Learning and Teaching Board

Heriot-Watt University Assessment and Progression System (Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Programmes)

The Heriot-Watt Assessment and Progression System

The Heriot-Watt Assessment and Progression System (HAPS) applies to all undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes (and the taught components of postgraduate research degrees) across all modes and locations of study. HAPS sets out minimum requirements and standards, expressing in a concise and inclusive form the key elements of the assessment regulations and policies of the University.

The Heriot-Watt Assessment and Progression System (HAPS) specifies the key assessment rules to be followed in taught assessment and provides links to other assessment-related information which underpins the operation of HAPS (see Appendix 4).

Contents

1. Forms and Timing of Assessment

1.1 The forms of assessment will be specified in the course descriptor. Where a course is assessed by more than one form of assessment, the contribution of each component will be stated in the course descriptor.

1.2 Assessment will occur during or at the end of a single course. Synoptic assessment will occur during or at the end of a set of synoptically assessed courses. All courses in a stage (of an undergraduate programme) will be first assessed by the end of that stage.

1.3 Each course will feature formative assessment to enable students to evaluate the extent of their learning. The form and extent of formative assessment will be stated in the course descriptor.

1.4 Assessment may take place at the end of Semester 1 or Semester 2, at the discretion of the Head of School.

1.5 Each programme will comprise a combination of both written examination and other forms of assessment. Written examination as the sole method of assessment for a programme will require approval of the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies Committee. Written examination as the sole method of assessment for synoptically linked courses will require approval of the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies Committee.

2. Marks and Grades

2.1 Marking

2.1.1 All forms of assessment will be marked according to the specified marking schedule and, where appropriate, will be marked anonymously.

2.1.2 A numerical mark will be allocated to each assessment or to each synoptic assessment.

2.1.3 The Course Board will decide which of the synoptically assessed courses have been successfully completed.

2.2 An explicit separation of assessment marking ("evidence" based on marks) from decisions (grades) returned by Course Boards

2.2.1 The Course Board will consider the marks of the various components of assessment within a course and, taking into account the learning outcomes, the marks and the course report, will determine a grade in the range A-F (*see section 2.3.4 below*) for student performance in each course. In this way, the marking is separated out from the decision-making process.

2.2.2 The assessment context will be considered by the Course Board in returning decisions in terms of grades and justification of decisions taken will be recorded if there is any unusual mapping of marks to grades (eg in reflection of the mitigating circumstances of an individual student).

2.2.3 No adjustment of marks will be made in relation to making decisions based on grades. Where decisions on degree classification are based on marks, then adjustment of those marks is permitted to take account of approved mitigating circumstances. In such cases, a formal system should be adopted to map the raw mark on the script to the final mark used for calculating award decisions.

2.3 Decisions returned in the form of letter-grades (A-F)

2.3.1 The Course Board will return its decision on student performance in each course in the form of a grade in the range A-F.

2.3.2   The allocation of grades is primarily a matter of academic judgement with respect to the meaning of the grades, although guidelines and grades descriptors are available to assist the Course Board in this process (*see section 2.3.3 and Appendix 7.3*).

2.3.3   The University Grades Descriptors, which are detailed in full in Appendix 7.3, are based on the quality of response in assessment given by the learner. Quality of response in assessment is determined with reference to the extent to which the learner has satisfied the criteria specified for the assessment of the course in question. For example, the extent to which the learner has achieved the specified learning outcomes for the course.

2.3.4   The Table below provides a concise guideline for measuring quality of response in terms of grades and also progression:

Grade	Quality of Response	Progression
A	Excellent	Learner has passed the course and can continue study in the subject
B	Very Good	
C	Good	
D[1]	Satisfactory	
E	Adequate	Learner is awarded credit points, but cannot continue study in the subject
F	Inadequate	Learner is not awarded credit points

1. Grade D is the University minimum standard for passing an individual course: in order to progress to the next stage of an undergraduate programme or to progress to the dissertation of a postgraduate taught Masters programme, or in order to qualify for an award, performance at Grade C may be required in particular courses (as designated in the programme structure/Student Handbook).

2.3.5   The full University Grades Descriptors, which are detailed in Appendix 7.3, have been provided as a means of facilitating consistent and equitable decision-making in the assessment of student work. They also provide a framework for communicating to students their level of performance in assessment and what students need to do to reach a particular grade or to improve level of performance. The Grades Descriptors may also be used as a basis for formulating subject-specific feedback to students.

3. Credits, Pass and Progression

Decisions based on grades, as detailed above, allow for a system which differentiates between criteria for pass and progression and criteria for the award of credit points[1].

Passing a course is based on meeting the specified *minimum* requirements (this may be a Grade D or Grade C: such requirements will be detailed in the relevant programme information), yet achievement in a course can still be recognised by awarding credits points (Grade E). Progression is based on achieving the requisite grades in all courses specified in the programme structure.

3.1 Application of minimum standards

As a means of maintaining or enhancing quality and academic standards, programmes may specify their own requirements *above* the minimum criteria in the University's assessment and progression system. Programmes are not required to converge towards the minimum standards for pass, progression or award as outlined in Sections 3.2, 4.1 and 4.2.

