For Heriot-Watt University, the External Examining system is of fundamental importance in assuring the quality and standards of the large number of programmes offered in multiple locations and by multiple modes of delivery. Three UK campuses, campuses in Dubai and Malaysia and a global network of academic partners are the most obvious examples of multi-mode, multi-location delivery; in addition, the University also provides opportunities for independent distance learning and work placement.

Most External Examiners' remit will include examining multi-location, multi-mode provision (i.e. two or more campuses and via an academic partner or independent distance learning) and via the report form, you will be asked to confirm that the Board of Examiners considered the assessment results of student cohorts across all modes and locations, and to comment on differences in, and comparability of, the quality and standard of student performance.

The University's approach to ensuring the quality and standards of any programme offered in more than one location, or by more than one mode of study, must be of the same quality and standard and have the following identical components across all versions: learning outcomes; award/programme title; mandatory courses; core knowledge, skills and competencies. Courses (ie modules) within such programmes must have identical learning outcomes and core curriculum, although variation is permitted in content and assessment.

## Your External Examiner Appointment

### Period of Appointment

Your appointment will be for a period of up to four years running from 1 September to 31 August, further information will be provided in your confirmation of appointment email.

### Resignation

If you wish to resign from your position prior to the end of the period of appointment, you should inform the School Executive Dean and Academic Quality, in writing and as soon as possible. We will request as much notice as possible ideally, so that you can conclude your examining duties for the current academic year.

### Disagreements

In rare circumstances, you or the Programme Team may consider that the other has not met, without good reason, their specified requirements.

In this situation, you should notify the Academic Quality team, who will investigate and provide a response. If you are not satisfied with this response, you may wish to submit a report directly to the Principal and Vice-Chancellor.

Should you be dissatisfied with the response from the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, you may ask the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland to investigate using its [Scottish Concerns Scheme](#). The concerns procedure should be used only to highlight serious systematic or procedure problems at the institutional level regarding academic standards or quality of learning opportunities.

## Termination of Contract

We may terminate your appointment before the end of your term of office in the following circumstances:

- Serious illness or other circumstances which render you unable to fulfil your duties;
- Changes in the programme structure which result in the appointment no longer being applicable;
- Your breach of confidentiality of the terms and conditions of appointment;
- A conflict of interest has emerged, which cannot be satisfactorily resolved;
- Failure to meet the terms and conditions of your appointment, such as repeated failure to attend Boards of Examiners, non-submission of an annual report or submission of an insubstantial report.

Decision to terminate an External Examiner's contract are taken by the relevant Dean of the University on recommendation from the School and Academic Quality.

## Responsibilities of External Examiners

### Role and Activities of External Examiners

The role and activities of External Examiners include:

- a) Review all draft degree exam papers and other forms of assessment contributing to the final award, including resit papers (and model answers). Schools should follow the [Regulations: A7 Awards](#) regarding External Examiners reviewing coursework contributing to the final award:
- b) Review exam papers not in English prior to translation and consideration of completed scripts once translated. Comment on process and performance of those students.
- c) Review of all (or a representative sample as appropriate) of exam scripts, assessed coursework, dissertations and project reports. You can expect to be sent or given access to a sample of assessments to review from all versions of the programme delivered outwith the UK campuses and may be invited to review further examples when visiting the institution for the Board of Examiners meetings. Only in exceptional circumstances will an External Examiner be invited to undertake a review of assessments at locations other than the relevant UK campus<sup>1</sup>.
- d) Conduct formal *viva voce* examinations if an approved part of the assessment process (the School may provide an opportunity for the External Examiner to meet informally with a selection of students representing the entire cohort, if practical<sup>2</sup>).
- e) Review consistency and standards of internal marking and classification of student work including across variants (sample to be agreed in advance and from top, middle and bottom of range).
- f) Discuss and comment on programme structure, assessment process and award schemes.

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<sup>1</sup> The Award Board for MSc programmes offered at the Orkney Campus is held at the Edinburgh Campus (as these programmes are part of the School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society), with Orkney staff participating remotely; the External Examiner does, however, undertake an initial visit to the Orkney Campus.

<sup>2</sup> Where a programme is delivered in more than one campus, the School will make arrangements for video-conference participation of students outwith the UK to ensure that the Examiner meets a representative selection of students across all locations. See also Section 3.2 g) and footnote 3.

- g) Being aware of differences in programme curricula between on- and off-campus variants and multi-campus variants.
- h) Consider the Board of Examiners' documentation as full member of Board.
- i) Attend as full member at all Boards of Examiners for the subject (not years 1-3 unless the programme is only offered at Ordinary Degree level or if substantial numbers of students exit with an Ordinary Degree). If you are absent, written comments should be submitted for consideration at the Board.
- j) Evaluate the extent to which procedures governing special circumstances, academic misconduct and borderline cases have been considered fairly and equitably.
- k) Ensure that the recommendations of the Boards of Examiners are consistent with the aims and outcomes of the programmes, with Heriot-Watt University regulations and, in general, with practice at other institutions with which you are familiar.
- l) Sign acceptance of final list of degree classifications awarded to candidates and note of any disagreement regarding a mark or classification to be awarded.
- m) Submit an External Examiner report annually.
- n) Notify the School Executive Dean as soon as possible if unable to undertake or complete any significant aspect of External Examining responsibilities.

You may also be invited to comment on any proposed restructuring of the programme or on matters related to its operation. Occasionally, at the request of the University Committee for Learning and Teaching, External Examiners may be invited to comment on the development or review the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. Although there is no formal requirement to participate in this process, the University welcomes, encourages and values the involvement of all key external stakeholders.

