

ACADEMIC QUALITY



Learning and Teaching Policy

Policy on Feedback on Exam Performance and Access to Exam Scripts

Purpose and Summary of Policy

This document provides the policy framework for the University's [Feedback on Exam Performance and Access to Exam Scripts Policy](#), which has been in place since April 2008. A revised version was introduced from 2022/23.

This policy should be used by Schools in the provision of feedback on examination performance and on access to exam scripts. The policy takes account of the decision made by the Senate that students should be permitted to view their own examination scripts where possible after each diet and should receive appropriate feedback on their performance in examinations.

Scope

The policy applies to access to examination scripts and to the provision of feedback on examination performance and includes all Heriot-Watt University taught students (undergraduate and postgraduate) across all modes and locations. This revised version is applicable from AY 2022/23.

Examinations are defined as “2- or 3-hour, in person, invigilated assessment held in a University approved exam venue or University approved computer lab via Canvas quizzes; they can be unseen/closed book or open book”. Examination script refers to the response provided by a student to questions set in an examination paper and to the associated comments and marks provided by University staff (or Approved Teachers/Tutors/Markers) on the response.

This policy does not apply to time-limited coursework, such as Final Online Assessments which are categorised as coursework, nor to any other form of coursework; these are covered by the [Feedback on Coursework Policy](#). (Note: the terminology of “take home exams” and “take home open book exams” was discontinued from 2022/23).

Definitions of examinations and coursework are provided in [Types of Assessment: Policy and Administrative Definitions](#).

Access to Exam Scripts: Policy and Supporting Procedures

The following policy and procedures relate to access to examination scripts.

Policy

- 1) Students across all modes and locations of study should be given the opportunity to view their examination scripts after each Exams and Assessment Diet (except examinations in the final diet for graduating undergraduate or postgraduate taught students).
- 2) At the present time, off-campus students (online and partnerships) cannot be given access to hard copy scripts, as this would be difficult to manage logistically. Access can be provided, at the discretion of the School, to a scanned version of a hard copy script.
- 3) It should be noted that, in accordance with the UK Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts, students have no legal right to see their examination scripts following marking and moderation. However, the Acts do allow discretion to universities to provide access to examination scripts if they wish to do so. At HWU, this is at the discretion of each School.
- 4) Whilst students do not have a legal right to view their examination scripts, they do have the legal right to view any written comments made on their examination scripts. These may be comments on the script itself or on a separate proforma. All staff involved in marking examination scripts should be made aware that their comments can be viewed by students.

- 5) Even in cases where Schools would normally allow students to view their scripts, the University has the right to refuse access to a script (but not to any written comments made on the script) where this is considered to be appropriate, for example, where: there is evidence that a script may have been tampered with; there are other disciplinary issues that need to be considered; a professional body does not permit scripts to be viewed.

Viewing Scripts

- 6) Schools should make clear to students all arrangements and conditions for viewing scripts.
- 7) Schools should ensure students are given information on access to their scripts by providing a statement on the course VLE site and/or handbook. Suggested information includes details on:
- which exam scripts they will have access to, and those which they will not, with a brief rationale for the latter;
 - how to make a request for access scripts (eg via AskHWU on the Student Portal, which will in turn be picked up by the Exams Team within Registry and Academic Support);
 - when and how they will be given access to their exam scripts;
 - why reviewing their scripts can provide them with useful feedback and how it fits with other feedback the School provides on exams;
 - their responsibilities for viewing their scripts;
 - contact details if they wish to discuss their script further.
- 8) Access to examination papers is provided to students on request for the purpose of gaining feedback from the examination process and to understand their own strengths and areas for improvement. However, it should be clarified to students that this is not an opportunity to question the marking process nor the allocation of marks, nor to debate the academic judgement of the markers in the award of marks, nor to ask about the identity of markers. If the student detects an irregularity in the marking (eg an arithmetical omission or error), then this will be reviewed after the viewing session and the outcome communicated to the student.
- 9) As part of the arrangements for providing access to scripts, the Exams Team within RAS will organise for at least one member of staff to supervise during the viewing session. Supervisors are usually an academic staff member involved in the marking or a Personal Tutor/Academic Advisor. Supervision may, however, be provided by a member of staff in the Professional Services or by staff not associated with the course; in such cases, it should be made clear to students that no explanation of comments written on the script will be given at the time of viewing and that other arrangements for feedback will be made.
- 10) At the start of each viewing session, supervisors should ask students for proof of identification, eg enrolment card. Supervisors should make clear that students must not remove, mark or modify an examination script. The provision of a script to a student is purely for their own educational use; students must not share, publish or otherwise disseminate their scripts, answers or the exam questions. Any breach of these conditions will be considered a disciplinary offence under the University's disciplinary procedures. These criteria apply to all formats of scripts (hard copy, scanned version of hard copy, script completed electronically and marked electronically). Students are, however, permitted to take their own notes during the session, when viewing either hard copy exam scripts or electronic scripts.