Specification of criteria above the minimum standards at the programme or course level requires approval of the Postgraduate or Undergraduate Studies Committee, as appropriate.

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[1] Transcripts of Assessment Results issued to students will indicate the number of credit points achieved per course (typically, 15 SCQF points for UG and PGT courses) and for the overall qualification.

3.2 Minimum standards for credits, pass and progression

3.2.1   To gain credit points for a course a minimum of Grade E is required. A Grade E may require re-assessment in order to meet the requirements for progression.

3.2.2   To pass a course a minimum of Grade C or Grade D is required.

3.2.3   To progress to the next stage of an undergraduate programme a minimum of Grade C or Grade D is required in all courses which are pre-requisites for subsequent courses or have been designated in the programme information as requiring a minimum of Grade C/Grade D.

3.2.4   To progress to Masters level on a taught postgraduate programme a minimum of Grade C is normally required in all courses.

3.2.5   Overall progression requirements, as specified in terms of number of credit points, SCQF levels and grades, will be outlined in the relevant Programme Specification and other associated documentation.

3.2.6   A student may normally enrol for a course only when the pre-requisites for that course have been met.

3.2.7   Schools will advise students on available options if they have not met the requirements for progression.

3.2.8   A student may appeal to the Senate via the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies Committee on progression decisions made by the Progression Board.

3.3 Discretionary Award of Credits

3.3.1   If a student has not achieved the minimum number of credit points for award or for progression from one stage to another, the requisite credit points may be awarded at the discretion of the Award Board or Progression Board, as appropriate.

3.3.2   If a Board is applying discretionary credits for award, the Board will assure itself that the learning outcomes of the programme have been met and the academic standards of the award will not been compromised by the award of discretionary credits.

Undergraduate Programmes

3.3.3   For undergraduate students, discretionary credits may be applied in normally a maximum of two courses or 30 credits (three courses or 45 credits for Combined Studies) and may be used for progression or award. If discretionary credits are being awarded to facilitate progression, the following criteria apply:

- The student has taken a re-assessment in the relevant course(s) and has gained a Grade F in the re-assessment;
- The student has met the overall requirements for progression;
- Discretionary credits cannot be applied to courses which are pre-requisites or designated as core;
- The student has been given the opportunity to take alternative courses to minimise the possibility of having insufficient credits for the overall award.

Postgraduate Taught Programmes

3.3.4   For postgraduate taught students, discretionary credits may be applied at the point of award only (ie not as a means to facilitate progression through the programme) and in a maximum of one taught course (15-20 credits), but may not be used for the dissertation/project.

3.4 Re-assessment

3.4.1   A student who has not fulfilled the specified minimum requirements for a course may be re-assessed in that course.

3.4.2 A student who has met the minimum requirements at the first assessment opportunity in a course will not be permitted to a further assessment or re-assessment in order to obtain a higher grade.

3.4.3 In exceptional circumstances, if a student is prevent by illness or other approved mitigating circumstances from undertaking or completing an assessment or re-assessment, a further assessment or re-assessment may be granted by the Progression Board.

3.4.4 The format of the re-assessment will be as specified by the School or the appropriate examiner or as detailed in the course descriptor.

3.4.5 Online results and transcripts will indicate where a grade has been obtained by re-assessment.

Undergraduate Programmes

3.4.6 For students on undergraduate programmes, there will be one re-assessment opportunity which should normally be taken at the next possible examination diet.

3.4.7 There will be no re-assessment opportunity for final year qualifying courses for undergraduate Integrated Masters or for Honours degree classification.

3.4.8 The Progression Board may permit a student to be re-assessed in a non-final year qualifying course for an undergraduate Integrated Masters or Honours degree for the award of *credit points only*, but the mark or grade gained at the first attempt will be used in determining the degree classification.

Postgraduate Taught Programmes

3.4.9 For students on postgraduate taught and graduate programmes, there will be an entitlement of one re-assessment opportunity in a maximum of three taught courses. Re-assessment opportunities in more than three courses and/or in the dissertation will be at the discretion of the Progression Board.

3.4.10 Re-assessment in the dissertation, project or portfolio is at the discretion of the Progression or Award Board.

3.4.11 Results obtained in both first assessments and re-assessments will be considered by the Progression or Award Board in making recommendations.

3.5 Repeat

3.5.1 A student who has been re-assessed in a course, but has not fulfilled the specified minimum standards for that course may be permitted, at the discretion of the Head of School, one opportunity to repeat with attendance the course in question.

3.5.2 All conditions and requirements specified in the course descriptor, including one opportunity for re-assessment, will apply to the repeated course.

4. Award

4.1 Credit and Level Requirements for Award

4.1.1 The credit and level requirements for the University's awards adhere to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland's Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland. The credit and level requirements for HWU awards are as detailed in the table below.

4.1.2 The Programme Specification will outline the credit and level requirements for award. The Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies Committee may approve credit and level requirements above the minimum specified in the table below.