### **What to expect as an External Examiner**

You are entitled to:

- a) Receive information core to the External Examining role, such as: programme structures; learning outcomes; details of learning, teaching and assessment processes; differences between versions of multi-mode/location programmes; draft exam papers, other forms of assessment and model answers; assessment and award regulations; marking schemes; process for dealing with borderline, unusual results or special circumstances; Board of Examiner procedures.
- b) Receive a response from the Programme Team on comments provided in relation to draft exam papers and other forms of assessment.
- c) Request additional exam scripts and other assessments in addition to the sample provided for initial moderation.
- d) Be present at all Examiners' meetings at which significant decisions are to be taken in relation to their designated subject area.
- e) An equal vote at meetings of Boards of Examiners. The Chair has a deliberative and casting vote.
- f) Recommend the adjustment of marks/grades on particular courses for all students, based on your overview of internal marking processes. External Examiners may not by themselves alter the marks/grades awarded to individual, or an entire cohort, of students. Any recommendations for marks/grades adjustments require the approval

of the Board of Examiners as a whole; the External Examiner does not have the right to take a final decision on any proposed alterations.

- g) Meet students, only if the selected students are representative of the entire cohort. In the case of programmes which are also offered at an overseas campus, through an Approved Learning Partner or via independent distance learning, such meetings must include students representing all modes and locations (for practical purposes, meetings involving students from different modes and locations can be conducted by virtually)<sup>3</sup>. External Examiners may not request that a *viva voce* examination be conducted; such formal oral examinations can only be undertaken if an approved part of the programme's assessment process. External Examiners can, however, request an informal meeting (including remotely where there are cohorts of students at other locations/on other modes of study) with a selection of representative students to help gain a more complete overview of the quality and standards of a programme.
- h) Submit a separate, confidential report to one of more of the Senior Officers of the University: the Dean of the University; the Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life); the Principal and Vice-Chancellor.

#### **Role of Chief External Examiners:**

Your role is to strengthen further oversight of the quality and standards of Heriot Watt's extensive multi-mode, multi-location provision. All Schools have at least one Chief External Examiner, with numbers varying according to the scale of each School's multi-mode, multi-location provision.

The principal duties of Chief External Examiners are as follows:

- Comment on versions of a programme
- Oversight of effectiveness of moderation procedures
- Review minutes (and related documents) of all Award Boards within the Programme(s)
- Comment on the effectiveness of the work of the External Examining team
- Review sample of student work from all locations and modes
- Identify versions of programme where there are disparities, areas of concern or good practice
- Conduct an end-of-year paper-based review, including the reports of External Examiners, and report on such to the University<sup>4</sup>
- Attend Exam Board, at least in first year
- Attend University/School briefing, at least in first year

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<sup>3</sup> The students with whom the External Examiner is meeting should be representative of the whole student profile. Therefore, while it might be practical to meet with students where a programme is offered only at, for example, the Edinburgh Campus, there might not be an opportunity to meet students where programmes are delivered in multi-locations/modes because the Edinburgh-based students would not constitute a representative sample of the entire cohort. In such cases, virtual meetings can be held to ensure that the meeting with the External is representative of all students. If such representative meetings cannot be arranged, then the External Examiner will not, therefore, be able to hold face-to-face meetings with only a selection of students based at the campus which the External is visiting.

<sup>4</sup> Following consideration by the University, External Examiners will receive a copy of the relevant Chief External Examiner's Report.

The role of the Chief External Examiner does not include:

- Commenting on assignment tasks or examination papers/questions
- Reviewing or making judgements on course assessment results, progression decisions or award decisions
- Meeting with individual students
- Scrutinising the activities of individual External Examiners
- Commenting on the judgements of individual External Examiners

## **Fees, Expenses and Travel Arrangements**

### **Fees**

We will pay you a fee on receipt of your completed annual report. Fees are determined and reviewed by the University Committee for Quality and Standards in consultation with Schools and normally calculated on the basis of the number of students on a particular award.

Fees are paid only upon receipt of reports.

### **Expenses and Travel Arrangements**

Expenses incurred by External Examiners may include:

- Travel
- Accommodation
- Subsistence

At your request, travel and accommodation arrangements can be made by the University. Alternatively, you may make your own arrangements in accordance with the University's guidelines on reasonable expenses. Travel will be to the relevant UK campus: only by exception and with approval of the School Executive Dean and the Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life), would you be invited to travel to one of the University's overseas campuses.

The University's Travel and Expenses Policy and Expenses claim forms are available on the External Examiners webpage. The Policy provides advice on matters such as types of travel expenses which will be reimbursed and limits on claims for accommodation and subsistence. The Expense claim forms have details on how you should submit them.

## **Briefing and Induction**

Both the University and individual Schools have a range of briefing and induction sessions and materials to support you in preparing for, and undertaking, your duties.

