

Heriot-Watt University

University Committee for Learning and Teaching; Student Learning Experience Committee

Framework for Developing Learning and Teaching Policy

Background

In December 2012, the Court approved a proposed set of definitions relating to the components of the University's constitutional framework (the most recent revised version was approved in May 2017). The purpose of adopting a set of commonly agreed definitions is to provide direction and support for any work undertaken in the future to tidy up or to develop parts of the constitutional framework. Agreed definitions and adherence to these are necessary to support the achievement and maintenance of good order in the University's constitutional framework. <https://www.hw.ac.uk/documents/Constitutional-Framework-Definitions-Document-Upda.pdf>. The constitutional framework is defined in terms of: Charter and Statutes, Ordinances, Regulations, Policies (Corporate), Policies (Academic), Procedures, Guidelines and Codes of Practice. In addition, lines of responsibility for each category are specified.

As regards policies, in essence, corporate (non-academic) policies are the responsibility of the Court, the University Executive, Secretary of the University and the Professional Services Leadership Board; they are devolved to various committees and groups as appropriate. Academic policies are the responsibility of the Senate and, as such, the Senate approves all new and modified academic policies. Within the overall categorisation of "academic policies", the development of policies related to the quality assurance of taught programmes is the responsibility of the University Committee for Quality and Standards and its sub-committees. Research policies are developed by the University Committee for Research and Innovation and its sub-committees.

The development of learning and teaching policies has likewise been delegated by the Senate: in this case, to the University Committee for Learning and Teaching. The actual process of producing and amending learning and teaching policies is undertaken by the Student Learning Experience Committee on behalf of the University Committee for Learning and Teaching. Recommendations are made to the Senate via UCLT and SLEC.

Definition of Academic Policy

The University's constitutional framework includes definitions of both corporate and academic policies. Academic policies are defined as follows:

1. Academic policies encompass learning, teaching, assessment, research, the student learning experience, and associated quality assurance policies and procedures.
2. Academic policies exist to define and communicate institutional standards and to ensure equitable treatment of all students.
3. Academic policies apply to all programmes offered by Heriot-Watt University in any location and by any mode of study.

Policies (Academic)

A University academic policy is a concise, formal and mandatory statement of principle and applies, by definition, institution-wide. Academic policies encompass learning, teaching, assessment, research and the student learning experience, and also include the quality assurance policies and procedures associated with each area. Academic policies are part of the regulatory framework which governs the University's core academic activities

The Senate is "the governing and executive body responsible for the academic work and standards of the University, both in teaching and research, and for the regulation and superintendence of the education and discipline of the students of the University" (HWU Charter, Clause 9 (1)). Therefore, the Senate has ultimate authority over the University's academic policies.

Academic policies aim principally to:

- guide academic practice and decision-making by setting out mandatory requirements;
- ensure the integrity of, and consistency across, the University's decision-making;
- help ensure that the University is compliant with national codes and external policy or legislation;
- provide a framework for ensuring the equitable treatment of all students;
- assure the quality and standards of the University's academic provision;

- safeguard the University's academic reputation;
- enhance the University's academic provision and the student learning experience.

Academic policies aim to support the University's academic strategy and operations, and should not be subject to frequent change.

The remainder of this Framework document focuses on the process for developing **learning and teaching policies**. "Learning and Teaching" is used in its broadest sense to make policies related to: learning and teaching practice and administration, assessment and the student learning experience.

Process for Developing and Reviewing Learning and Teaching Policies

In its review of its Terms of Reference in March 2012, the Learning and Teaching Board (LTB) agreed to devolve all matters related to learning and teaching policy to the Student Learning Experience Committee (SLEC). With the establishment of the new academic committee structure from 1 August 2017, the University Committee for Learning and Teaching (the successor to the LTB) agreed that the development, review and revision of learning and teaching policies and associated procedures should continue to be delegated to SLEC in accordance with the previously agreed process for the review and development of learning and teaching policies¹:

- the groundwork (in terms of review, drafting, etc.) is undertaken by small groups of SLEC members and colleagues with relevant expertise.
- the Clerk to SLEC is responsible for completion of the Equality and Privacy Impact Assessment (EIA and PIA) with the exception of policies with learning and teaching management implications, for which the EIA and PIA is completed by the Clerk to UCLT.
- a draft proposal, including the completed EIA and PIA, is considered by SLEC, with a view to wider consultation (including with UCQS if appropriate).
- a finalised draft is sent from SLEC as an appendix to the relevant Minutes to the UCLT for endorsement.
- UCLT makes recommendations, via its regular report, to the Senate for approval (policy to be appended to the report).

As part of its remit, Student Learning Experience Committee is responsible for putting in place a more managed approach to the development and review of learning and teaching policies, procedures etc. As a consequence, a schedule for review of existing learning and teaching policies and development of new policies is overseen by SLEC and is maintained by the Clerk to the Committee.

Process for Developing and Reviewing Procedures for Learning and Teaching Policies

Learning and Teaching policies are usually accompanied by a series of procedures which outline in detail the steps to be followed in implementing, and adhering to, the over-arching policy. In terms of the definitions within the University's constitutional framework, procedures are defined as follows:

Procedures relate to and aid implementation of a University policy; representing the "how" rather than the "what" and "why" covered by policy documents. Procedures documentation sets out the prescribed and specific tasks or sequence of actions necessary to comply with the policy with which they are associated.

The proposal for a new or revised learning and teaching policy includes a recommendation on the group or individuals responsible for developing or amending the underpinning procedures. The finalised procedures are ratified by the designated group or individuals, and a report is then provided to the relevant Committee, with a view to endorsing the procedures and confirming their adherence to the associated policy.

This framework for developing learning and teaching policy was approved by the Learning and Teaching Board in November 2012; an updated version (with the inclusion of Equality and Privacy Impact Assessment) was approved in November 2014. An update to include the section on Procedures was approved in October 2015, with a further update in November 2017 to reflect the new academic governance structure/

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1 November 2012. Updated November 2014; October 2015; November 2017

¹ The process as described has been updated to reflect the new academic governance structure, which was introduced on 1 August 2017; in all other respects, the process remains unchanged.