Award	Minimum Credit Requirements	Minimum Level Requirements
Masters	180 SCQF Credits	A minimum of 150 credits at SCQF Level 11
Postgraduate Diploma	120 SCQF Credits	A minimum of 90 credits at SCQF level 11
Postgraduate Certificate	60 SCQF Credits	A minimum of 40 credits at SCQF level 11
Graduate Diploma	120 SCQF Credits	A minimum of 120 credits at SCQF Level 9
Graduate Certificate	60 SCQF Credits	A minimum of 60 credits at SCQF Level 9
Award	Minimum Credit Requirements	Minimum Level Requirements
Integrated Masters	600 SCQF Credits	A minimum of 120 credits at SCQF Level 11
Honours	480 SCQF Credits	A minimum of 90 credits at SCQF Level 10, and a minimum of 90 credits at SCQF Level 9
Bachelors	360 SCQF Credits	A minimum of 60 credits at SCQF Level 9
Diploma of Higher Education	240 SCQF Credits	A minimum of 90 credits at SCQF level 8
Certificate of Higher Education	120 SCQF Credits	A minimum of 90 credits at SCQF level 7

4.2 Award Criteria

4.2.1 The same guidelines used to assign a grade to a course can apply to the calculation of awards. The following table outlines the minimum criteria for awards. *Please read carefully paragraphs 4.2.2-4.2.3 and footnote 1 in conjunction with this table.*

Award	Minimum Criteria
Masters with Distinction	(1) an overall performance in qualifying courses at Grade A; or (2) an overall performance at an equivalent average percentage mark; or (3) a grade profile with the majority of passes in qualifying courses at Grade A. In all three options, no courses less than Grade C are permitted.
Masters	(1) an overall performance in qualifying courses at Grade C; or (2) an overall performance at an equivalent average percentage mark; or (3) a grade profile with the majority of passes in qualifying courses at Grade C. In all three options, no courses less than Grade D[1] are permitted.
Postgraduate Diploma or Graduate Diploma with Distinction	(1) an overall performance in qualifying courses at Grade A; or (2) an overall performance at an equivalent average percentage mark; or (3) a grade profile with the majority of passes in qualifying courses at Grade A. In all three options, no courses less than Grade C are permitted.
Postgraduate Diploma or Graduate Diploma	(1) an overall performance in qualifying courses at Grade D; or (2) an overall performance at an equivalent average percentage mark; or (3) a grade profile with the majority of passes in qualifying courses at Grade D. In all three options, no courses less than Grade E are permitted.
Postgraduate Certificate or Graduate Certificate	(1) an overall performance in qualifying courses at Grade D; or (2) an overall performance at an equivalent average percentage mark; or (3) a grade profile with the majority of passes in qualifying courses at Grade D. In all three options, no courses less than Grade E are permitted.

Award	Minimum Criteria	
Integrated Masters with Merit/with Distinction	(1) an overall performance in qualifying courses at Grade A; or (2) an overall performance at an equivalent average percentage mark; or (3) a grade profile with the majority of passes in qualifying courses at Grade A. In all three options, no courses less than Grade C are permitted.	
Integrated Masters	(1) an overall performance in qualifying courses at Grade C; or (2) an overall performance at an equivalent average percentage mark; or (3) a grade profile with the majority of passes in qualifying courses at Grade C. In all three options, no courses less than Grade D[1] are permitted.	
Honours	• First Class	(1) an overall performance in qualifying courses at Grade A; or (2) an overall performance at an equivalent average percentage mark; or (3) a grade profile with the majority of passes in qualifying courses at Grade A. In all three options, no courses less than Grade D[1] are permitted.
	• Second Class (2.1)	(1) an overall performance in qualifying courses at Grade B; or (2) an overall performance at an equivalent average percentage mark; or (3) a grade profile with the majority of passes in qualifying courses at Grade B. In all three options, no courses less than Grade D[1] are permitted.
	• Second Class (2.2)	(1) an overall performance in qualifying courses at Grade C; or (2) an overall performance at an equivalent average percentage mark; or (3) a grade profile with the majority of passes in qualifying courses at Grade C. In all three options, no courses less than Grade D[1] are permitted.
	• Third Class	(1) an overall performance in qualifying courses at Grade D; or (2) an overall performance at an equivalent average percentage mark; or (3) a grade profile with the majority of passes in qualifying courses at Grade D.
Bachelors	Normally a minimum of Grade D in pre-requisites and in courses designated as requiring a Grade D minimum	
Diploma of Higher Education	Normally a minimum of Grade D in pre-requisites and in courses designated as requiring a Grade D minimum	
Certificate of Higher Education	Normally a minimum of Grade D in pre-requisites and in courses designated as requiring a Grade D minimum	

1. The Award Board may, in exceptional circumstances, recommend an award in the case of a student who has achieved a Grade E or Grade F in a qualifying course (ie performance in a course which contributes towards the final award). Justification for the award decision should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

4.2.2 Programmes may specify their own requirements for awards *above* the minimum requirements detailed against each award in the table. Award requirements will be specified in the Programme Specification and must be approved by the Postgraduate or Undergraduate Studies Committee, as appropriate. Students must be provided with information on award criteria, including the method of calculating awards and the relative weighting of various components.