### **University Briefing/Induction**

Academic Quality provides an annual virtual briefing/induction session for new External Examiners and Chief External Examiners. In these sessions, the following topics are covered:

- Background on Heriot-Watt University, particularly the international dimension
- Key aspects of quality assurance
- The role of the External Examiner (or Chief External Examiner)
- The University's assessment procedures and its grading system

- The External Examiner's report, the process of consideration and its public availability

A recoding of the most recent briefing session is also available at:

[External examiners - Heriot-Watt University](#)  
( [External Examiners Briefing Session, 27 November 2024](#) )

This Handbook is part of the briefing information provided to you. Other relevant material provided by Academic Quality includes: arrangements for submitting the annual report and the report template; process and form for claiming expenses. This information is available on the External Examiners website at: [External examiners - Heriot-Watt University](#)

### **School Briefing/Induction**

The School will provide the following information to you as an External Examiner:

- Programme-related information:
  - Programme structure and course descriptors;
  - Programme specification, including learning outcomes; learning, teaching and assessment methods; awards;
  - Assessment regulations, including resits, discretionary credits and award criteria;
  - grading and classification schemes;
  - different offerings of the programme by mode and location;
  - recently introduced changes;
  - student handbooks;
  - particular requirements of Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRB's)
- Assessment-related procedures, including: paper setting procedure; marking process (double-marking; procedure for resolving disagreements between markers); moderation policy; arrangements for sampling of assessments; process for dealing with academic misconduct; process for dealing with borderline cases, unusual results or special circumstances;
- Criteria for assessment, marking and grading;
- Assessment weighting;
- Draft exam papers, other forms of assessment and model answers;
- Past exam papers and examples of past projects/dissertations;
- Reports from previous External Examiners and previous/current Chief External Examiners;
- Matters related to the Board of Examiners: dates of meetings; members; role of External Examiner at the Board; access to minutes of previous meetings;
- Arrangements for meeting with students (either informally or formally as part of a *viva voce* examination) and the principles for selection of candidates;
- Opportunities for visiting the School, meeting staff and other External Examiners and discussing broader matters related to the development of the programme.

The School will issue annually a variant of the above information as relevant to existing External Examiners.

With agreement from the School, the External Examiner may request other relevant information.

A face-to-face briefing may be offered prior to a meeting of the Boards of Examiners. Schools will provide particular support to External Examiners who do not have prior experience of the role or who have been appointed from industry or business.

These discussions will provide an opportunity to explain in detail matters related to the programme, including multi-mode/location versions, any differences between various offerings and how the External Examiner is expected to review the different versions.

### **External Examiner Reports**

External Examiner reports are an integral part of the University's quality assurance processes and contribute to both University and School annual monitoring of programmes.

You are required to submit a written report to the University annually by a deadline specified by Academic Quality. These deadlines are usually:

- For UG reports - 30 June
- For PGT reports – 31 October
- For CEE reports – 28 February

Academic Quality will send you a link to the online report form via email (for UG and PGT) with a reminder of the submission deadline. Chief Examiners will be sent a report template via email.

The prompt receipt of reports provides Schools with sufficient time to consider the External Examiner's recommendations and take appropriate action before the start of the next academic year, as well as enabling the University to meet deadlines set by the external accreditation authority in Dubai (Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA)).

If you do not submit your report by the specified date, an email reminder will be sent, highlighting the requirement to submit a report as a condition of the terms of appointment. In the event of non-submission following the initial reminder, you may be contacted by Academic Quality or the Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life).

Non-submission of reports is recorded annually in a Summary Review of External Examiners Reports. This summary is considered by the University Committee for Quality and Standards.

### **Areas for Comment**

You have the right to comment on any matter you wish in relation to your role. However, Heriot-Watt University has a standard series of issues on which the views of External Examiners are required – these issues form the basis of the sections within the report proforma:

- Quality enhancement including areas of good practice and those that require improvement
- Academic standards including:
  - Consistency of the programme with QAA Subject Benchmark Statements
  - Appropriateness of the forms of assessment
  - Quality of learning, teaching and assessment methods
  - Equity of treatment of students
  - Academic standards of the awards, including comparability with other institutions
- Assessment
  - Length of time allocated to External Examiner for scrutinising papers and scripts
  - Assessment process and schemes for marking and classification

- Rigour of the assessment process
- Exam Process and Board of Examiners including
  - Conduct of Board of Examiners
  - Application of University Guidelines and Regulations
- Global, Online and Partnership Provision
  - Quality and standard of student performance across all campuses or partner organisations
- Administration
  - Provision of sufficient evidence to fulfil External Examiner role
  - Induction process
  - Administration process
- Summary of term of office

In the case of the MBA, External Examiners are also invited to comment on translated scripts.

### **Informative Reports**

The report proforma is a combination of tick box and open comment sections. The template format is designed to ensure that key information is provided, both to the satisfaction of the University and QAA. In addition, you can comment on any other relevant matter. The completed report should, however, be consistent with the comments and judgements given by the External Examiner to the Board of Examiners.

You are requested not to refer to individual students or staff members by name or by designation in their reports, given that these reports are in the public domain and will be considered by the School Studies Committee, which features student representatives amongst its membership. In addition, students can request access to External Examiner reports at any time.

You are encouraged to complete all sections and to provide as full and informative a written report as possible, even if a verbal report was previously given at the Board of Examiners, so that the School and the University can be assured that the standard of awards is appropriate and assessment processes are rigorous and fair.

A comprehensive, informative and specific report also helps the School and the University to make enhancements. By contrast, a very brief, generic report does not provide the School or the University with sufficient independent evidence of the quality and standards of its provision. If a report is deemed insufficient in terms of the usefulness of its content, the External Examiner will be invited to return a more informative report.

### **Consideration of Reports**

Your submitted report will be forwarded to the relevant Programme Team who will review your report and provide a response to both any recommendation you have made, and any areas of good practice identified. This response will be approved on behalf of the School by the Director of Learning and Teaching or the Director of Academic Quality before consideration by a University Dean. Once that is concluded Academic Quality will return the response to you.

