Heriot-Watt University

Framework for Developing Learning and Teaching Policy

This Framework for Developing Learning and Teaching Policy applies to the development of policies relating to taught provision and undertaken by the University Committee for Learning and Teaching or by the University Committee for Quality and Standards on behalf of the Senate. The term "learning and teaching policy" is used as a generic term throughout to refer to the policies developed by both Committees.

This Framework document and the accompanying step-by-step *Guide to Learning and Teaching Policy Development* are also available on the front page of the Learning and Teaching Policy Bank: https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/learning-teaching/policy-bank.htm

Background

In December 2012, the Court approved a proposed set of definitions relating to the components of the University's constitutional framework (the most recent revised version was approved in May 2017). The purpose of adopting a set of commonly agreed definitions is to provide direction and support for any work undertaken in the future to tidy up or to develop parts of the constitutional framework. Agreed definitions and adherence to these are necessary to support the achievement and maintenance of good order in the University's constitutional framework. https://www.hw.ac.uk/documents/Constitutional-Framework-Definitions-Document-Upda.pdf. The constitutional framework is defined in terms of: Charter and Statutes, Ordinances, Regulations, Policies (Corporate), Policies (Academic), Procedures, Guidelines and Codes of Practice. In addition, lines of responsibility for each category are specified.

As regards policies, in essence, corporate (non-academic) policies are the responsibility of the Court, the University Executive and Secretary of the University; they are devolved to various committees and groups as appropriate. Academic policies are the responsibility of the Senate and, as such, the Senate approves all new and modified academic policies. Within the overall categorisation of "academic policies", the development of policies related to the quality assurance of taught programmes is the responsibility of the University Committee for Quality and Standards and its sub-committees. Research policies are developed by the University Committee for Research and Innovation and its sub-committees.

The development of academic policies has likewise been delegated by the Senate: in this case, to the University Committees for Learning and Teaching and for Quality and Standards. The actual process of producing and amending learning and teaching policies is undertaken by the Learning and Teaching Academic Operations Committee on behalf of both UCLT and UCQS. Recommendations are made to the UCLT or UCQS via LTAOC and thereafter, if required, from UCLT or UCQS to the Senate.

Definition of Academic Policy

The University's constitutional framework includes definitions of both corporate and academic policies. Academic policies are defined as follows:

1. Academic policies encompass learning, teaching, assessment, research, the student learning experience, programmes and courses, and associated quality assurance policies and procedures.
2. Academic policies exist to define and communicate institutional standards and to ensure equitable treatment of all students.
3. Academic policies apply to all programmes offered by Heriot-Watt University in any location and by any mode of study.

Policies (Academic)

A University academic policy is a concise, formal and mandatory statement of principle and applies, by definition, institution-wide. Academic policies encompass learning, teaching, assessment, research, the student learning experience and programmes and courses, and also include the quality assurance policies and procedures associated with each area. Academic policies are part of the regulatory framework which governs the University's core academic activities

The Senate is "the governing and executive body responsible for the academic work and standards of the University, both in teaching and research, and for the regulation and superintendence of the education and

discipline of the students of the University" (HWU Charter, Clause 9 (1)). Therefore, the Senate has ultimate authority over the University's academic policies.

Academic policies aim principally to:

- guide academic practice and decision-making by setting out mandatory requirements;
- ensure the integrity of, and consistency across, the University's decision-making;
- help ensure that the University is compliant with national codes and external policy or legislation;
- provide a framework for ensuring the equitable treatment of all students;
- assure the quality and standards of the University's academic provision;
- safeguard the University's academic reputation;
- enhance the University's academic provision and the student learning experience.

Academic policies aim to support the University's academic strategy and operations, and should not be subject to frequent change.

> The remainder of this Framework document focuses on the process for developing **learning and teaching policies**. "Learning and Teaching" is used in its broadest sense to refer policies related to taught provision and the taught student experience which are developed by either the University Committee for Learning and Teaching or by the University Committee for Quality and Standards.

Types of Learning and Teaching Policies

The University Committee for Learning and Teaching (UCLT) operates with the delegated authority of the Senate to develop the policies in the following areas:

- learning and teaching;
- academic quality enhancement frameworks for taught programmes of study;
- the development of the academic attributes of students, and the academic practice and learner support skills of staff and students;
- the development of approaches for effective sharing of best practice in learning and teaching.

