

University Studies Committee Handbook

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1. Introduction to the University Studies Committee and this Handbook

The University Studies Committee is a standing sub-committee of the University Committee for Quality and Standards (UCQS), one of the three main committees of Senate. UCQS is responsible on behalf of the Senate for all aspects of academic quality assurance.

With the approval of the Senate, UCQS has established the Studies Committee as a standing sub-committee to undertake on its behalf consideration and approval of the academic conditions associated with the establishing, modifying, or withdrawing of undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses, programmes and disciplines. The University Studies Committee works closely with Studies Committees in the academic Schools to ensure that quality is maintained across the full range of the University's taught provision.

The [Terms of Reference](#), setting out the remit and composition of the Committee are published on the University website.

This Handbook will be updated as required but particularly where major changes have taken place in the remit or the operation of the Committee or in the University's programme approval process. The Handbook aims to provide a comprehensive overview of all aspects of the Studies Committee and is intended to support members in carrying out their roles on the Committee. In addition, it is intended to be useful to the wider group of staff involved in the Studies Committee's activities, in both Schools and Professional Services.

2. Process & Structure for Academic Approvals

2.1. Role of Senate, UCQS and the Studies Committee

The Court is the governing body of the University which, subject to the Charter, exercises all the powers of the University. The University Charter and Statutes (Statute 4: The Court) define the powers, functions and composition of the Court.

The Court has delegated to the Senate all of its powers in relation to academic work and standards, so that, subject to the terms of the Charter and the Statutes and to the powers reserved to the Court, the Senate is the principal body responsible for the academic work and standards of the University in relation to:

- programmes of study;
- teaching and research;
- the granting of awards;
- the regulation and stewardship of the education and discipline of the students.

The University Committee for Quality and Standards, a standing sub-committee of Senate, is responsible, on behalf of the Senate, for all aspects of academic quality assurance, including:

- progressing or engaging with institutional policy development;
- monitoring and review;
- oversight of the Quality Assurance Framework.

Responsibility for academic approval has been further delegated to the Studies Committee (see diagram below). The Studies Committee has delegated responsibility for the approval of new programmes, modifications to programmes, and the withdrawal of programmes, and plays a fundamental role in

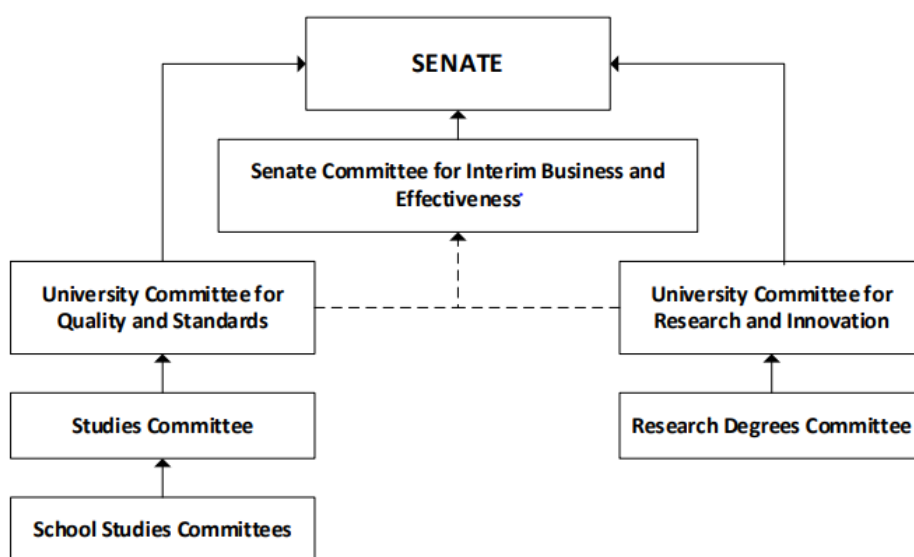
assuring the academic standards of the University's undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes of study. The purpose of approval by Senate and the Studies Committee is to ensure that:

- programmes meet the expectations of the external reference points (typically credit level, degree title, broad curriculum)
- programmes meet the requirements laid down in University regulations.

The Studies Committee works closely with Studies Committees in the academic Schools, the School Studies Committees (SSCs). Proposals that come to the Studies Committee for consideration must first be considered and approved by SSCs.

Schools have sole responsibility for approval of most types of new courses, course modifications, and course withdrawals, as well as minor modifications to programmes.