### **Multi-Mode/Location Programmes**

In relation to multi-mode/location programmes, External Examiners will be made aware that relevant information within their reports will be shared, where appropriate, with staff at overseas campuses and partner organisations.

## Student Representatives

Student representatives, as members of the University Committee for Quality and Standards, have the opportunity to scrutinise and comment on general issues and themes identified in the Annual Summary Review of External Examiner Reports.

School-specific issues identified by External Examiners are considered by student representatives as part of the process of reviewing External Examiner Reports through the School Studies Committee.

## Operation and Conduct of Boards of Examiners

Processes for the operation, conduct and composition of Boards of Examiners for taught programmes or programmes featuring a taught component are set out in the relevant University Regulations: Ordinances and Regulations - Heriot-Watt University ([hw.ac.uk](http://hw.ac.uk))

At Heriot-Watt University, "Boards of Examiners" is a generic term used to describe three specific Boards:

- **Assessment Boards:** meet at the end of each semester to consider the results of individual units of learning (referred to as "courses" at HWU; known as "modules" in some other HEIs) and to assign grades.
- **Progression Boards:** operate at the level of the programme of study; meet after the January semester and re-assessment diets of exams to consider all the course assessment results and to make decisions on: progression; re-assessment; intermediate awards.
- **Award Boards:** operate at the level of the programme of study; meet after the January semester and re-assessment diets of exams to consider all the course assessment results and to make decisions on awards.

External Examiners are only required to attend Award Boards, therefore the following sections focus on the composition of Award Boards, and role of External Examiners in relation to Award Boards.

### Pre-Board Activities

The deliberations, recommendations and decisions of Award Boards are facilitated by a number of fundamental pre-Board activities, which do not directly involve the External Examiner. However, the External Examiner is entitled to ask for clarification, make comments or raise issues on any matter related to these activities.

- Grades are assigned to individual course results by Assessment Boards.
- Decisions on special circumstances are considered and approved in advance of the Award Board, in accordance with the University's *Policy on Mitigating Circumstances* ([Mitigating Circumstances Policy](#))
- Suspected cases of academic misconduct (including plagiarism) are investigated in advance of the Assessment and Award Boards, in accordance with University's *Student Discipline Regulations and Procedures* ([Discipline - Heriot-Watt University](#))

### Operation of Award Boards

Each programme of study is required to have an Award Board of Examiners, which meets after the April diet of examinations and, if required, after the resit diet of examinations.

The Award Board considers the requirements for award together with the decisions on individual courses as taken by the Assessment Boards.

### Results/Grades of Individual Courses

The Award Board confirms the grades determined by the Assessment Boards and only in exceptional circumstances can these grades be adjusted, as per the University's *Guidelines on Examination Procedures*. The Award Board must record its justification for any adjustments to course grades.

### Recommendations for Award

The Award Board makes recommendations for an award with respect to each student as outlined in the Regulation A7 Awards - [Ordinances and Regulations | Heriot-Watt University](#)

### Composition of Award Boards

1. The Award Board consists of the following members:
  - a) The Chair, who is the School Executive Dean, the Director of Learning and Teaching or a nominee of the School Executive Dean. For the appointment of a nominee as Chair, the School Executive Dean submits an application for approval to the University Committee for Quality and Standards. Irrespective of designation, all Chairs need to attend one of the 'Examination Board Chairs' briefing sessions.
  - b) The External Examiner(s)
  - c) The members of the academic staff or at least one representative of the academic staff involved in the teaching and the setting and marking of examinations and assessment of each course within the relevant stage of the programme, as nominated by the Course Co-ordinator.
  - d) The School Examination Officer or equivalent.
  - e) Such other members as the Senate may from time to time determine.
2. One of the Deans of the University acts as an observer at the Award Board, or one of his or her Associate Deans. Alternatively, at the Dean's discretion, a nominee who is normally a senior member of academic staff, can act as the Dean's representative. The Dean, the Associate Dean or his or her nominee cannot, however, be a member of the academic staff of the School offering the programme.
3. The quorum for a meeting of an Award Board is three members of the Board or one third of its membership whichever is larger in number.

### External Examiner at Boards

#### Attendance at Boards

Attendance at relevant meetings of Award Boards of Examiners is one of the terms and conditions of appointment of all External Examiners.

If you are unavoidably and exceptionally absent from a Board meeting where your presence is formally required, written comments should be provided for consideration at the meeting. In the absence of the External Examiner, a Dean of the University or his or her nominee must be present at the meeting.

External Examiners are not normally required to attend Progression Boards (for stages 1, 2 or 3 of a four-year Honours degree) where intermediate awards can be recommended, as assurance of these awards is determined by a process of interpolation. If, however, significant numbers of students exit at the end of Stage 3 of an Honours programme with an Ordinary degree, then the External Examiner should attend the relevant Board.

External Examiners must be present at Progression Boards for Postgraduate Taught Programmes where final awards of PG Certificate and PG Diploma are being recommended.

### **Information for Boards**

The School is responsible for providing you with all information related to the Board, such as:

- dates of Board meetings and the related schedule/process (provided sufficiently far in advance to enable the External Examiner to make arrangements to attend the Board and any required pre-Board meetings);
- samples of marked exam scripts and other assessments, including internal moderation reports;
- guidelines and procedures related to assessment processes, eg: School's moderation policy; discretionary award of credits; classification criteria;
- spreadsheets of provisional results, awards and classifications (usually made available once the External Examiner has arrived at the University);
- details of unusual results and proposed actions.

