

ACADEMIC QUALITY



Learning and Teaching Policy

Academic Decision-Making: Assessment, Progression and Award Student Guide

This Student Guide summarises HWU's approach to academic decision-making and maintaining academic standards in relation to assessment, progression and award. The full Policy document is available on the Learning and Teaching Policy Bank [here](#).

These are the University's standard procedures. However, it is recognised that there might be occasions where there is a need for whole cohort mitigation, in order to address the impact of particular disruptions (eg industrial action or severe weather) on assessment, progression and award. (Note: the University has in place its [Mitigating Circumstances Policy and Procedures](#) for individual circumstances).

The University's approach is in line with that of other universities across the UK.

Messages sent to all students prior each Assessment and Exams Diet will highlight the [University's Academic-Decision Making Approach](#) and the [Student Guide to What Happens after Exams](#) (and after other end-of-semester assessment). This summary is designed to provide students with further detail on academic decision-making. It is also available on the Supporting Our Students site [here](#).

Three-Stage Approach

Whatever the circumstances, all students (campus, partner, online) are always treated fairly in assessment; this fundamental approach remains in place whatever and however external circumstances might impact on assessment, progression or award. There continues to be a three-stage approach in place to support those students who might otherwise be disadvantaged in their studies for reasons beyond their control.

Stage One: Fair and Equitable Assessment

The key principle of fair and equitable assessment is that no student, irrespective of programme, degree, location or mode of study, will be academically disadvantaged or penalised under the University's assessment (coursework and examination) arrangements due to circumstances beyond their control.

Stage Two: Supportive Arrangements

Across the University, supportive arrangements are in place in relation to assessment:

- Assessments (both coursework and in-person exams) have been specifically designed for the different and changing learning environments.
- Academic staff take into account the impact of any disruption on all students when marking assessments. Additionally, if any specific issues have affected students individually, these can be reported quickly through the streamlined [mitigating circumstances](#) process.
- There is widespread support, advice and guidance on different forms of assessment, including in-person exams, for example, through the [Exams website](#), [Skills Hub](#) and the [Advice Hub](#). Prior to each Assessment and Examination Diet, the Student Success Advisors will provide drop-in sessions and also produce guidance via their social media channels. The [AskHWU tile](#) on the Student Portal provides access to over 50 FAQs on exams
- Schools have provided their own specific information for students on topics such as types of assessment, assessment scheduling and feedback on assessment; there will also be specific guidance on helping students to prepare for in-person, invigilated exams. School information is aligned with University policies and guidance.
- Each academic year, the University has continued to review, and adapt where necessary, its assessment policies, ensuring that these are fair and equitable:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification on types of assessment: in-person exams and coursework • Professionalism and Academic Integrity guidance and advice for students revised and extended, including Canvas module • Mitigating Circumstances for individual situations, with revised student guides and procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduling and submission of Coursework Policy, including late submission process • Return of Feedback on Coursework Policy, including timescales, and Feedback on Exams Policy
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Stage Three: Decisions by Boards of Examiners

Boards of Examiners are responsible for making decisions on course assessments and also on progression and award based on course assessment results. For awards, Boards include an External Examiner (a subject expert from another UK institution) and a representative from another School to confirm that decision-making is fair, reliable and transparent. Boards of Examiners also make sure that the quality and academic standards of all awards are maintained.

Boards of Examiners will take into account the circumstances under which assessments were taken and any disruption to students' studies. They will not simply look at individual marks or even just the average, but will use all available information to reach fair decisions on grades, progression and final degree classification. The Board will then act to remove any negative impact on students and ensure degrees are awarded fairly, while maintaining academic standards and the value of Heriot-Watt qualifications.

Boards of Examiners will use the following information to help them make their academic judgements and confirm assessment results, progression decisions and awards:

- information regarding the overall outcome and results profiles for the previous years of each course and the programme as a whole;
- the results for students on each course and the programme in the current academic year;
- information confirming any ongoing impact of any disruption to learning, teaching or assessment on the relevant courses and information on changes already made in response to such disruption.

This information enables the Board to reach decisions which are fair, consistent and reliable and which ensure the value, quality and academic standards of all qualifications over time.

Contacts

If there is any aspect of this three-stage process which students have queries or concerns about, the Student Representative Bodies have recommended that students should contact their Class Rep or a member of staff such as the Student Advisor, Course Leader/Lecturer, Personal Tutor or Year Co-ordinator.