4.2.3 The Award Board may recommend the award of Bachelors, Diploma of Higher Education or Certificate of Higher Education to a student who has achieved a Grade E or Grade F in a course which was taken originally as a qualifying course (ie performance in a course which contributes to the award of an Honours or Integrated Masters degree) or as a pre-requisite for a higher award. Justification for the award decision should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

4.3 Postgraduate Awards: Minimum Criteria and Progression

4.3.1 Although Masters, Postgraduate Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate are all at the same level - Level 11 - in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, a distinction has been made in the table in para 5.2.1 between Masters and PG Diploma/Certificate in terms of *minimum* criteria for awards.

4.3.2 This distinction reflects the concept of "progression" to Masters within taught postgraduate programmes, since PG Diploma/Certificate can be intermediate awards within the same level as Masters. This distinction is implicit in one-year Masters programmes and is explicit in the two-year Masters programmes.

4.4 Calculating an Award

4.4.1   In order to reach a judgement about student performance at the end of a programme, the Award Board may use either a profile of grades across the programme or an average of marks/grades across the programme. The use of alternative approaches reflects current practice at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The method to be used in calculating the award should be specified in the relevant programme and student documentation.

4.4.2   Where scaling or modification of marks had been applied for the purposes of award, all Schools should use the final, modified mark (and not the initial, raw mark) in calculating the award (the latter reflects the policy agreed by Senate in October 2007).

5. Boards of Examiners

There are three types of Boards of Examiners: the Course Board, the Progression Board and the Award Board. Their terms of reference and composition are detailed below.

5.1 The Course Board

5.1.1   Each course will have a Course Board which will meet after the relevant diet of examinations at the end of the semester.

5.1.2   The Course Board will consider the results of the various components of assessment in the course and, on the basis of the overall mark, will determine a grade in the range of A-F for each student. The Course Board will record its justification for any usual mapping of marks to grades.

5.1.3   The Course Board will consist of the following members:
- The Head of School, or nominee, as Chair
- The members of academic staff involved in the teaching and assessment of the course

5.1.4   The Course Board will identify:
- Those students whose performance gives cause for concern and agree appropriate action
- Instances of a high number of grades awarded at E or F and agree appropriate action

5.1.5   The Course Board will prepare a report for consideration by the Progression Board or Award Board, as appropriate. The Course Report will include the information and commentary as specified in the *Guidelines on Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Assessment Procedures*

5.2 The Progression Board

5.2.1   Each programme will have a Progression Board which will meet after Semester 2 and resit diets of examinations.

5.2.2   The Progression Board will determine a student's progress within a programme, based on the grades recommended by the Course Boards and the specified requirements for progression. The Progression Board will make one of the following recommendations regarding each student:

- Progress to the next stage/part of a programme, or project/dissertation in the case of postgraduate taught programmes;
- Re-assessment in one or more courses;
- Repeat one or more courses.

The Progression Board may also take decisions in relation to transfer to another programme.

5.2.3   The Progression Board will consist of the following members:

- The Chair, who will be the Head of School, Director of Learning and Teaching, or nominee. The Quality and Standards Committee must approve all nominees for the role of Chair. All Chairs must attend one of the "Exam Board Chairs" briefing sessions;
- The members of the academic staff, or at least one representative of, involved in the teaching and assessment of the courses in each stage or part of the programme;
- The School's Examinations Officer;
- Any other members as determined by the Senate.

- The quorum is: three members of the Board or one third of its membership, whichever is the larger number.

5.2.4   One of the Deans of the University, or an Associate Dean, or a nominee of the Dean (who will normally be a senior member of academic staff), will be an observer at the Progression Board. The Dean or representative cannot be a member of the academic staff of the School offering the programme being considered by the Progression Board.

5.2.5   The Progression Board will confirm the grades determined by the Course Boards and may only in exceptional circumstances alter these grades (as per the *Guidelines on Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Assessment Procedures* referred to in para 5.1.5). Justification for any such adjustments will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

5.2.6   All members of the Progression Board are entitled to vote at meetings. The Chair will have a deliberative and casting vote.

5.3 The Award Board

5.3.1   Each programme will have an Award Board which will meet after Semester 2 diet of examinations and, if required, after the resit diets.

5.3.2   The Award Board makes recommendations for award, based on the grades determined by the Course Boards and the specified requirements for award.

5.3.3   The Award Board will consist of the following members:

- The Chair, who will be the Head of School, Director of Learning and Teaching, or nominee. The Quality and Standards Committee must approve all nominees for the role of Chair. All Chairs must attend one of the "Exam Board Chairs" briefing sessions;
- The External Examiner(s);
- The members of the academic staff, or at least one representative of, involved in the teaching and assessment of the courses in each stage or part of the programme;
- The School's Examinations Officer;
- Any other members as determined by the Senate.

- The quorum is: three members of the Board or one third of its membership, whichever is the larger number.

5.3.4   One of the Deans of the University, or an Associate Dean, or a nominee of the Dean (who will normally be a senior member of academic staff), will be an observer at the Award Board. The Dean or representative cannot be a member of the academic staff of the School offering the programme being considered by the Progression Board.

5.3.5   The External Examiner(s) will normally be present at any meeting of the Award Board which makes recommendations for the award of degree. If an External Examiner is unavoidably absent, he or she will normally be required to submit written comments for consideration at the Award Board meeting. In the absence of an External Examiner, a Dean of the University or nominee must be present at the meeting.