External Examiners may request that certain exam scripts and other assessments, in addition to those provided by the School, be sent for scrutiny prior to the Board of Examiners meeting. Schools will discuss and agree with External Examiners their precise requirements for additional scripts and/or assessments. The guiding principle is that External Examiners should receive sufficient evidence to determine that internal marking and classification are of an appropriate standard and are consistent.

### **Role of the External Examiner in advance of the Board**

Prior to the Board meeting, External Examiners will have sufficient opportunity to view all students' exam scripts, coursework, projects and dissertations, and to discuss any matters related to the assessment process with the Programme Team. Schools will grant access to a VLE to all qualifying course materials. Schools will make arrangements for this process.

External Examiners may request to be invited to attend presentations by students on their projects or dissertations.

### **Role of the External Examiner at the Board**

The External Examiner will have the opportunity during, or at the end of, the Board meeting to comment on such matters as: exam questions, student performance, the assessment process and schemes for marking and classification.

On any matter requiring a vote, all members of the Board of Examiners, including the External Examiner, are entitled to an equal vote at meetings of the Board. The Chair, rather than the External Examiner, has a deliberative and casting vote.

External Examiners may not by themselves alter the marks/grades awarded to individual, or an entire cohort, students. However, External Examiners may recommend the adjustment of marks/grades on particular courses for all students, based on his or her review of internal marking processes. Any such recommendations require the approval of the Board of Examiners as a whole; the External Examiner does not have the right to take a final decision on any proposed adjustments.

### **Ratification of Decisions**

No University degree can be awarded without participation in the examining process by at least one External Examiner. An External Examiner must sign the final list of agreed award decisions as evidence that he or she endorses the awards and associated classifications.

If an External Examiner is unwilling to provide endorsement, steps should be taken by the School to resolve the relevant issues. If matters cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the External Examiner, he or she should submit a separate, written report as per the process to be followed in Section 5.3 Disagreements. Schools should have in place procedures for informing students of any delay in finalising and communicating their results.

Appeals by students against the decisions of Award Boards of Examiners are progressed in accordance with the University's Regulations and Procedures on Student Academic Appeals (available at: [Student academic appeals - Heriot-Watt University](#)).

## **Confidentiality, Data Protection and Freedom of Information**

In terms of the Data Protection Act 1998, the term 'examination' includes 'any process for determining the knowledge, intelligence, skill or ability of a candidate by reference to his/her performance in any test, work or other activity'.

Students have certain subject access rights on the examination process. Information recorded by students during examination (eg examination scripts) is specifically exempted from subject access provisions. All other data associated with examinations including 'raw' examination marks, Examiners' comments and Board minutes are covered by subject access provisions.

### **Examination Scripts**

Comments made by Examiners are accessible by a student and should be both intelligible and appropriate. Comments should not be made directly on examination scripts but on an attached sheet.

### **Progression and Award Board Minutes**

Progression and Award Board Minutes constitute personal data which is being processed for the purpose of determining the results of examinations and therefore will be accessible by students making a subject access request. Data has to be disclosed even if students are not actually mentioned by name.

### **External Examiner Reports**

As part of the process of ensuring that students are engaged in commenting on External Examiner Reports, all reports are considered by School Studies Committee, which features

student representatives (School Officers) amongst its membership. All students are informed of the means by which they can request access to a copy of an External Examiner Report.

For the wider student population, reports are disclosable under the terms of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, unless particular parts of them qualify for an exemption and External Examiners should be aware of this when writing such reports. External Examiners are advised on this matter in the letter of appointment. External Examiners should not refer to individual students or staff members by name in their reports. The University will remove any reference to named individuals prior to the report being circulated for consideration.

Confidentiality of reports should always be observed until the University has sent its response proforma/letter on a report to an External Examiner. Whilst the University is considering its response to the report, the report should be read only by appropriate members of staff and the consent of an External Examiner should be sought before a report may be viewed by an individual outwith the School concerned or the formal line of scrutiny specified. The only exception to this restriction on access is that, as per the University's policy, External Examiner reports will be sent immediately on receipt to the relevant Chief External Examiner in order that he or she may promptly undertake the required review of multi-mode/location provision (see page 5 for further information).

Where an External Examiner has asked to make a report in confidence to the Principal and Vice-Chancellor or other Senior Officer of the University, the External Examiner is asked to indicate in the report whether or not he or she consents to the report being made available to successive External Examiners.

External Examiners should note that when the University has sent its response letter, reports may be made available for internal and external reviews, audits and accreditation events (at programme, School or institutional levels, the latter including overseas accreditation authorities). Reports are also disclosable under the terms of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, and to data subjects under Section 7 of the Data Protection Act (1998), unless particular parts of them qualify for an exemption and External Examiners should be aware of this when writing such reports.

## Further Information

A variety of sector-wide information is available on the External Examining; for example:

- the Advance HE's *Handbook for External Examining* (2019) – this handbook is aimed specifically at External Examiners and provides a useful, comprehensive source of information [External examining | Advance HE \(advance-he.ac.uk\)](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/external-examining)

### Information on Heriot-Watt University's Academic Structure and Assessment Scheme

Note: the Edinburgh Business School and its programmes and awards (primarily the MBA) have their own structures and assessment schemes, reflected in separate regulations:

[Regulations and policies - Heriot-Watt University](#)

### Academic Structure

The academic year for Heriot-Watt University's campus-based programmes comprises two semesters. September Semester begins with a 12-week teaching period in mid-September and

concludes with an assessment period in December. January Semester begins with a 12-week teaching period in mid-January and concludes with an assessment period in April. A consultation week takes place in each semester. A third May semester is provided in some specialist programmes, such as degree entry/foundation programmes.