Details of the University's approval process can be found [here](#).



2.2. Business Approval

Prior to academic approval through the Studies Committee, new programmes and some programme modifications (e.g. new location, new partner) require business approval. The [Business Approval Process](#) is overseen by the Programme Management Board, a Board of the University Executive.

The business approval process ensures that the University has sufficient resources in place to deliver the programme (e.g. space, staff, learning materials, IT facilities, laboratories) and that, where relevant, any partner meets the University requirements to share in the delivery of the programme. Business case approval also ensures that risks have been properly assessed and there is sufficient demand from students for the programme to be sustainable.

Some aspects of business approval are delegated to Executive Deans, while others are delegated to specific Senior Officers. Exceptionally, business approval may require the approval of the Court, e.g. a new campus.

2.3. Approval of Academic Partnerships

Academic partnerships are approved by the [Partnership Management and Approval Group](#). Proposals are required to follow the [partnership application process](#).

2.4. Scrutiny by Academic Quality

Academic Quality must be notified of all changes through GCM, the Global Curriculum Management System.

For all academic approvals, it is the responsibility of the Curriculum Management Approval Team (CMAT) team in Academic Quality to ensure that all required information has been correctly entered on GCM.

3. Operation of the University Studies Committee

3.1. Schedule of Meetings

The Studies Committee usually meets seven times per academic session, although additional meetings may be scheduled for more detailed consideration of particular items or for immediate consideration of items that are urgent.

A schedule of meetings for each academic session is issued prior to the start of each session; each schedule lists the meetings for two academic sessions.

The start time of meetings is typically 9.15 am (UK time), with an expected duration of approximately two hours. This may be extended if more detailed discussion of particular items is required or if the agenda is particularly lengthy.

Cancellation, rescheduling or inclusion of additional meetings will be notified to members by the Clerk as soon as possible, and normally within at least five working days.

3.2. Typical Meeting Structure

The order of business at each of the Committee's meetings is typically as follows:

- Welcome and Apologies
- Minutes of Previous Meeting
- Matters Arising
- Chair's Business
- Academic proposals for approval: new programmes, programme modifications, and programme withdrawals
- Any Other Competent Business
- Date of Next Meeting

3.3. Agenda and Papers

Agenda items considered by the Committee are primarily School-specific proposals. In addition, the Committee may generate its own agenda items, identifying areas of policy or procedure related to undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and courses of study.

3.3.1. Notifying agenda items

The agenda is typically set two weeks in advance of each meeting: potential items should be notified to the Clerk of the Committee no later than 10 days before the meeting. Individuals who would like to present a programme proposal or a paper to the Committee for consideration should contact the Clerk in the first instance. The Clerk will advise the sponsor on when the paper will be considered by the Committee and the format in which the paper should be prepared.

Items notified to the Clerk later than 10 days before the meeting will be included on the agenda only with the prior agreement of the Chair; otherwise, they will be held over until the next meeting. Papers tabled at the meeting will not normally be considered, as there is insufficient time for informed discussion.

The Chair and the Clerk will determine whether notified items are matters for the Committee or for another of the University's committees.

Members are requested to identify all matters to the Clerk in advance of the meeting, including any urgent, last-minute issues, in preference to tabling papers or raising matters not previously notified to the Clerk under the 'Any Other Competent Business' item.

3.3.2. Preparation of Papers

Papers are prepared by the Clerk in conjunction with the Chair and academic colleagues in Schools who are responsible for submission of proposals. All programme proposals are accessible via the Global Curriculum Management System (GCM).

3.3.3. Circulation of agenda and papers

The agenda and papers are made available to members at least one week in advance of each meeting. Papers are made available on the SharePoint site, while proposals are accessible via GCM. Notification about the meeting will be emailed to members along with a summary of proposals to be scrutinised at the meeting and a note of the allocation of the reviewers for the programme proposals.

Unapproved minutes of the previous meeting are included in the main circulation; a version will have been already issued approximately two weeks after the relevant meeting.

Additional circulations, typically including 'to follow' papers, are kept to a minimum, but on some occasions are unavoidable. Every effort will be made to ensure that all such papers are issued electronically before the meeting, so that members have sufficient opportunity to consider them in advance.

