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Academic Review

Introduction and Overview

This document provides an introduction to the University, its academic structure and an overview of its quality assurance processes. A 'Useful References and Web Links' document is available to use in conjunction with this guidance.

The University

History

Heriot-Watt University has its origins in the Edinburgh School of Arts, which was established in 1821 and subsequently renamed Heriot-Watt College. The institution was awarded University status in 1966.

International

Heriot-Watt is Scotland's most international university with an unsurpassed international in-country presence, delivering degree programmes to over 28,000 students worldwide.

Five Campuses

The University has five campuses: Edinburgh, Galashiels, Orkney, Dubai and Malaysia.

Multi-Mode / Multi-Location

Professional Accreditation

The University is characterised by the opportunities it offers for multi-location, multi-mode study and by the extent to which academic disciplines are closely linked to professional career opportunities. Most disciplines have professional accreditation, and all undergraduate programmes include preparation for graduate-level professional careers. These programmes are offered to a wide range of students through a number of different modes of learning:

- On Campus
- Independently
- Through academic partners (ie Approved Learning Partners)
- Collaboratively (with other higher education institutions in the UK and overseas; including exchange)
- Industrial Placements

Academic Structure

Six Schools

Five academic Schools (undergraduate and postgraduate programmes).
One graduate School (postgraduate programmes only).

- School of Engineering & Physical Sciences
- School of Social Sciences
- School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure & Society
- School of Textiles & Design
- School of Mathematical & Computer Sciences
- Edinburgh Business School *(graduate School)*

Disciplines

Schools are split into disciplines, ranging between one and six within each.

Quality Assurance

Key Processes

The University has three main processes for assuring the quality of its academic programmes.

- Academic Approval (Courses and Programmes)
- Annual Monitoring and Review (including Chief/External Examiners)
- Periodic Review

Academic Approval

Senate

Overall responsibility of Senate.

Devolved Processes

Processes are devolved to the University Committee for Quality and Standards with certain aspects of academic approval devolved to Schools (where the subject expertise resides, and procedures are in place for ensuring consultation with other Schools and timetablers as appropriate).

Policy and Procedures

The University's policy on the approval of new and modified disciplines and programmes is detailed in the institutional academic approval guidelines which are available on the web.

Annual Monitoring and Review

Overall Aims

All of the University's academic provision (including programmes delivered in conjunction with partners) is monitored on an annual basis through the Annual Monitoring and Review (AMR) process which primarily aims to:

- Monitor and review academic standards and quality.
- Monitor and review the student learning experience (and to ensure sufficiency for the achievement of programme learning outcomes).
- Monitor and review progress towards achievement of the University's strategic objectives in learning and teaching.

Guidance and Templates

Guidance documents and templates for the AMR process are available on the web.

External Examiners

Academic Standards / Comparability

The External Examiner system is a key aspect of the University's procedures for setting and maintaining academic standards and is one of the processes by which the University assures itself that the standards of its degrees are comparable to the awards of other higher education institutions. The same external examining procedures are applied for all locations and all modes of delivery.

Chief External Examiner

The External Examiner process has been strengthened by the introduction of the Chief External Examiner, an individual who has oversight of all a School's provision across its various modes and locations of delivery, thereby ensuring the equity of standards across all programmes, regardless of location or mode of delivery.

Scrutiny Process

The process by which External Examiner and Chief External Examiner reports are received and actioned is the responsibility of the University Committee for Quality and Standards and is managed through the Academic Quality Team within Academic Registry. Reports are returned to the Academic Quality Team and scrutinised by the Head of Academic Quality before being sent out to individual Schools for response. Draft responses are then scrutinised by a Dean of the University, who takes a view on whether all the issues raised by the External Examiner have been addressed, and whether additional action is required. Reports and responses are subsequently sent on to the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) for scrutiny and comment. An annual summary report on External Examiner and Chief External Examiner reports is produced by the Academic Quality Team and submitted to the University's Committee for Quality and Standards.

Management of Multi-Location, Multi-Mode Programmes

Code of Practice

The University's Code of Practice for the Management of Multi-Location, Multi-Mode Programmes provides, inter alia, a framework for the assurance of academic standards across all variants of programmes. The Code also outlines the key principles for ensuring that the student learning experience meets the University's minimum threshold. A common academic management structure for all Schools is in place, which is intended to support both the assurance of academic standards and the enhancement of provision, integrating the management of academic activities by Schools across all locations.

Academic Review

A periodic review process is in place for assuring and enhancing the quality and standard of the University's academic programmes. The process follows guidelines set by the Scottish Funding Council and complies with the Quality Assurance Agency's UK Quality Code for Higher Education and outcomes of the reviews are reported to these bodies on an annual basis. Academic Review, which is designed in such a way that it may be demonstrated that academic standards and the quality of the provision are being maintained, is underpinned by other quality processes such as academic approval of courses and programmes, Annual Monitoring and Review and Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies Review.

Professional Services Review

A separate periodic review process is in place for assuring the quality of academic-related support services. The process is very similar to, and is modelled on the Academic Review process.

Scottish Funding Council

Guidance from the Scottish Funding Council indicates that institution-led quality reviews should include key characteristics. A mapping exercise has been undertaken, to demonstrate how these key characteristics are embedded within the University's Academic Review process and/or other quality assurance processes.

Internal Audit

A separate additional process is in place for high risk activities such as those delivered by independent learning or through Approved Learning Partners (ALP). Internal Audit is an assurance-led process which complements enhancement-led Academic Review. It is designed to ensure that high risk activities are properly managed and the quality and standards of such activities are assured. Internal Audit provides an opportunity to periodically review the effectiveness of Schools' management structures for higher risk activities. This additional process is

exclusively assurance focused, thereby allowing Academic Review and Academic-Related Review to have an enhancement purpose.

Quality Enhancement

Workshop	**T**he Review will include a quality enhancement workshop delivered and facilitated by the School/Discipline, on a topic linked to the School's Learning and Teaching Strategy and Enhancement Plan (LTSEP). The School/Discipline will provide a one page briefing paper in advance of the review event.
Outcomes	**F**ollowing the workshop, the School/Discipline will develop clear outcomes which will contribute towards the achievement of the LTSEP. Monitoring the implementation of School LTSEPs is the responsibility of the University Committee for Learning and Teaching, which takes place through various activities (eg annual discussion meetings).