All taught programmes and awards, irrespective of mode or location of study, adhere to, and are credit-rated according to, the national Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF; see below for further information). Programmes consist of individual units of learning known as "courses" ("modules" in some other HEIs) as follows:

- Each course normally is rated at 15 SCQF credits, based on 150 student effort hours
- For undergraduate programmes, each stage (year of study) within a programme comprises normally 8 courses, equating to 120 SCQF credits/1200 student effort hours. Undergraduate programmes typically comprise four stages (Honours degree) or five stages (Integrated Masters). See below for further information on qualifications and credit-rating.
- Postgraduate taught programmes comprise, for the award of Masters, normally 8 courses (each of 15 SCQF credits) and one dissertation or one dissertation and project (total rating of 60 SCQF credits). See Section 2 for further information on qualifications and credit-rating.

In addition to the SCQF, programmes/courses at the Malaysia Campus are credit-rated according to the in-country national system used by the Malaysian Qualifications Authority.

### Assessment Scheme

The University has a single assessment scheme for both undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, known as the [Heriot-Watt Assessment and Progression System](#) (HAPS). The key features of HAPS are as follows:

- Assessment marking ("evidence" based on marks) is explicitly separated from decisions (grades) returned by Course Boards.
- Assessments are marked according to a numerical marking scheme; an overall results of each course is communicated in the form of a letter grade:

Grade	Quality of Response	Progression
A	Excellent	Learner has passed the course and can continue study in the subject
B	Good	
C	Good	
D	Satisfactory	
E	Adequate	Learner is awarded credit points, but cannot continue study in the subject
F	Inadequate	Learner is not awarded credit points

Online results available to students display both marks and grades; the official University transcript communicates only grades.

No adjustment of marks can be made in relation to making decisions based on grades, with the exception that where decisions on performance in a course are based on marks, then adjustment of those marks is permitted.

### **Credits, Pass and Progression**

To pass a course a minimum of Grade D is required.

To gain credit points for a course a minimum of Grade E is required.

In order to progress on an undergraduate programme, a minimum of Grade D is required in all courses which are pre-requisites for subsequent courses and in all courses designated as requiring a minimum of Grade D in the structure of each programme of study.

In courses which are neither pre-requisites nor designated as requiring a minimum of Grade D, a minimum of Grade E is required to gain the credit points for each such course.

To progress to Masters level on a taught postgraduate programme a minimum of Grade D is normally required in all courses.

Criteria for pass, progression and credit points are specified in the structures for each programme.

### **Re-assessment**

1. A student who has not fulfilled the specified minimum standards for a course may be re-assessed in that course.
2. For students on undergraduate programmes, there will be one re-assessment opportunity.
3. There will be no re-assessment opportunity for final year qualifying courses for undergraduate Integrated Masters or for Honours degree classification.
4. The Progression Board may permit a student to be re-assessed in a non-final year qualifying course for an undergraduate Integrated Masters or Honours degree for the award of *credit points only*, but the mark or grade gained at the first attempt will be used in determining the degree classification.
5. For students on postgraduate taught and graduate programmes, there will be an entitlement of one re-assessment opportunity in a maximum of three taught courses. Re-assessment opportunities in more than three courses and/or in the dissertation will be at the discretion of the Board of Examiners.

### **Repeat**

1. A student who has been re-assessed in a course but has not fulfilled the specified minimum standards for that course may be permitted, at the discretion of the School Executive Dean, one opportunity to repeat with attendance the course in question.
2. All conditions and requirements specified in the course descriptor, including one opportunity for re-assessment, will apply to the repeated course.

### **Award Criteria**

1. The criteria for the awards associated with each programme of study are specified in the structures for each programme. Award criteria may be based on a profile of grades or an average of marks.
2. Where scaling or modification of marks had been applied for the purposes of award, the final, modified mark (and not the initial, raw mark) is used in calculating the award.

### **Discretionary Award of Credits**

1. Where a student is short of credits for the target award, the Progression Board may determine that the student's performance has been affected by illness or other

- extenuating circumstances or that the student has satisfied the overall criteria for the award.
2. In consequence, a recommendation of award may be made as considered appropriate by the Board of Examiners by applying a discretionary award of credits to ensure that the student possesses the requisite credit points for the target award.
  3. For undergraduate students, discretionary credits may be applied in normally a maximum of two courses or 30 credits (three courses or 45 credits for Combined Studies) and may be used for progression (after unsuccessful re-assessment) or award.
  4. For postgraduate taught students, discretionary credits may be applied at the point of award only (ie not as a means to facilitate progression through the programme) and in a maximum of one taught course (15 credits), but may not be used for the dissertation/project.

### Information on the Scottish Higher Education Sector

There are 19 higher education institutions in Scotland, comprising universities, an art school, a conservatoire and a rural college. For further information, see Universities Scotland website at: <http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/>

### Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

All secondary and tertiary level qualifications (included vocational qualifications) in Scotland are part of the national Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Qualifications are related by level and credit points.

The framework comprises 12 levels, ranging from Access 1 (Level 1) to Doctorate (Level 12).