5.3.6   The Award Board will confirm the grades determined by the Course Boards and may only in exceptional circumstances alter these grades (as per the *Guidelines on Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Assessment Procedures* referred to in para 5.1.5). Justification for any such adjustments will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

5.3.7   All members of the Award Board are entitled to vote at meetings. The Chair will have a deliberative and casting vote; the External Examiner does not have such an entitlement.

6. Assessment Results and Transcripts

6.1 After the Progression Board has ratified assessments decisions and grades, assessments results, with details of marks, grades, credit points and a progression decision, will be published after the Semester 2 and resit diets of examinations. Results will be published only online on the SAS-Banner system. Assessment results from Semester 1, which should be regarded as provisional until ratified by a Progression or Award Board, will be published online on the SAS-Banner system following the meeting of the relevant Course Boards.

6.2 After the completion of the programme (or at the point of exit from a programme), a hard copy transcript of all results, with details of grades, credit points and an award decision, will be sent to each registered student. Marks will not be recorded on the University transcript, but will be available in SAS-Banner.

Learning and Teaching Board, 21 January 2015

7. Appendices

7.1   Key Principles of Assessment

7.2   Summary of Heriot-Watt Assessment and Progression System (HAPS)

7.3   Grades Descriptors

7.4   Other Assessment-Related Information

Appendix 7.1: Key Principles of Assessment

The following key principles related to assessment have been adapted from the University's *Code of Practice for the Management of Multi-Location, Multi-Mode Programmes*:

1.1 All students will have access to assessment information on: the specific methods used to assess their performance, and the relative weighting of courses or components thereof in respect of overall assessment; clear requirements and regulations regarding progression and award in terms of credits and grades required in individual courses; the form and timing of feedback to be provided on their academic performance; and, where relevant, the assessment requirements of any Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies.

1.2 Information on assessment will be provided in a variety of ways, for example: programme structure/notes/description templates (the Programme Specification); course descriptor templates; student handbooks; VISION (the University's VLE). Assessment and progression requirements will be provided at the start of the programme and then again at each subsequent stage. The same information should be made available at the point of enquiry and application.

1.3 Students will be encouraged to adopt good academic conduct in assessment and will be made aware of their own responsibilities related to assessment.

1.4 Assessment will be designed to promote effective learning, and formative assessment will be incorporated into all courses to provide students with the opportunity to learn and improve their performance.

1.5 All programmes will incorporate a variety of assessment methods, with a balance between exams and other forms of assessment. Where examination is the principal form of assessment in non-campus programmes, other forms of assessment will be used to support and develop student learning.

1.6 The amount and timing of assessment will be scheduled so as to enable effective and appropriate measurement of students' achievement of the course learning outcomes.

1.7 All students, irrespective of location or mode of study, will be provided with appropriate and timely feedback on their performance in assessment. The form and extent of feedback will be determined by each School, and will be clearly articulated in Student Handbooks and other documentation, and will be brought to the attention of students.

Appendix 7.2: Summary of Heriot-Watt Assessment and Progression System

Key Features of Heriot-Watt Assessment and Progression System (HAPS)
The key features of the Heriot-Watt Assessment and Progression System (HAPS) are as follows:

Separation of Marking and Decisions
a) Marking and decision-making are separate processes: the numerical mark represents the evidence on which a decision is made by the Course Board which is returned in the form of an alpha grade A-F.

b) The Course Board considers the marks of the various components of assessment within a course and, taking into account the learning outcomes, the marks and the course report, determines a grade in the range A-F for each course.

c) The allocation of grades is a matter of academic judgement, although grades descriptors can assist the Course Board in this process.

d) Both marks and grades are available to students via the SAS-Banner system; formal, printed University assessment results letters, which are issued on completion of a programme, contain only grades.

Credit, Discretionary Credit, Pass, Progression and Award
a) The University requirements for gaining credit points, for progressing to the next stage or next part of a programme, and for qualifying for an award are expressed in terms of minimum criteria. Credit, progression and award criteria are specific to each programme and are higher than the University minimum. Criteria above the University minimum requirements are approved by the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies Committee. Programme-specific criteria for credit, progression and award are detailed in the Programme Structure/Notes and Student Handbooks.

b) A Grade D or Grade C (depending on the individual programme criteria) is the minimum requirement for passing a course.

c) A Grade E is the minimum requirement for gaining credit points for a course.

d) The minimum criteria for progressing to the next stage of a programme is Grade D or Grade C (depending on the individual programme criteria) in all designated courses.

e) The minimum criteria for all UG and PGT awards and the accepted methods of calculating awards are set out in Section 4.

f) Discretionary credits may be awarded to enable progression from one stage of a programme to the next or to enable an award to be made, provided that academic standards and learning outcomes have been met. The maximum number of permissible discretionary credits on UG and PGT programmes is specified in Section 3.3

Re-assessment and Repeat
a) Undergraduate programme: one re-assessment in each course is permitted; postgraduate taught programmes: one re-assessment is permitted in a maximum of 3 taught courses.

b) Re-assessment is required for Grade F (no credit points are awarded for Grade F); Grade D and Grade E may be re-assessed if a higher grade is specified in the programme structure information; Grades A, B or C cannot be re-assessed.

c) Re-assessment in undergraduate final year qualifying courses is permitted only in exceptional circumstances; re-assessment in non-final year qualifying courses may be undertaken for the award of credit points only.

d) One opportunity to repeat a course with attendance may be permitted.

