

ACCREDITATION

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Introduction

Heriot-Watt University engages in collaborative arrangements with partner institutions based in the UK and overseas.

The University has primary and ultimate responsibility for academic standards and quality across all its provision. It works collaboratively with other bodies whose roles include accreditation, licencing and regulation in the UK and overseas.

All external partnership arrangements go through a rigorous approval process. This process ensures authorisation is given by colleagues with particular responsibilities within the University: these include the proposal originator, the Head of School, a Governance and Legal Services representative, Director of Information Services, the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and Secretary of the University.

1. Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)

Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) is the umbrella term given to a very diverse group of professional and employer bodies, regulators and those with statutory authority over a profession or group of professionals. PSRBs engage with higher education as regulators. They provide membership services and promote the interests of people working in professions; accredit or endorse courses and programmes that meet professional standards, provide a route through to the professions or are recognised by employers.

For students, PSRBs provide access to professions through membership; industry contacts; links to employers and access to both initial (IPD) and continuing professional development (CPD). Completion of accredited or recognised programmes may provide a fast-track route to qualified or chartered status or to a professional title. Institutions often make a voluntary commitment to PSRBs and accreditation is a public conformation that they are maintaining required standards and comparability with programmes across the sector.

The University aims to ensure that all its programmes which are eligible for PSRB accreditation secure and retain the accreditation. [please refer to the Code of Practice for the Management of Multi-Location, Multi-Mode Programmes Part 3: Management of Programmes and Partnerships, Principle 3.11, which can be found at <http://intranet.hw.ac.uk/ps/registry/ar/quality/Pages/COP-Multicode.aspx>

This ensures that professional standards and quality are maintained and that students gain the skills and knowledge required by employers. In some cases, the accreditation may impose requirements on the curriculum, assessment or method of teaching. Where a special arrangement is in place to meet PSRB requirements, it is stated within the approval documentation submitted to the Undergraduate/Postgraduate Studies Committees.

Programmes to be offered overseas, either at a campus or through a partner, should also be accredited, wherever possible. In many cases, there will be accreditation both by a UK and an overseas institution. Particular programmes may be required to be accredited by the relevant in-country PSRB, ie overseas professional bodies. Academic Registry maintains a formal record of accreditation by PSRBs, and annual PSRB reports are considered by the Quality and Standards Committee, following a review undertaken by Schools and Academic Registry.

With regard to increasing demands for overseas accreditation, the University will support UK PSRBs gaining a global presence. This will ensure that the University's programmes are externally benchmarked and genuinely the same worldwide, thereby securing PSRB accreditation in the UK and beyond.

Process for Annual Review of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)

- 1 Schools follow their own process with regard to collecting information on PSRBs for each of their programmes, which they pass onto Academic Registry.
- 2 It is agreed that unless Schools have a genuine reason to do otherwise, accreditation should always be sought.
- 3 Academic Registry collects the information on PSRBs from Schools as follows:

1	Academic Registry produces a PSRB review template and this is forwarded to Schools in April each year to complete and return by June.
2	Schools are asked to provide the following information, for the relevant academic year, on: a) the mode of study and location of study for each accredited programme b) details of programmes accredited c) details of programmes and accreditation bodies (with location and mode of study) where programmes were presented for accreditation, but were unsuccessful d) details of any programmes that lost accreditation status during the reporting period.
3	Schools are also asked to identify any issues relating to the accreditation process, list any actions with responsibility and timescales, and identify any actions requiring University-level action.
4	The Quality and External Partnerships Officer produces a summary report of the Schools' accreditations and notes any issues that are raised.
5	The summary report is presented to the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC). QSC approves the report and confirms completion of the review process, noting actions to be undertaken to address resulting issues at the University and School levels.

2. Reviews of Overseas Provision of UK Higher Education Institutions by the Quality Assurance Agency

Many UK institutions offer higher education programmes through partnership links with organisations abroad, or deliver programmes on overseas campuses.

Higher education institutions are responsible for the academic standards of their awards, whether delivered inside or outside of the UK. As part of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)'s work, it reviews the arrangements that UK higher education institutions have formed with overseas campuses/partners in other countries to deliver UK programmes.