#### SCQF/HWU Credits and Levels of Awards: Taught Programmes

Award	Total Credits	Level
PGT Masters	180	11
PGT Diploma	120	11
PGT Certificate	60	11
Integrated Masters	600	11
Honours	480	10
Ordinary	360	9
Diploma HE	240	8
Certificate HE	120	7
Graduate Certificate (60 credits) and Graduate Diploma (120 credits) are also awards of the University/SCQF. The majority of credits for the HWU awards must be at level 11; credits lower than level 9 are not permitted.		

## Correspondences between HE Qualifications Frameworks in UK, Ireland and Europe

Typical Higher Education Qualifications within each level	England, Wales, N.Ireland	Scotland (SCQF)	Republic of Ireland	European Qualif. Framework	Corresponding Framework for Qualif's of European HE Area	
Doctoral Degrees	8	12	10	8	Third cycle (end of cycle) qualifications	
Master's degrees (PGT + Integrated UG Masters)	7	11	9	7	Second cycle (end of cycle) qualifications	
Postgraduate Diplomas				7	Intermediate qualifications within second cycle	
Postgraduate Certificates						
Bachelor's Degrees with Honours/Honour's Bachelor Degrees	6	10	8	6	First cycle (end of cycle) qualifications	
Irish Higher Diploma			7			
Bachelor's Degrees /Ordinary Bachelor Degrees			9		6	Intermediate qualifications within first cycle
Graduate Diplomas						
Graduate Certificates						
Foundation Degrees (eg FdA, FdSc)	5	8	6	5/4	Short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle qualifications)	
Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE)						
Higher National Diplomas (HND)						
Irish Higher Certificate						
Higher National Certificates (HNC)	4	7		3	Intermediate qualifications within the short cycle	
Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE)						

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), see: <http://www.scqf.org.uk/>

### The Quality Framework in Scotland

Scottish higher education institutions utilise the same reference points as the rest of the UK in terms of assuring quality and standards, eg the Quality Assurance Agency's *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*. <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

In addition, QAA has a separate Scottish office, known as QAA Scotland, to develop and operate quality assurance and enhancement arrangements that reflect the needs of higher education in Scotland. <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland>

As well as the UK-wide framework, an enhancement-based framework operates in the Scottish HE sector, known as the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework ([Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework - Scottish Funding Council](#)). This new Framework, was developed in partnership by the Scottish Funding Council, QAA Scotland, QAA, Education Scotland, College Development Network, Universities and Colleges, SPARQS and students. The Principles of the TQEF are:

- **Excellence in learning, teaching and assessment:** the TQEF will ensure that institutions are equipped to deliver the highest possible standards of learning, teaching and student support, empowering students for success.
- **Supporting student success:** high quality learning is best defined by how effectively it delivers student success in all its diverse forms.
- **Student engagement and partnership:** because we believe that student should be partners in their learning, and that a strong and engaged student voice is critical to improved student outcomes.

- **Enhancement and quality culture:** we believe that everyone working in our colleges and universities are part of the quality culture, driving forward improvement and sharing ideas and innovations to deliver better outcomes for their students.
- **Externality:** external review, reference points and benchmarks together help ensure that an institutions delivery of high-quality provision and the student experience is understood across a broader range of inputs than can be found in any given institution.
- **Data and evidence:** because we need data and evidence to better understand how effectively our colleges and universities are delivering high-quality learning, and to support improvement and enhancement.

The Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) is the new external peer-led and enhancement focused review method for Scotland’s tertiary sector. The TQER is a single method for colleges and universities replacing both the How Good is our College (HGIOC) progress and/or annual engagement visits for colleges, and Enhancement Led-Institutional Review (ELIR) for universities. The key features of TQER include:

- Self-evaluation by each institution, informed by ongoing institution-led enhancement activity and institution-led annual and periodic review.
- Engagement informed by sector reference points.
- Involvement of peer and student reviewers, including a site visit(s).
- A focus on student voice.

Further information is available from: [SFC Guidance on Quality for Colleges and Universities 2024-25 to 2030-31 - Scottish Funding Council](#)

## Heriot-Watt University Malaysia Engineering Accreditation Council External Examiners

The Malaysian Engineering Accreditation Council requires External Examiners to be appointed to provide oversight of the Engineering programmes delivered at the University's Malaysia Campus. This section provides an overview of roles and responsibilities of Engineering Accreditation Council External Examiners at Heriot-Watt University Malaysia (referred to hereafter as HWUM External Examiners).

### Roles and Activities of HWUM External Examiners:

- Visit HWUM once every two years;
- Review all (or a representative sample as appropriate) of exam scripts, assessed coursework, dissertations and project reports;
- Review consistency and standards of internal marking and classification of student work, including across variants (sample to be agreed in advance and from top, middle and bottom of range);
- Discuss and comment on programme structure, assessment process and award schemes;
- Submit reports.

You should notify the Head of School as soon as possible if you are unable to undertake or complete any aspect of External Examining responsibilities.

In order to carry out your role and activities you should expect to:

- Receive an induction/briefing on your role, as provided by HWUM;
- Receive information core to your role, such as: programme structures; learning outcomes; details of learning, teaching and assessment processes; differences between versions of multi-mode/location programmes; exam papers, other forms of assessment and model answers; assessment and award regulations; marking schemes; process for dealing with borderline, unusual results or special circumstances; and Board of Examiner procedures;
- Receive a response from the Programme Team on comments provided in relation to exam papers and other forms of assessment;
- Receive additional exam scripts and other assessments in addition to the samples provided for initial moderation if requested;
- Meet selected students who are representatives of the entire cohort.