Hard Copy Exam Scripts

- 11) Where a hard copy of a script has been provided for viewing (either original or copy), it is supervisor's function to ensure that the student does not alter the examination script in any way and that the student does not copy or take a photograph or remove the examination script from the supervised area. The key function of the supervision is to ensure that all scripts issued are returned intact.

Electronic Exam Scripts

- 12) Students can also be granted access to view examination scripts which have been completed electronically and marked electronically. Depending on the format of the online exam, students may have their own copy of their completed e-script, and, in such situations, any viewing will, therefore, be for the purpose of enabling students to see comments written on their e-scripts.
- 13) Viewings can be arranged as in-person sessions or as remote sessions (eg via MS Teams). In the case of in-person sessions for e-scripts, devices should be available for students to view the script on. If a remote viewing session has been arranged, the script should be displayed by the supervisor as a shared screen. Irrespective of

the format of viewing session, the e-script should not be shared as a copy with the student by email or any other means (eg posting on MS Teams).

- 14) Where a script with comments, or the comments themselves if not written on the e-script, is provided electronically for viewing, the supervisor's function is to ensure that the student does not photograph or take a screenshot of the e-script. It will be more challenging to prevent screenshots being taken in the case of a remote viewing session, and in such cases, additional reminders should be provided of the disciplinary procedures.

Arranging Access to Exam Scripts

- 15) Access to scripts can be made available through a range of means, and the Exams Team in RAS will liaise with Schools to make arrangements. Some examples are given below:
 - Open access sessions at a specified where students can turn up without prior notification;
 - Appointments are available for students to book a slot to view scripts on a scheduled day;
 - Students may request independent access, giving prior notice to enable supervision to be arranged at a mutually agreeable time and place.
- 16) The Exams Team will monitor the uptake of access to scripts (hard copy and electronic) to keep under review the usefulness and efficiency of any School-specific process (eg those listed in paragraph 15) above), and also to determine whether or not the volume of requests is manageable.

Access to Past Exam Papers and Solutions

This section is replicated across a number of related policies:

- 1) The Global Course Leader may release a sample of past examination papers for revision purposes and learning how to navigate examination questions (the format of which might differ year on year). Pedagogical reasons will determine whether papers are made available.
- 2) Solutions to past examination papers are not provided as standard practice. They may be provided if deemed pedagogically appropriate by the Global Course Leader. Solution notes may be provided for marking and moderation purposes, but these are not necessarily model answers.
- 3) In all cases, there should be comprehensive communication to students regarding the assessment strategies, including whether there are opportunities to practice past exam papers and whether solutions will be provided.

Feedback on Examination Performance: Policy and Supporting Procedures

The following policy and procedures relate to feedback on examination performance.

Policy

- 1) Irrespective of whether or not access has been requested to marked examination scripts, all students should be provided with feedback on their examination performance as part of the School's overall approach to providing feedback. This principle does not apply to final year undergraduate students nor to final diet postgraduate taught students for whom feedback at this stage would not have the purpose of helping to improve performance.
- 2) Each School can determine the most appropriate method of providing feedback on examination performance, depending on the discipline, cohort size and level of study. Examples of methods used to provide access to examination scripts and feedback include the following:
 - Examination workshops timetabled in the next semester to go through examination performance and overall learning points.
 - Provision of feedback through generic commentary for all students, highlighting learning points, posted on the University's VLE or other University-approved means of communicating with students, or where relevant members of academic staff have an opportunity to provide group feedback. In the case of electronic exams, if students have their own copy of their submitted script, generic feedback could be a more practical approach.
 - Individual student feedback sheets relating to examination scripts, detailing how a student performed; this could also be used to assist off-campus students.

- One-to-one feedback provided by Personal Tutors/Academic Advisors or members of the Course team.
- 3) Each School should inform students (eg handbook, statement on Course VLE site) of the methods used to provide exam performance feedback.