It is important to note that it is not the role of the QAA to review or accredit partner institutions outside the UK. The QAA does however, provide guidance for UK higher education institutions on selecting partners and agents through its UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B10.

The Review of Overseas Provision is carried out according to the same principles and processes as the review methods for UK higher education institutions:

- it is a peer review, evidence-based process
- the UK higher education institution provides a briefing document describing its overseas provision
- overseas review usually involves a one-day visit of a review team to the UK institution to meet staff and students, and a similar visit to the partner institution overseas.

The QAA conducts Reviews of Overseas Provision on a country by country basis, rather than at the same time as a university or college's own review. Its method for overseas review is customised according to the country in which programmes are located, and the type of programmes being covered.

As well as reviewing the partnership arrangements of institutions, it also gathers information about the activities of UK institutions in a particular country. It produces reports about individual institution's arrangements, and often an overview of UK higher education in a particular part of the world.

Some institutions with overseas provision may not be reviewed, but may take part in the information gathering exercise which feeds into the country overview, or into case studies exploring particular aspects of overseas partnership provision.

Process for Reviews of Overseas Provision

1	The QAA writes to the Principal, with a copy to the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), to inform the University that an identified country will be reviewed, and that the University and its relevant partner(s) will be included.
2	<p>The QAA requests a short, focused briefing paper prepared by the University, describing the way in which its provision (or a sub-set of its provision) operates, and commenting on the effectiveness of the means by which it assures quality and standards.</p> <p>The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) informs the relevant School of the impending review and requests that the School starts to complete the relevant sections of the briefing paper. The Student Experience Manager, Academic Registry, liaises with the School and ensures the coordination of the relevant documentation for submission to the QAA through Academic Registry.</p>
3	Following the submission of the completed briefing paper and supporting documentation, a two-day visit to the University is undertaken by the QAA and a one-day visit to the partner organisation.
4	<p>The arrangements for the two-day visit to the University are organised and managed by the relevant School in conjunction with Academic Registry staff, ensuring that senior colleagues are included in meetings with the QAA.</p> <p>Visits to the University typically involve two reviewers and a QAA officer. The visit includes pre-meeting preparations by the review team, and various meetings with University staff, involving those with institutional responsibilities for overseas collaborative provision; staff with operational responsibilities for the partnership, and students from the partnership (provided there are students in the UK).</p>
5	The overseas visit to the partner is completed within a single day. The meetings mirror those at the University, although, in some cases there may be just one meeting with staff.
6	Thereafter, the University receives a report from the QAA on the review team's findings, along with a statement in terms of confidence in the University's management of its overseas collaborative activities. The report also highlights key issues and recommendations to be taken forward by the relevant School.

3. Overseas Registration

In order to deliver programmes in some overseas countries, the University (through the relevant School) ensures that the programmes are registered by the relevant in-country accreditation bodies. These bodies provide accreditation services for non-local learning programmes that require registration or exemption from registration.

Schools register non-local programmes leading to post-secondary academic (ie. sub-degree, degree, postgraduate or other post-secondary qualifications) and professional qualifications.

Within the University, the countries involved so far are Hong Kong, Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica.

4. Overseas Annual Returns

In certain countries, for example, Hong Kong, annual accreditation returns for the non-local programmes have to be completed by the University (through the relevant School) and submitted to the relevant overseas accreditation bodies as part of the registration process.

5. Overseas Accreditation/Recognition

With regard to partner institutions located overseas, and as part of the negotiation and preparatory approval documentation, the School ensures that the respective overseas government approval and accreditation is in place.

Accreditation is the status granted to an institution or programme that has been found, through self-evaluation and peer review, to meet or exceed stated guidelines of educational quality.

The role of the accrediting body is to ensure quality through encouraging the improvement of educational standards. There are two types of accreditation: institutional and programme. Institutional accreditation is accreditation of the whole institution and relates to the general quality of the institution. Programme accreditation, on the other hand, evaluates the quality of specific programmes of study offered by an institution. A process of institutional assessment must precede accreditation of programmes in an institution.