3.4. Scrutiny of Programme Proposals

The main business of most Studies Committee meetings is consideration of academic proposals for new programmes, programme modifications, and withdrawal of programmes. All Committee members are expected to read and comment on proposals. However, to ensure thorough scrutiny and to make best use of the meeting time, each proposal is assigned to specific members of the Committee to review prior to the meeting. Reviewers are chosen by the Clerk and in such a way as to ensure that the task is shared equally among Committee members over the course of the session. Typically, two reviewers are assigned to each proposal, based on expertise where feasible. Members are not expected to review a proposal from their own School. Where a proposal is being re-submitted to the Committee, the original reviewers are generally re-assigned.

Members should use the Reviewer Guide & Checklist when reviewing academic proposals, to ensure that reviews are comprehensive and systematic. It can be found [here](#); a PDF version for reference can be found [here](#). Reviewers should complete their review in advance of the meeting, consult their co-reviewer, and bring their comments to the relevant meeting for discussion. The form will be held by the Clerk. Reviewers should not leave any comments in GCM; the Review function in GCM is to be used by Schools, primarily during the proposal development phase.

Once a proposal has been discussed at the meeting, a decision on approval is taken. If not approved, the Committee is likely to request further information from the School, or particular actions, either to provide clarity or to strengthen the proposal. The Committee may agree that Chair's action be taken to approve the programme once all of the points raised have been satisfactorily addressed, in which case the School submits amendments to the Chair via the Clerk.

In some cases, the requested amendments are more extensive and require re-submission of the proposal to a subsequent meeting of the Committee.

The most common approval decisions relating to programme proposals taken by the Studies Committee are as follows:

- Members approve the proposal
- Members do not approve the proposal and request that revised documentation and responses to the Committee's comments are submitted for consideration at the next meeting
- Members agree to approve the proposal in principle, subject to the Chair receiving via the Clerk, satisfactory revisions/responses addressing the Committee's comments.

3.5. Decision-Making and Voting

The Committee's remit allows it to make decisions on, and thereby approve, proposals related to new taught programmes, modified programmes, and withdrawal of programmes. All decisions are reported to the Senate through minutes submitted to the University Committee for Quality and Standards.

3.6. Minutes and Action Points

The minutes of each meeting are produced by the Clerk and signed off by the Chair. Minutes are circulated electronically to Committee members usually within two weeks of the meeting. Members are invited to notify any factual errors in the minutes to the Clerk before the next meeting; these will be announced by the Chair at the next meeting, prior to the Committee being invited to accept the minutes as an accurate record.

3.6.1. Chair's Actions

Where the Committee decision is to approve a proposal in principle, subject to the Chair receiving, via the Clerk, satisfactory revisions/ responses addressing the Committee's comments, the revised proposal is submitted to the Chair for review and approval on behalf of the Committee. All Chair's actions are reported to the Committee under Matters arising.

3.6.2. Business by Correspondence

At times it is necessary to complete some of the Committee's business by correspondence, e.g. if there is urgency to have a certain programme considered and approved within a set time period.

3.7. Reporting to Schools and Professional Services

As part of its ethos of engagement across the institution, the Committee reports discussions and decisions to Schools and Professional Services. This is done partly through circulation of the minutes of

meetings, but it is also the responsibility of School-appointed members of the Committee to communicate decisions and the outcome of discussions back to their Schools. In this way the intention is to foster two-way dialogue between the Studies Committee and the Schools, and to ensure that the feedback loop is closed. All Studies Committee decisions and discussions can be communicated widely; paperwork and outcomes of discussions are very rarely identified as confidential.

3.8. Communicating with the Studies Committee

Non-members should communicate with the Committee via the Clerk, rather than emailing the Committee directly. In this way, there is a consistent line of communication and a means of ensuring that only matters of relevance are circulated to the Committee.

4. Composition of the Committee & Role of Members

4.1. Composition

In addition to the Chair, Vice-Chair, and the Clerk, the Committee is composed of the Chair of UCQS, members appointed by the Senate, members appointed by the academic Schools, student representatives, and an external member. The Head of Market Research & Analysis and a representative from the Learning & Teaching Academy are also in attendance.

A full list of Studies Committee members is available on the [Committee webpage](#).

4.2. Term of Office

Members of the Committee, other than ex officio, are appointed for three years, from 1 August to 31 July. Members are eligible for re-appointment but are not permitted to serve more than two consecutive terms of three years. Any extension of the number of consecutive terms of three years requires approval from the Senate.