Release of Results

This section is repeated in the [Feedback on Coursework Policy](#).

Release of Marks and Grades

- 1) In consideration of student wellbeing, coursework results:
 - should be released only during “normal business hours”, ie 0900-1700 in each timezone;
 - should not be released during Exams and Assessment Diets in order not to impact on students who might have exams during the Exams and Assessment Diet.
- 2) The finalised, approved results are those released by Registry and Academic Support (RAS) and available to view on Student/Faculty Self-Service.
- 3) The following arrangements should be followed for particular types of assessments:
 - 100% coursework – academic staff can release results in Canvas before the Course Assessment Board (CAB), highlighting to students that these are provisional. The final course mark, ratified at the Course Assessment Board, is released by RAS and available to view in Student/Faculty Self-Service (S/FSS).
 - 100% exam – feedback (and the mark for the exam) will not be released by academic staff on Canvas until after the CAB has taken place. The final course mark, ratified at the Course Assessment Board, is released by RAS in S/FSS.
 - Coursework/Exam Split – academic staff release coursework results in Canvas in accordance with the standard 3-week turnaround policy. Feedback (and the mark for the exam) will not be released on Canvas until after the CAB has taken place. The final course mark, ratified at the Course Assessment Board, is released by RAS in S/FSS.
 - Final Online Assessments (FOA) – Feedback (and the mark for the FOA) will not be released by academics on Canvas until after the CAB has taken place. The final course mark, ratified at the Course Assessment Board, is released by RAS in S/FSS.

Communication to Students on Release of Results

- 4) Since December 2023, a communication is sent to all students at the end of each diet to inform them of when to expect final results for their course; the provisional status of marks and grades is referred to in this institutional communication. A follow-up communication is sent prior to the final results release, confirming the process, resources and support available. The communications are contextualised according to location and mode of study.

Days of the Week for Release of Results

- 5) The LTAOC will consider the specification of designated days of the week for results release and the support available prior to the start of 2025/26. Until a decision is made in relation to designated days for release of results, RAS and Schools should ensure that students do not receive results when there would likely to be limited or no support for students (eg weekends, Buildings Closed Days).
- 6) Following the release of results, a member of the Course Team should be available to respond to student queries.

Marking: Legibility of Handwriting in Exams

This section is replicated across a number of related policies:

- 7) Students are responsible for ensuring that handwritten assessment work submitted is legible (including handwritten exams), and, where relevant, they should seek the appropriate support and guidance from Disability Services or the Student Advisor/Academic Advisor/Personal Tutor.

- 8) Where a new student has previously received support prior to joining Heriot-Watt University, they must arrange to meet Disability Services as soon as possible to seek guidance and determine what level of support or adjustment is appropriate.
- 9) If the main marker finds any part of the completed handwritten assessment illegible, a second marker (the moderator of the marking) will attempt to mark the work (or part thereof). If there are issues with the legibility of the work, irrespective of whether it was possible to mark the work in whole or part, the Global Course Leader will, after the release of marks, inform the student and recommend they discuss with the Student Advisor/Academic Advisor/Personal Tutor, possible actions to avoid recurrence in the future.

Implementation

It is the responsibility of each School to:

- Ensure consistent implementation of the institutional policy on access to exam scripts and feedback on exam performance across all modes and locations of study;
- Communicate exam feedback procedures (format, return date, use) to students;
- Offer guidance and support to students in recognising, and making use of, different forms of feedback;
- In collaboration with the Learning and Teaching Academy, offer guidance and support to staff in providing timely feedback which helps students review, reflect and act in order to improve their learning.

It is the responsibility of the Learning and Teaching Academic Operations Committee to:

- Monitor annually the effectiveness of the policy and process by reviewing data on the frequency of requests for access to exam scripts, by reviewing student surveys, by engaging with student representatives and colleagues and thereafter take forward any enhancements;
- Review the policy on a five-yearly basis;
- Submit any changes to the policy for consideration and approval to the University Committee for Learning and Teaching.

Further Information

The Learning and Teaching Academy has produced a series of [Feedback Resources](#), including a [Guide for Students on Feedback](#). There is a specific Guide on [helping students to benefit from feedback on exams](#).

The LTA updates this information each academic year, providing a suite of resources and support for teaching teams in preparation of the start of the session. Check out the LTA SharePoint Hub for [current information](#). Further support and guidance are available from the LTA: LTAcademy@hw.ac.uk

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