Boards of Examiners
a) There are three types of Boards of Examiners, one for each of the three stages of assessment decision-making: the Course Board, the Progression Board and the Award Board.

b) The composition and terms of reference of each Board are outlined in Section 5.

Explanation of Marks/Grades and Minimum Criteria

When the Assessment and Progression System was introduced (1999 for UG programmes; 2005 for PGT programmes), one of the key drivers behind the scheme was to introduce greater transparency into marking and decision-making processes, which had previously been obscured through a combination of University and Faculty compensation schemes and a variety of differing rules for pass and re-assessment and for calculating progression and award.

As a means of providing this transparency, two key processes were introduced:

(1) a double system of raw numerical marks and final alpha grades;

(2) specification of University-wide minimum criteria for credit, pass, progression and award.

Marks and Grades

In HAPS, a numerical mark is designed to reflect the actual performance in assessment, while the grade is intended to convey the outcome of the Course Board's decision based on a range of evidence: the marks, the learning outcomes and any particular mitigating factors outlined in the course report.

The process separates out marking from decision-making: the raw mark is to be left unaltered as evidence of the actual level of performance, while the grade is the academic judgement of the Board – although a suggested mapping scheme was initially provided during the transition to the new scheme, there is no automatic mapping between marks and grades, and marks/grades can legitimately not match up, eg a higher grade (eg C) can be awarded for a lower mark (45) if there are circumstances which justified this (eg poor performance of the entire cohort due to an inadequately designed assignment). The University took the decision, which it has re-affirmed on four subsequent occasions, to record only grades on official, hard copy assessment letters/transcripts, as the raw mark was seen as one piece of evidence only while the grade was a record of the Board's decision based on several pieces of evidence.

Marks are, however, still provided to students via means such as mentor meetings in order to provide a context for improvement and as part of their overall learning experience. VISION, the University's VLE, is also used to provide numerical marks. Since 2012, all students are able to access to online marks and grades via SAS-Banner; hard copy, end-of-year assessment results letters have been discontinued, with only University transcripts (provided at the end of a programme) continuing to be issued in hard copy and continuing to feature only grades.

University-wide Minimum Criteria for Credit, Pass, Progression and Award

In HAPS, there are minimum criteria for credit, pass, progression and award:

- award of credit points at the course level (Grade E)
- pass at the course level (a minimum of Grade D)
- progression (passes at a minimum of Grade D in pre-requisites or core courses)
- award and method of calculating awards (from Certificate of Higher Education to Masters with Distinction)
- discretionary award of credits (up to 30 credits in UG programmes; up to 45 credits in Combined Studies programmes; up to one taught courses (15 or 20 credits) in PGT programmes)

The specification of minimum criteria ensures that all of the University's programmes meet the threshold standards for a HWU award. Programmes are not, however, required to converge to these minimum standards, and it is recognised that the quality and academic standards of the University's awards need to be at a high level.

Therefore, in order to maintain both quality and standards and to ensure comparability with equivalent programmes elsewhere in the UK, programmes do in fact specify criteria for pass, progression and award above these institutional minimum requirements. Criteria higher than the University minimum must be approved by the Undergraduate/Postgraduate Studies Committee: an accompanying rationale must explain the reasons why higher criteria are being proposed (programmes cannot specify criteria below the minimum).

Each version of a programme will have the same criteria for pass, progression and award across all variants; there are no differences according to mode or location. In this way, while there might be variations in student performance in different locations/modes, the academic standards for pass, progression and award are identical.

Appendix 7.3: Grades Descriptors

This Appendix presents full grades descriptors for the five alpha grades used in assessing student performance in coursework, examinations and other credit-bearing assignments.

1. Scope and Purpose of Grades Descriptors

The following Grades Descriptors have been produced for the five alpha grades which form the basis of the Heriot-Watt Assessment and Progression System (HAPS). The descriptors are based on an analysis of similar descriptors used by other UK HEI's, and have been developed with reference to the Quality Assurance Agency's Framework for HEI Qualifications in Scotland and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels descriptors.

1.1 Scope

The Grades Descriptors apply to all of the University's taught provision across all qualifications (including the taught element of research degrees), ranging from SQCF Level 7 to SCQF Level 12 (taught element of doctorate awards). The Grades Descriptors describe each of the five alpha grades in the range of A to F, which are part of Heriot-Watt University's assessment and progression system.

The Grades Descriptors refer to the overall grade awarded for performance in a course; they may also be used, if appropriate, for the various component assignments which contribute to the overall course or for non-credit bearing assessments.

1.2 Purpose

The grades descriptors have been provided as a means of facilitating consistent and equitable decision-making in the assessment of student work. They also provide a framework for communicating to students their level of performance in assessment and what students need to do to reach a particular grade or to improve level of performance.

The Grades Descriptors may also be used as a basis for formulating subject-specific feedback to students.

2. Use of Grades Descriptors

2.1 Generic University Descriptors

The University Grades Descriptors are intentionally generic to ensure their applicability to all of the HWU's academic disciplines and the taught programmes within them. They describe the general characteristics and key features of five levels of performance in terms of knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The University Grades Descriptors are intended to be used as general guidelines.