4.3. Induction for New Members

An induction session for new members, which all members are invited to attend, takes place at the start of each academic year, in September. This introduces members to key aspects of the Studies Committee and talks through their roles, expectations of them as members, and available support.

4.4. Role of Members

The success of the Committee in fulfilling its Terms of Reference and its responsibilities to the Senate and the University is dependent on the active engagement of its members during and out with meetings.

4.4.1. Preparation for Meetings

For the Committee's meetings to be efficient and effective, members must be well-prepared and informed regarding the issues to be discussed.

Programme proposals require consideration and approval by the entire Committee. However, each proposal is specifically allocated to two named members for detailed scrutiny and reporting back to the Committee. Reviewers are expected to complete the Reviewer's Checklist and to submit this via MS Forms before the meeting, so that a record of their review and comments can be logged.

The preparation required by members will vary slightly depending on their category of membership; in particular, School-appointed members have additional responsibilities, which are outlined below (4.6.4).

4.4.2. At Meetings

Irrespective of position or category of membership, the contribution and views of all members are regarded as equally valid. To that end, the Chair will ensure that representatives from the different sections of the University have an opportunity, particularly during meetings, to contribute to issues under consideration. As the situation demands, the Chair will actively invite all members (or particular categories of members) to contribute, in order to ensure that the views of each person in attendance are heard during meetings.

4.5. Non-Attendance

In order to fulfil its responsibilities effectively, the Committee is reliant on its membership maintaining a high level of attendance at meetings. If members are absent from three consecutive meetings without good reason, this may result in the recommendation that their membership is revoked and the Senate or the School appoints a replacement member.

Anyone unable to attend a meeting should notify the Clerk in advance, citing the reason for their absence. If a member is unable to attend a meeting where decisions are expected to be taken, they are encouraged to submit their views in writing prior to the meeting. The Committee will maintain a record of attendance at each of its meetings and will include this within the final report of the session to the Senate.

In the absence of the Chair and the Vice-Chair from any given meeting, those members present shall appoint one of their number as Chair for that particular meeting. In the absence of the Clerk, the Head of Academic Quality will provide a substitute Clerk.

The Senate attendance policy can be accessed [here](#).

4.6. Roles of Members of the Committee

4.6.1. Chair

The responsibilities of the Chair with regard to the Committee are:

- to provide leadership to move forward the institutional priorities related to undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and ensure that the Committee achieves its overall objectives;
- to provide advice to Schools and DAQs in relation to taught academic programmes;
- to chair meetings and ensure that meetings run efficiently and effectively;
- to ensure that appropriate papers and information are provided to enable members to make an informed contribution to discussions;
- to advise members on quality requirements in relation to taught academic programmes;
- to present the Committee's views to UCQS as appropriate and to provide feedback from UCQS to the Committee;
- to set the Committee's agenda;
- to schedule items across meetings so as to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to bring forward items for consideration and that items are not repeatedly dropped from the agenda;
- to organise the induction programme for new members of the Committee;
- to represent the Committee on relevant working groups;
- to take Chair's action to approve proposals on behalf of the Committee where appropriate.

4.6.2. Vice-Chair

The responsibilities of the Vice-Chair are:

- to deputise for the Chair of the Committee as required;
- to chair meetings of the Committee where the Chair is not available to do so.

4.6.3. Senate Appointees

In addition to the standard duties of members of the Committee (3.1. above), Senate members are expected to:

- ensure that the recommendations of the Senate are taken into consideration, as appropriate, by the Committee;
- provide verbal reports, if required, at meetings of the Senate, in order to supplement the report given by the Chair.

Although Senate appointees are members of academic staff in particular Schools, their role is not to represent their School, but to represent Senate.

4.6.4. School Representatives

In addition to the standard duties of members of the Committee (3.1 above), School members are expected to:

- provide advice on proposals specific to their School;
- discuss issues in their Schools as appropriate and bring to the Committee the considered views of their School;
- bring items to the attention of the senior management of their School;
- contribute towards discussions that lead to the Committee reaching an informed decision.

4.6.5. External Member

The purpose of the External Member is to enhance the externality in the University's academic approval and assurance processes and to ensure that the University is compliant with the UK Quality Code.

4.6.6. Student Representatives

The purpose of the Student Representatives is to offer insights into representation, curriculum design and assessment practices which further help embed the student voice across Heriot-Watt University. They should provide the student body's viewpoint and comment upon the implications for students of the approval of new programmes, major modifications to programmes, and programme withdrawals, at undergraduate and postgraduate taught levels.