### HWUM External Examiner Reports

External Examiner reports are an integral part of the University's quality assurance processes and contribute to both University and School annual monitoring of programmes.

At the end of a visit to HWUM (and, if appropriate, at the end of the period of office), you are required to submit a written report to the University. Reports should be submitted no later than two months after the date of your visit. Your fee will be paid on receipt of the report.

You have the right to comment on any matter you wish in relation to your role. However, there is a standard series of issues on which the views of HWUM External Examiners are required. Your report should contain, but is not limited to, the following:

- a) Assessment of programme objectives and outcomes.
- b) Assessment of OBE (outcomes-based education) implementation and achievement of the programme objectives by the students.

- c) Assessment of staff quality including qualifications and industry exposure. This is to include assessment of loading of each staff in teaching, research, consultancy and supervision of student projects.
- d) Assessment of staff-student ratio and student workload. If found to be insufficient, corrective action shall be taken by the Institute for Higher Learning.
- e) Assessment of preparation process of examination papers i.e. procedures for setting and vetting, quality assurance, confidentiality and security.
- f) Assessment of examination papers and marking schemes set for the standard of questions, coverage of syllabus, adequate balance between theory and application, setting of questions of equal level, adequate choice of questions, and appropriateness of marking scheme.
- g) Assessment of the marked answer scripts based on a sample of good, average and weak candidates. Fairness/disparity of marking, follow-through method adopted if answer to one section is wrong, response of candidates to the question, and distribution of marks.
- h) Assessment of coursework, laboratory work, assignments, design projects, final-year projects.
- i) Assessment of examination procedures and regulations.
- j) Management commitment towards the programme.
- k) Assessment of assessments moderation process.

You will receive a response to your report from a senior member of the HWUM Programme Team, addressing any issues you raised.

## Heriot-Watt University Global College External Examiners

This appendix provides supplementary information to the External Examiners handbook specifically for Global College External Examiners.

Each programme that leads to an award of the University must have one or more External Examiner. For Global College, a programme that leads to the significant transition to another level/programme of study must have one or more External Examiner.

### Roles and Responsibilities of Global College External Examiners

As an External Examiner of the University, you are expected to undertake the following duties:

- Assess and comment on draft examination papers and other forms of assessment contributing to a significant progression decision (e.g. progression to another level/programme of study);
- Review samples of assessed work across all modes and locations;
- Comment on programme design/re-design;
- Submit an annual report to the University covering each campus/location (including University approved partners e.g. Aktobe);
- Attend and participate in a Board of Examiners where there is a significant transition to another level/programme of study. At least one External Examiner should attend a programme Board. It is not necessary for all External Examiners to attend all Boards. The Global College will advise you regarding attendance at Boards;
- Comment on student performance, and assessment process;
- Evaluate assessment processes (e.g. internal marking, feedback, borderline cases);
- Comment on the level of student performance, including across locations, where appropriate;
- Comment on academic standards;
- Comment on consistency of the programme (e.g. with UK Subject Benchmark Statements or with other HEIs)

### Global College Examiner Reports

External Examiner reports are an integral part of the University's quality assurance processes and contribute to both University and School annual monitoring of programmes.

At the end of the academic year, you are required to submit an online report to the University. Guidance and link to the online report form will be sent to you in early May.

Where the programme runs at different campus locations and/or at a University approved Partner, a report should cover each location.

UG reports should be submitted no later than **30 June** each year. For the Aktobe partnership, the Boards tend to take place after this deadline, therefore, a later date for submission of reports will be advised. PGT reports should be submitted no later than **31 October**. Your fee will be paid on receipt of the completed report(s).

Your completed report(s) will be forwarded to the Global College who will review your report(s) and provide a response addressing any issues you raised, and any areas of good practice identified.

### Support for Global College External Examiners

**Academic Quality** will oversee the nomination and approval process for all Taught External Examiner positions, provide advice in relation to your appointment and tenure, and support you with the External Examiners reporting process. Academic Quality will initiate payment of your external Examiner fee on receipt of your annual report(s) and process any expenses in relation to a visit, apart from the Malaysia Foundation programme. For this programme, the Malaysia campus will initiate payment of your fees.

Please contact Academic Quality: [externalexaminerstaught@hw.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminerstaught@hw.ac.uk)

**Academic Operations** will provide support in relation to access to materials for reviewing assessment and issuing invitations to the Boards of Examiners. Academic Operations have devolved responsibility to Dubai and Malaysia for access to examination materials and the set-up of Boards of Examiners at each location.

#### Key Contact Information for Academic Operations

Location	Contact
Edinburgh (including partnership locations)	Academic Operations Support Team (will issue invitations to Boards of Examiners): <a href="mailto:ras-acops-uk@hw.ac.uk">ras-acops-uk@hw.ac.uk</a>  Examinations Team, within Academic Operations (will assist with access to assessment material): <a href="mailto:Ras-Examinations@hw.ac.uk">Ras-Examinations@hw.ac.uk</a>
Dubai	All queries in relation to assessment materials and Board of Examiners for Dubai Entry Programme: <a href="mailto:DEP@hw.ac.uk">DEP@hw.ac.uk</a>
Malaysia	All queries in relation to assessment material and Board of Examiners for the Malaysia Foundation Programme: <a href="mailto:Jasmine.Low@hw.ac.uk">Jasmine.Low@hw.ac.uk</a>

The **Global College** will act as the main point of contact in relation to the programme. The Global College will provide you with an induction in the first year of your appointment.