

# Supporting Student Athletes

## Academic access and support

August 2014

## Supporting Student Athletes – Academic Flexibility

### Background

The University is one of the lead institutions in the UK in its provision for academic flexibility (AF) for athletes. Whilst there is no official policy, most Schools provide an excellent level of support. There are occasions when the level of flexibility does not exceed any basic request. For us to deliver what was indicated in our bid for the National Performance Centre for Sport (NPCS), it is important that the University as a whole support the development of performance sport and as such, a clear and official message to all staff is required.

### Policy Statement

The University policy on Academic Flexibility for Elite Athletes shall be as follows:

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#### Academic Flexibility

1. Heriot-Watt University has a policy of supporting performance sport student athletes, who are part of the Talent Development Programme (TDP), to combine their academic studies with their commitment to their sport.
  2. The University recognises that the primary purpose of the talented athletes at the University is to pursue an academic programme to the best of their intellectual ability and that a pro-active approach, wherever practicable, should be adopted towards supporting talented athletes to manage these academic commitments alongside significant training and competition obligations.
  3. The University is committed to providing flexibility to students so that they may excel in both their chosen sport and their academic studies.
  4. There will be no compromise on the academic standards required for the attainment of a credit in any university course.
  5. The quality of the learning experience must always be sufficient to enable students to achieve all of the programme's specified learning outcomes.
  6. Responsibilities:
    - a. It is the responsibility of the TDP Coordinator to write to each School at the beginning of each academic year to notify the Director of Learning and Teaching on which of their students are part of the programme and as such fall under this policy.
    - b. It is the responsibility of the student to communicate promptly, any sporting commitment that might affect their attendance or assessment, with their Academic Mentor.
    - c. It is the responsibility of the Academic Mentor to provide appropriate guidance and support to the student.
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### Guidance Notes

#### - Scope - TDP

The TDP is an application based programme available to Scottish/British students studying at our Edinburgh Campus. There are three levels available:

- **International Athletes;** available to athletes who are competing at Commonwealth, World and Olympic standard.
- **Developing Athletes;** available to athletes, from selected sports and chosen by their National Governing Body, who wish to train at the university.
- **Coaching TDP;** which is available to talented and motivated coaches wishing to develop themselves within their chosen sport.

#### - An Athletes Requirement

Through this policy the University is demonstrating a commitment to supporting talented athletes. There is however a requirement from the student to ensure that the relevant school is aware, in an amount of time that is deemed reasonable to both the student and the school, of when AF is required.

#### - School Support

The TDP Coordinator will write to each School at the beginning of each academic year to notify the Director of Learning and Teaching on which of their students are part of the programme and as such fall under this

policy. It is the responsibility of the student to communicate promptly, any sporting commitment that might affect their attendance or assessment, with their Academic Mentor. It is the responsibility of the Academic Mentor to provide appropriate guidance and support to the student.

In some circumstances due to the nature of some sports training and competition calendars, typically in sports such as Football, Judo, Rugby and Swimming, an individual learning plan would be advisable.

- **Examples**

The following examples are of situations where AF can be applied within a particular school:

<b>An athlete cannot attend a lecture</b>	Issue:	An athlete needs to travel to a competition on a Friday morning during semester and misses their lectures that day.
	Conclusion:	The athlete notifies their lecturer(s) and collects the notes from Vision.
<b>An athlete will miss a lecture on a weekly basis</b>	Issue:	A Judo player is required to train full time through the semester and as such misses all their lectures on a Tuesday and Thursday morning.
	Conclusion:	The athlete chooses a course that does not clash with their training and/or notifies their academic mentor at the beginning of the semester and collects the notes on a weekly basis.
<b>An athlete requests an extension for coursework</b>	Issue:	A Curling athlete qualifies for the World Junior Championships in February so requires two weeks off University.
	Conclusion:	The athlete contacts their academic mentor to notify them of their absence. The athlete discusses a possible extension based on the length of time required to complete the coursework that doesn't impact on sports performance and is equal to the length of time given to other students.
<b>An athlete cannot sit an examination due to competition</b>	Issue:	An Athletics athlete has a competition in the summer diet that is the same day as one of their exams.
	Conclusion:	The athlete contacts their academic mentor and agrees to take the exam in the August diet as a first sitting. In certain circumstances an alternative means of assessment can be applied.
<b>An athlete has a clash between competition and one of their final exams</b>	Issue:	A Rugby 7s player is chosen for the Scotland 7's team to compete in South Africa and Dubai at the IRB 7s tournament.
	Conclusion:	The athlete contacts their academic mentor and arranges to sit the exam in South Africa.
<b>An athlete wishes to study part time</b>	Issue:	A Swimming athlete is training full time and unable to cope with full time study.
	Conclusion:	The athlete discusses an appropriate part time route with their academic mentor. The number of courses per semester will depend on the importance of the year. For example, if it is a Commonwealth games year then the athlete may choose to do two courses over the year and do six courses the year after.
<b>An athlete wishes to postpone their studies</b>	Issue:	An athlete qualifies for the Olympics and wishes to postpone their studies.
	Conclusion:	The athlete is encouraged to complete the remainder of the semester and then postpone their studies until such time (likely one calendar year) as they can return to study at the point to which they postponed.