

GUIDANCE ON FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS ON EXAMINATION PERFORMANCE

1. Background

- 1.1 This Guidance note was developed by the Learning and Teaching Board of Heriot-Watt University (HWU) in March 2008. It reflects a decision taken by the University Senate which stated that members of academic staff should be encouraged to permit students to view their own examination scripts after each diet where possible and to receive appropriate feedback on their performance. This Guidance applies to all on-campus students including those at the Dubai and Malaysia Campuses.

2. Precept One

Students on a HWU Campus may be given the opportunity to view their examination scripts after each examination diet

- 2.1 It should be noted that allowing students to view their examination scripts does not constitute 'feedback'.
- 2.2 This Precept does not apply to final year undergraduate or final diet postgraduate taught programme students who will gain no benefit from viewing their examination scripts in terms of opportunities to improve performance on their study programme at HWU. At the present time, the Precept does not apply to off-campus students for whom this would be difficult to manage logistically.
- 2.3 It should be noted that, in accordance with the UK Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts, students have no legal right to see their examination scripts. However, the University Data Protection Officer has confirmed that the Act does allow discretion to universities to provide access to examination scripts if they wish to do so. At HWU, this is at the discretion of each School.
- 2.4 Whilst students do not have a legal right to view their examination scripts, they do have the right to view any written comments made on their examination scripts. Members of staff should be made aware of this and advised to manage their comments appropriately.
- 2.5 Scripts will continue to be owned by the University and must be returned to the University immediately after being viewed by students. Where Schools wish to allow sight of examination scripts by students, the Schools need to implement a process to manage and control access to the scripts, for example, by distributing and collecting during a review session.
- 2.6 Even in cases where Schools would normally allow students to view their scripts, the University has the right to refuse access to a script (but not to any written comments made on the script) where this is considered to be appropriate, for example, where there is evidence that a script may have been tampered with or where there are other disciplinary issues that need to be considered.

3. Precept 2

Students should be given the opportunity to receive feedback on examination performance

- 3.1 This Precept does not apply to final year undergraduate or final diet postgraduate taught programme students who will gain no benefit from feedback with respect to improving performance. The Precept does not apply to off-campus students unless it is appropriate to post generic comments on the University's Virtual Learning Environment or other appropriate electronic forum/ medium used for communicating with students, or where relevant members of academic staff have an opportunity to provide face-to-face feedback.
- 3.2 It is for the relevant School to identify the most appropriate method of providing feedback, depending on the discipline, cohort size and level of study. Schools should also consider the importance of providing feedback to students in their first year of studies.

4. Good Practice

Some examples of successful methods used to provide access to examination scripts and feedback include the following:

- 4.1 Examination workshops timetabled the following semester to go through examination performance and overall learning points; this is particularly relevant for core courses.
- 4.2 Provision of feedback through generic commentary for all students, highlighting learning points, posted on the University's Virtual Learning Environment or other appropriate electronic forum/ medium used for communicating with students, or where relevant members of academic staff have an opportunity to provide group feedback.
- 4.3 Individual student feedback sheets relating to examination scripts, detailing how a student performed; this could also be used to assist off-campus students.
- 4.4 One-to-one feedback provided by academic mentors, tutors or relevant lecturers. This mechanism is particularly appropriate for failing or at risk students.

5. Other Issues

- 5.1 This Guidance will be made available through the normal University communication routes and posted on the Academic Registry policy website. Any issues/ feedback arising from the Guidance should be discussed in Schools at Student/Staff Liaison Committee meetings and communicated to Class Representatives in the first instance.
- 5.2 The formal legal position under the UK Data Protection Act is that students are entitled to view the comments made on an examination script but not the script itself. Students have a right to make an individual request to view comments made on their examination scripts via the University's Subject Access Request (SAR) process. The form is available on the Academic Registry website under Subject Access at:
<http://www.hw.ac.uk/registry/studentrecords.htm>