The University Committee for Quality and Standards (UCQS) operates with the delegated authority of the Senate to develop the policies in the following areas:

- the University's Quality Assurance Framework;
- academic and other entry requirements and the recognition of prior learning;
- conditions of registration, periods of registration, and changes of registration;
- assessments, examinations, feedback, and progression;
- the appointment of internal and external examiners;
- the granting of awards resulting from taught programmes of study;
- the deprivation and revocation of awards resulting from programmes of study.

In practice, the UCLT and the UCQS delegate development of policies to their joint sub-committee, the Learning and Teaching Academic Operations Committee (LTAOC).

> All learning and teaching policies are available on the Learning and Teaching Policy Bank (https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/learning-teaching/policy-bank.htm), which provides an alphabetical list of all policies, procedures and guidelines.

Process for Developing and Reviewing Learning and Teaching Policies

In its review of its Terms of Reference in March 2012, the Learning and Teaching Board (LTB) agreed to devolve all matters related to learning and teaching policy to the Student Learning Experience Committee (SLEC). With the establishment of the new academic committee structure from 1 August 2017, the University Committee for Learning and Teaching (the successor to the LTB) agreed that the development, review and revision of learning and teaching policies and associated procedures should continue to be delegated to SLEC in accordance with

the previously agreed process for the review and development of learning and teaching policies[1]. Following a period during the COVID-19 pandemic, when SLEC was replaced by a series of L+T Groups, SLEC was formally replaced in 2022/23 by the Learning and Teaching Academic Operations Committee. From January 2025, LTAOC became a joint committee of both UCLT and UCQS.

The process for LTAOC to review and develop policies on behalf of UCLT and UCQS remains as previously:

- the groundwork (in terms of review, drafting, etc.) is undertaken by small groups of LTAOC members (and/or members of UCLT or UCQS) and colleagues with relevant expertise;
- the member of Professional Services responsible for supporting the review and development of a policy is also responsible for completion of the Equality and Privacy Impact Assessment (EIA and PIA);
- the member of Professional Services responsible for supporting the review and development of a policy is also responsible for reviewing the draft proposal with reference to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the University's own Code of Practice for the Management, Assurance and Enhancement of Taught Programmes (known as the "Global Code"), and ensuring that there is appropriate reference to both in the proposal;
- a draft proposal is circulated with a view to wider consultation and thereafter amended;
- the finalised draft proposal, including the completed EIA and PIA, is considered by LTAOC, with a view to endorsement;
- the version endorsed by LTAOC is sent to UCLT or UCQS for approval;
- UCLT or UCQS includes information on the new/revised policy in its regular report to the Senate;
- For policies which require approval by the Senate, eg where these including Regulation changes, these will be forward via an appendix to the UCLT or UCQS report.

As part of its remit, the LTAOC is responsible for putting in place a more managed approach to the development and review of learning and teaching policies, procedures etc. As a consequence, a schedule for review of existing learning and teaching policies and development of new policies is overseen by LTAOC and is maintained by the Academic Quality Division.

A separate *Guide to Learning and Teaching Policy Development* provides a step-by-step overview of how to undertake policy development, from an initial case to approval and implementation. The Guide and this Framework document are also available on the front page of the Learning and Teaching Policy Bank: https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/learning-teaching/policy-bank.htm

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Process for Developing and Reviewing Procedures

Learning and Teaching policies are usually accompanied by a series of procedures which outline in detail the steps to be followed in implementing, and adhering to, the over-arching policy. In terms of the definitions within the University's constitutional framework, procedures are defined as follows:

Procedures relate to and aid implementation of a University policy; representing the "how" rather than the "what" and "why" covered by policy documents. Procedures documentation sets out the prescribed and specific tasks or sequence of actions necessary to comply with the policy with which they are associated.

The proposal for a new or revised learning and teaching policy should include the development or amendment of the underpinning procedures. The finalised procedures are approved by the LTAOC, having satisfied itself that the procedures adhere to the associated policy. The LTAOC should, when making a recommendation to the UCLT or UCQS for approval of a new or amended policy, confirm to the Committee that the underpinning procedures are in place and will ensure the effective implement of the policy.

M.King
Academic Quality
1 November 2012. Updated November 2014; October 2015; November 2017; April 2019, August 2025

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[1] The process as described was updated to reflect the new academic governance structure, which was introduced on 1 August 2017, and to include reference to the UK Quality Code; in all other respects, the process remained unchanged.