4.6.7. Clerk

The role of the Clerk is to:

- provide administrative support for the Committee and relevant sub-committees or working groups;
- provide specialist input to discussions;
- support Schools in submitting programme proposals for approval;
- ensure relevant individuals in academic Schools and Professional Services are properly informed of the Committee's discussions and decisions;
- liaise directly with Committee members regarding information to be communicated more widely across the University;
- provide specialist input to other groups as required;
- advise on the scheduling of agenda items within and across meetings;

- advise on the use of GCM in the programme approvals process;
- keep track of and report on progress of actions and matters arising from Committee business.

4.6.8. Individuals in attendance

In addition to members, there are normally a number of other individuals in attendance at meetings, including the Head of Market Research & Analysis who can provide input regarding the origins of a proposal and the supporting business case, and a representative from the Learning & Teaching Academy who provides specialist advice on aspects of proposals related to learning and teaching. Committee meetings may also be attended by other staff, either to deliver a presentation on a topic of strategic relevance to the Committee, or to present programmes for consideration by the Committee.

5. Guidance for the Approval of Programmes

5.1. Introduction

Members of the Studies Committee are required to use the Reviewer Guide & Checklist when reviewing academic proposals. This provides guidance to reviewers on what they should be looking for when reviewing proposals submitted to the Studies Committee and includes references to relevant regulations. Additional guidance can also be accessed in the help text on GCM. It is important that members are familiar with the requirements of programmes set out by the University and relevant external bodies. Relevant information is provided below, and links to key resources can be found in section 7 of this handbook.

5.2. General Requirements of Programmes

The [Scottish Funding Council](#) and the [Quality Assurance Agency](#) require that:

- all awards and their titles are located in the SCQF framework;
- the academic level of study is recorded using the SCQF level criteria;
- credits are based on a notional 10 hours of learning for 1 credit;
- student workload is based on a notional 40 hours per week;
- Postgraduate Diploma programmes are based on 30 weeks of study at 40 hours per week, giving 1200 student effort hours (SEH) or 120 SCQF credits;
- Postgraduate Masters programmes are based on a 45 week year, corresponding to 1800 SEH or 180 SCQF credits;
- Graduate Apprentice programmes are designed, developed and delivered in accordance with SFC Guidance for University Graduate Apprenticeship places;
- the content of all named awards is consistent with the expectations of the national Subject Benchmark Statements
- the University undertakes its business in a way that is consistent with the QAA Code of Practice.

The University complies with all these requirements, except in one case: the location and mode of study are not specified on the transcript and/or degree certificate issued by HWU. The University's rationale for this divergence from the QAA Code of Practice is based on the fundamental principle that HWU degrees are equivalent, irrespective of mode or location of study.

5.3. Consistency of the Programme with the University's Portfolio

All academic proposals are required to show that the programme (whether new or modified) is consistent with the overall portfolio of the University. This is confirmed by the Programme Management Board (PMB).

The Studies Committee should take a view on whether the award title is appropriate, particularly if similar, but slightly different, titles have been introduced for various versions of a programme, even though the content, assessment etc are almost identical. The Committee should operate on the agreed principle that the same title should be used; different locations or different options choices are not sufficient justification. Professional bodies may, however, require different titles as part of their accreditation criteria.

5.4. University Expectations for Programme Content

The University expects the content of all programmes to have been informed by national Subject Benchmark Statements and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional bodies (PSRBs) and overseas government authorities (see section 6).

More detailed requirements are set out on GCM.

6. Quality Assurance: External Reference Points

There are a number of external quality assurance agencies that the University needs to take into consideration and also report to on a regular basis. This ensures that the quality and standards of the University are in line with the rest of the UK.

6.1. QAA

The [QAA](#) is the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. It partners with Scottish Government, the Scottish Funding Council, universities, AdvanceHE, and the National Union of Students for Scotland, amongst others. The primary focus of QAA is to maintain and enhance quality and standards across the higher education sector. It takes a global perspective of UK education, ensuring that programmes provided by UK institutions, wherever they are delivered, meet quality requirements. The work of the QAA is based on the UK Quality Code which provides a set of principles for securing, assuring and enhancing quality standards sector-wide. The UK Quality Code is the basis of the University's quality practices and processes.