2.2 Discipline-Specific Descriptors

The Grades Descriptors can be adapted by Schools to produce their own assessment criteria/discipline-based grades descriptors. Adapted descriptors may incorporate, for example, subject-related references or examples added on to the generic descriptions to provide criteria which are more relevant and, therefore, easier for students to understand in the context of their own programme. Adapted descriptors may also reflect requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB's) and may take in to account other reference documents such as subject benchmark statements.

If disciplines have produced their own descriptors, it should be clear to students that these are directly based on the University Grades Descriptors.

2.3 Grades Descriptors and Learning Outcomes

A grade provides an overall indication of a student's performance in achieving a course's stated learning outcomes and in meeting the specified assessment criteria for that course. Assessment

criteria are based on assessment methods, weighting of assessment, marking schemes as well as the specified learning outcomes of a course.

The Grades Descriptors provide a generic overview of how a student has performed in achieving the course learning outcomes. It is recognised that not all of the characteristics specified in the Grades Descriptors will be relevant to all course learning outcomes and assessments, eg organisation and presentation of arguments will not be applicable to a series of complex mathematical problems. In such contexts, discipline-specific descriptors used in conjunction with course assessment criteria will be more relevant and informative.

2.4 Grades Descriptors and SCQF Levels

A Grade "A" performance is necessarily different in a stage one course of an undergraduate programme (SCQF level 7) from a course in an MSc programme (SCQF level 11), reflecting, for example, the differing levels of complexity and intellectual demand (as expressed also in a course's learning outcomes). Therefore, it is important to communicate to students what the grades will mean in the context of the SCQF level of their individual courses, particularly for undergraduate students who may be progressing through up to five different SCQF levels over the duration of their programme. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels descriptors provide a useful reference point for differentiating between the characteristics of various levels and indeed qualifications.

2.5 Academic Judgement

Although the descriptors are presented separately for each of the five alpha grades, student work will, in many cases, demonstrate characteristics spanning two or more grade categories. The decision as to which single grade is to be awarded is a matter of professional academic judgement, in conjunction with the application of over-arching School moderation procedures. The allocation of grades based on University or School grades descriptors is not a mechanistic process - this is an important point to convey to students.

It is not necessary for students to meet all of the characteristics specified in the University or discipline grades descriptors to achieve the associated grade; however, there is an expectation that in awarding a particular grade, a student will have clearly demonstrated that most of the characteristics have been met. The extent to which students have satisfied the majority of characteristics is a matter of academic judgement.

2.6 Information for Students

The University Grades Descriptors will be published in the generic/institutional section of the various Student Handbooks, and will be available on the "Examination and Assessment" section of the Academic Registry website and the Academic Policy Bank. Schools must ensure that both the University Grades Descriptors and, if used, discipline-specific grades descriptors are clearly communicated to students at relevant times (eg at the start of the session, at the start of a new course), are easily accessible and are published in key sources of information, such as the School-specific section of Student Handbooks, School websites, Course Descriptors and assessment documentation.

Students should also be informed about how the grades descriptors are used as part of their programme's/course's marking scheme.

3. Grades Descriptors

The University Grades Descriptors are set out in the table on the following pages.

> The Learning and Teaching Board approved the University Grades Descriptors at its meeting on 17 September 2014.

Grade	Descriptor	
A	**Excellent**	
	Knowledge, understanding, application	*Analysis, synthesis and evaluation*
	A comprehensive, highly structured, focused and concise response to the assessment task(s), consistently demonstrating • an extensive and detailed knowledge of the subject matter • a highly-developed ability to apply this knowledge to the task set • evidence of extensive background reading • clear, fluent, stimulating and original expression • excellent presentation (spelling, grammar, graphical) with minimal or no presentation errors	A deep and systematic engagement with the assessment task(s), with consistently impressive demonstration of a comprehensive mastery of the subject matter, reflecting • a deep and broad knowledge and critical insight as well as extensive reading • a critical and comprehensive appreciation of the relevant literature or theoretical, technical or professional framework • an exceptional ability to organise, analyse and present arguments fluently and lucidly with a high level of critical analysis, amply supported by evidence, citation or quotation • a highly-developed capacity for original, creative and logical thinking
B	**Very Good**	
	Knowledge, understanding, application	*Analysis, synthesis and evaluation*
	A thorough and well-organised response to the assessment task(s), demonstrating • a broad knowledge of the subject matter • considerable strength in applying that knowledge to the task set • evidence of substantial background reading • clear and fluent expression quality presentation with few presentation errors	A substantial engagement with the assessment task(s), demonstrating • a thorough familiarity with the relevant literature or theoretical, technical or professional framework • well-developed capacity to analyse issues, organise material, present arguments clearly and cogently well supported by evidence, citation or quotation • some original insights and capacity for creative and logical thinking