Accreditation may not initially be required. However, once the partnership begins to produce graduates, partners/relevant accreditation bodies may request that foreign institutions embark on a local accreditation process that grants recognition of transnational qualifications offered by registered institutions and recognition of the foreign awarding institutions.

Regulation of international provision is on the increase and there are quite substantial costs involved. As the University quality assurance framework is underpinned by the operation of all Schools, clarification of the information required by the relevant government authority and coordination of information is undertaken by the Academic Registry, especially as the University develops partners with multi-School programmes.

There is no set pattern as to how these accreditation processes operate, as they vary from country to country. However, they follow a similar pattern along the lines below:

Process for Accreditation/Recognition (based on Jamaica and Trinidad)

Accreditation/Recognition is a voluntary activity that promotes self-evaluation, self-regulation and accountability. The role of the accrediting body provides an assurance of external evaluation of programmes and authenticity of foreign academic degrees. For some programmes, accreditation/recognition is an employers' requirement in-country and therefore it is very important to universities to undertake overseas accreditation activities. Accreditation/Recognition is awarded to those universities through the process outlined below.

1	The University is required to submit a self-evaluation report, whereby the University formally examines itself, assesses its strengths and weaknesses, and plans how to capitalise on those strengths and to improve on the areas of weaknesses. A separate submission is also required from the local partner.
2	The University and partner submissions are coordinated by the Student Experience Manager, Academic Registry, on behalf of the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching). Relevant Schools/Academic Registry liaise with relevant partners on the completion of their submission to ensure that it is in line with the University's submission. Both submissions are finalised and signed off by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and forwarded to the accreditation body.
3	The accreditation body reviews the material supplied by the University to determine if it will be included as part of a formal review.
4	If the University is included in the formal review, the accreditation body will conduct a visit to both the University and the local partner. (In the case of the visit to the local partner, the accreditation body will liaise direct with the partner on the arrangements.)
5	The accreditation body communicates with the University on an appropriate date for a site visit by a team of professionals.
6	The visit is comprised of (i) a series of interviews with administration, academic staff, students, graduates and employers of graduates from the programme(s), and any other relevant stakeholders (ii) an assessment or evaluation of the University's facilities: lecture rooms, library, laboratories, computer facilities, recreational provisions, etc.
7	All arrangements for the site visit are coordinated and managed by the Student Experience Manager, Academic Registry, on behalf of the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching).
8	Following the visits, the evaluation team prepares a report which provides a summary of strengths and weaknesses and offers advice, suggestions and recommendations to the University. A copy of the report is sent to the Principal, who is invited to submit a written response to the comments and recommendations. The response is coordinated by the Student Experience Manager, working with relevant Schools and the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), and is forwarded to the accreditation body.

9	The team's report and the University's response are reviewed by the accreditation body and then they inform the University of its recommendations with regard to accreditation. Any recommendations for approval (or development/enhancement) normally require the University to respond (or resubmit documentation) to the accreditation body within a specified period, or as part of the annual reporting mechanisms.
10	One of the conditions of accreditation is the submission of annual reports on the status of the accredited programme(s). Such reports can inform the accreditation body of steps taken to satisfy any conditions upon which accreditation was granted. The reports can also detail any substantive changes in programme structure, course content, staffing, equipment and teaching facilities, requirements for student admissions, and financing arrangements.
11	Following the period of approval, the University will undertake a re-accreditation process. Accreditation and re-accreditation are similar in both substance and procedure. The University must satisfy the accreditation body that they continue to meet the accreditation requirements. There would also be a complete review of the programme(s) and the University would have to demonstrate what developments it has implemented to maintain and enhance the quality of the programme(s).
12	Overseas accreditation/registration is reported to University committees through an annual Quality Report which is submitted to the Scottish Funding Council.

6. Overseas Campus Accreditation/Recognition

Dubai Campus - Knowledge and Human Development Authority Annual Returns

The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) is responsible for the future growth, direction and quality of education and learning in Dubai. It is the Dubai Government Authority with responsibility for the issue of educational permits and external quality assurance of higher education provided in the Dubai Free Zones.