The QAA has developed a set of key reference documents:

- Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework: The [SCQF](#) is a framework for all levels of qualification across Scotland, the different levels indicating the level of difficulty of a particular qualification. There are 12 levels in total, ranging from level 1, the lowest (introductory skills), to 12, the highest (doctoral level). At HWU, as at all other Scottish institutions, the SCQF framework is the foundation of all programmes and underpins the University's regulations.
- Subject Benchmark Statements
- Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in UK HE.

6.2. CMA

The [CMA](#) is the Competitions and Markets Authority, an independent, non-ministerial department of the UK government, which has responsibility across all sectors of the UK economy to promote fair competition and protect consumers. It monitors and reviews the activities of organisations to make sure they are operating in line with regulations. For HWU, this means that the University must ensure that it

delivers what it has published (on the website, in marketing materials etc). If this is not the case, the CMA can impose substantial fines.

6.3. Non-UK Governments

Before the University can deliver programmes in Dubai and Malaysia, academic proposals need to be approved by the CAA and the MQA respectively.

The [CAA](#) is the **Commission for Academic Accreditation**, a federal government agency in the UAE charged specifically with quality assurance. Its primary mission is safeguarding academic standards, as well as awarding licensure for universities to be able to deliver degrees. All programmes delivered by HWU in Dubai require CAA accreditation.

The [MQA](#) is the **Malaysian Qualifications Agency**, a government agency which accredits higher education programmes and qualifications. HWU degrees must meet all of the requirements of the MQA, including some additional compulsory elements in programmes (e.g. industrial placement) that are not a requirement of the degree programmes themselves.

6.4. Professional Bodies

In addition to in-country recognition, the University seeks accreditation for its programmes by the relevant professional bodies, referred to collectively as Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). PSRB accreditation involves approval of academic programmes and assurance that programmes meet the requirements of a particular profession.

PSRB accreditation may be full accreditation, which means that graduates of the programme become full members of a professional body. In other cases, PSRB accreditation may mean that graduates are exempt from specific professional examinations required to become a member later on.

In some cases, PSRB accreditation may impose requirements on the curriculum, award criteria, assessment or method of teaching. This set of requirements should be made explicit in the proposal submitted on GCM.

Programmes to be offered overseas, either at a campus or through a partner, should also be accredited by the relevant PSRB, as UK accreditation does not automatically extend to delivery in other locations. All approval paperwork should include details of the PSRB as well as confirmation that accreditation is being sought for all locations of delivery.

In many cases, there will be accreditation both by a UK and overseas institution. In addition, overseas authorities may require particular programmes to be accredited by the relevant in-country PSRB.

Academic Quality maintains a formal record of accreditation by PSRBs. PSRB reports are considered annually by UCQS.

7. Useful resources

7.1. Webpage of the University Studies Committee

The Committee has a website at: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/studies-committee.htm> which features the Terms of Reference, membership and dates of meetings.

7.2. SharePoint workspace of the University Studies Committee

The Committee has a private SharePoint workspace at: <https://heriotwatt.sharepoint.com/sites/registry-ws-universitystudiescommittee> where the Committee papers are held and features the Terms of Reference, membership and dates of meetings.

7.3. University Regulations

The University regulations are available on the website:

<https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/about/profile/governance/ordinances-regulations.htm>

7.4. Webpage of Academic Quality

A wealth of resources can be accessed from this page: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/academic-registry/quality-external-partnerships.htm>

7.5. SharePoint page of the Programme Management Board (Business Approval Process)

The Board has a SharePoint page at: <https://heriotwatt.sharepoint.com/sites/registry-qualityassurance/SitePages/approvals.aspx>. This contains information about the business approval process.

7.6. GCM Sharepoint site

The CMAT team in Academic Quality have a GCM Sharepoint site where users can access guidance on how to use GCM as part of the approvals process. It can be accessed here: <https://heriotwatt.sharepoint.com/sites/registry-qualityassurance/SitePages/cmat-quality.aspx>

7.7. Learning & Teaching Briefing Papers

Some of the L&T briefing papers are directly relevant to the approvals process and can be found here: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/academic-registry/quality/learning-teaching/learning-and-teaching-briefing-papers.htm>

7.8. Codes of Practice, Policies and Procedures

An extensive series of policies, procedures, guidelines and codes of practice are available on the website (<https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/learning-teaching/policy-bank.htm>).