C	**Good**	
	Knowledge, understanding, application	*Analysis, synthesis and evaluation*
	A competent response to the assessment task(s), demonstrating • adequate but not complete knowledge of the subject matter • omission of some important subject matter or the appearance of a few minor errors • capacity to apply knowledge appropriately to the task albeit with some errors • evidence of some background reading • clear expression with few areas of confusion • writing of sufficient quality to convey meaning but some lack of fluency and command of suitable vocabulary • good presentation with some presentation errors	An intellectually competent engagement with the assessment task(s), marked by • evidence of a reasonable familiarity with the relevant literature or theoretical, technical or professional framework • good developed arguments, but more statements of ideas • arguments or statements adequately but not well supported by evidence, citation or quotation • some critical awareness and analytical qualities • some evidence of capacity for original and logical thinking
D	**Satisfactory**	
	Knowledge, understanding, application	*Analysis, synthesis and evaluation*
	An acceptable response to the assessment task(s) with • basic grasp of subject matter, but somewhat lacking in focus and structure • main points covered but insufficient detail • some effort to apply knowledge to the task but only a basic capacity or understanding displayed • little evidence of background reading • several minor errors • satisfactory presentation with an acceptable level of presentation errors	An acceptable level of intellectual engagement with the assessment task(s), showing • some familiarity with the relevant literature or theoretical, technical or professional framework • mostly statements of ideas, with limited development of argument • limited use of evidence, citation or quotation • limited critical awareness displayed • limited evidence of capacity for original and logical thinking

E	**Adequate**	
	Knowledge, understanding, application	*Analysis, synthesis and evaluation*
	The minimum acceptable standard of response to the assessment task(s) for the award of credit points which • shows a basic grasp of subject matter but may be poorly focussed or badly structured or contain irrelevant material • has one major error and some minor errors • demonstrates the capacity to complete only moderately difficult tasks related to the subject material • very little or no evidence of background reading • displays the minimum acceptable standard of presentation (spelling, grammar, graphical)	The minimum acceptable level of intellectual engagement with the assessment task(s) for the award of credit points showing • the minimum acceptable appreciation of the relevant literature or theoretical, technical or professional framework • ideas largely expressed as statements, with little or no developed or structured argument • minimum acceptable use of evidence, citation or quotation • little or no analysis or critical awareness displayed or is only partially successful • little or no demonstrated capacity for original and logical thinking
F	**Inadequate**	
	Knowledge, understanding, application	*Analysis, synthesis and evaluation*
	A response to the assessment task(s) which is unacceptable, with • a failure to address the question resulting in a largely irrelevant or entirely irrelevant answer or material of marginal relevance predominating • a display of little or no relevant knowledge or some knowledge of material relevant to the question posed, but with very serious omissions/errors and/or major inaccuracies included in answer • solutions offered to none of, or a very limited portion of, the problem set • an answer unacceptably incomplete • a random and undisciplined development, layout or presentation unacceptable standards of presentation, such as grammar, spelling or graphical presentation • evidence of substantial plagiarism	No intellectual engagement with the assessment task(s) or an unacceptable level of intellectual engagement with the assessment task(s), with • no appreciation of the relevant literature or theoretical, technical or professional framework • no developed or structured argument • no use of evidence, citation or quotation • no analysis or critical awareness displayed or is only partially successful • no demonstrated capacity for original and logical thinking

Appendix 7.4: Other Assessment-Related Information

There is a wide range of other assessment-related information which underpins the operation of the Heriot-Watt Assessment and Progression System (HAPS). Much of this information is updated and re-issued on an annual basis by the Academic Registry as part of the overall *Assessment and Examinations Procedures and Guidelines* (https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/exam-guidelines.htm)

1. Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Assessment Procedures

2. Decisions and Decision Codes

3. Guidelines on the Discretionary Award of Credits

4. Heriot Watt University Assessment and Progression System (HAPS)

5. Guidelines on Complying with SCQF

6. Guide to Medical Certificates under the HAP System

7. Policy on Mitigating Circumstances in relation to Assessment

8. Policy on Withholding Awards due to Outstanding Debts: Implementation Procedures

9. Appeals against Examiners' Recommendations of Award

10. Managing Suspended Examination Boards

11. Briefing Session: Chairs of Examination Boards; Deans' Representatives

12. Guidelines for Deans, Associate Deans and Deans' Representatives; Report Proforma

13. Examination Paper Format Guidelines

Items 1-13 above, and this HAPS document, are available on the Academic Registry website at: https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/exam-guidelines.htm

Further assessment information is available on the Academic Policy Bank includes:

1. *Code of Practice for the Management of Multi-Location, Multi-Mode Programmes*

2. Examinations in Different Timezones

3. Policy on Approved Calculators in Exams

4. Policy on Use of Dictionaries in Exams

5. Exams Instructions for Candidates

6. External Examiners

7. Feedback to Students on Examination Performance

8. Providing Effective Feedback to Students

9. Guidelines on the Delivery and Assessment of Courses in Languages other than English

10. Management of Examinations Scripts (On and Off Campus)

11. Management of Transcripts and Certifications

12. Policy on the Moderation of Assessment

13. Off-Campus Examinations: Centre Instructions; Invigilation; Identification and Approval of Proposed New Centres

14. Plagiarism

15. Posthumous Award Policy

The University's Regulations contain assessment regulations specific to each of the taught awards offered by HWU (http://www1.hw.ac.uk/ordinances/regulations.pdf).