The University Quality Assurance International Board (UQAIB) is a board of leading international higher education quality assurance experts who work to ensure that the quality of higher education of the Higher Education Providers (HEPs) is in line with both international and Emirati standards.

UQAIB has responsibility for approving Higher Education Providers Branches for the purpose of Institutional Permits and making recommendations to KHDA accordingly; and validating the academic programmes of HEP Branches for the purpose of Programme Registration. Each year, the University participates in a quality assurance process, whereby the UQAIB reviews the academic institution and its programmes. On completion, the University will receive academic authorisation from KHDA to continue for a further year.

Malaysia Campus - Process for Provisional and Full Accreditation

The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) are the 2 bodies who grant accreditation and approval for programmes delivered at Heriot-Watt University Malaysia (HWUM).

The MQA approves programmes through two distinct quality assurance processes:-

1. Provisional Accreditation – this initial accreditation/approval is an exercise to determine whether a programme has met the minimum quality requirements before Full Accreditation. It allows the University to market the programme, recruit students and commence delivery of the programme.
2. Full Accreditation – this is an assessment exercise to confirm that the teaching, learning and all other related activities of a programme provided by the University have met the quality and standards in compliance with the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF). The University will seek to secure Full Accreditation before the first cohort of students graduate and when Full Accreditation has been granted, the programme will be listed on the Malaysian Qualifications Register (MQR).

MQA Provisional Accreditation/MOHE approval is granted through the process outlined below.

Provisional Accreditation

1	The University is required to complete and submit a document known as the MQA-01 – this comprises nine areas of evaluation of the programme and specific MQA course descriptors.
2	The submissions are coordinated by the Accreditation Manager, Academic Registry. Colleagues in Schools/Academic Registry and Heriot-Watt University Malaysia (HWUM) collaborate to produce the MQA documentation. HWU approval must be granted by the Undergraduate/Postgraduate Studies Committees before the MQA documentation can be finalised. Once HWU approval is granted the documentation is dispatched to HWUM and submitted to the MQA.
3	The documentation is received and checked by the MQA and sent to a Panel of Assessors (POA). The POA reviews the documentation and produces an evaluation report. This report is sent to the University and the relevant Schools/Accreditation Manager and HWUM Regulatory and Compliance Manager liaise to produce a response to the MQA Evaluation Report. This is submitted to the MQA and is considered at an MQA Accreditation Committee meeting. Approval is then granted by the MQA and a Certification of Quality Compliance (CQC) is issued. This states any conditions stipulated by the MQA which must be met in order to offer and deliver the programme.
4	Upon receipt of approval by the MQA, an application is submitted to the MOHE for approval. The MOHE reviews the application and then grants approval.
5	Upon receipt of the MOE approval, an application for a Provisional Accreditation Certificate is sent to the MQA. This application must include the application form, the approval letter from the MOE, a copy of the Registration Certificate for HWUM and proof of compliance with any conditions set by the MQA and MOHE. The Provisional Accreditation Certificate is then issued.

Full Accreditation

1	<p>The Full Accreditation process consists of 4 main parts which is set out below:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The University is required to complete and submit a document known as the MQA-02. This comprises the same nine areas of evaluation as the MQA-01 but also includes a Self-Review Report.2. Academic Review (Malaysia) – assurance-led, incorporating enhancement and operates on a 3 year cycle. It focuses on programme-level activity (grouped by School), assesses quality and standards and considers the student learning experience at the Malaysia Campus.3. HWUM Self-Review Exercise - an exercise carried out by HWUM at programme level which informs the production of the MQA-02 Self Review Report4. MQA Evaluation Visit – this is normally conducted over 1.5 – 2 days and the Chairman of the Panel of Assessors will provide a verbal update at the conclusion of the visit. HWUM will be given the opportunity to seek clarification on points raised. <p>Following the MQA visit, an evaluation report is produced and sent to HWUM for comment. The response from HWUM/HWU is reviewed at the MQA accreditation meeting. The MQA grants approval with or without conditions and issues a Full Accreditation Certificate.</p> <p>The University is required to submit a final response to any conditions set by the MQA, 6 months after receipt of the Full Accreditation Certificate</p>
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