

Heriot-Watt University

Student Learning Experience: Threshold Criteria

Heriot-Watt University's academic provision is governed by a key, fundamental principle:

Identical academic standards; diversity of learning experiences

Heriot-Watt University is characterised by the variety of modes and locations of study it offers to students, and the University recognises that, as a consequence, the student learning experience is multi-dimensional and multi-faceted.

The above principle underlines the fact that the University highly values the spectrum of choice in mode and location, and the diversity of benefits available through different study options; this diversity is, however, underpinned by common safeguards regarding academic standards.

An ethos of supporting diverse student learning experiences means that the University does not wish to be overly prescriptive in defining the various criteria which constitute the "HWU student learning experience". However, the University does prescribe a minimum threshold for the learning experience of all students, irrespective of mode or location of study, namely:

The quality of the learning experience must always be sufficient to enable students to achieve the all of the programme's specified learning outcomes

Scope of the Student Learning Experience

The factors which need to be taken into account to ensure that the student learning experience meets the University's minimum threshold are specified in the following key document:

Code of Practice for the Management of Multi-Location, Multi-Mode Programmes: Part 1, Student Experience (February 2014)

All Heriot-Watt programmes of study, including those offered in multi-location, multi-mode format, are required to meet the following Expectation, as articulated in Part 1, Student Experience of the Multi Code:

All Heriot-Watt programmes of study will provide students with the opportunity to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, and the University will seek to enhance the experience of students across all modes and locations.

35 key principles outline the criteria deemed by the University to be essential for programmes to meet the above Expectation. The principles, which are explained in detail in Part 1 of the Multi Code and are presented in summary form as an Appendix to this document, cover the following areas:

- 1) General approach to the student experience on multi-location, multi-mode programmes
- 2) Application, admission and enrolment
- 3) Induction
- 4) Learning and teaching
- 5) Assessment
- 6) Representation and feedback
- 7) Award
- 8) Employment

The above framework encapsulates Heriot-Watt University's principles-based (as opposed to rules-based) approach to the student learning experience.

Monitoring the Student Learning Experience

The University monitors the student learning experience across all levels, modes and locations through its standard quality assurance processes:

- Annual Monitoring and Review: the student learning experience is considered in both the School report (School-Level Review and Enhancement Report; SRER) and Partner report (Partner Annual Monitoring and Review; PAMR)
- Academic Review: the student learning experience at the programme/discipline level
- Internal Audit: management of the student learning experience at the School level
- Academic-Related Review of Professional Services: the contribution of relevant Professional Services to the student learning experience

In addition, direct feedback from students themselves provides a valuable source of information on the student learning experience, as gathered through surveys (internal Course Feedback Survey; external: NSS, PTES, Student Barometer); Student-Staff Liaison Committees; and representative structures (Sabbatical Officers, School Officers and Class Reps).

The above monitoring and review reports, and summaries of student feedback, are considered and acted on by the University's committees, primarily the Quality and Standards Committee (and from there to the Senate) and the Learning and Teaching Board (and from there to the University Executive).

Enhancement of the student learning experience is an integral part of assurance, and plans for such enhancement are incorporated into all of the above monitoring and review processes. In addition, the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy 2013-2018, and the related strategies and plans of Schools and relevant Professional Services, all have *Enhancing Student Learning* as one of the four key strategic objectives. Local implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy is evaluated through the above quality assurance processes (both annual monitoring and periodic review).

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

KEY INFORMATION, PART 1: STUDENT EXPERIENCE

EXPECTATION

All HWU programmes of study offered in multi-mode, multi-location format are required to meet the following Expectation.

All Heriot-Watt programmes of study will provide students with the opportunity to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, and will seek to enhance the experience of students across all modes and locations.

GENERAL APPROACH TO THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE ON MULTI-LOCATION, MULTI-MODE PROGRAMMES

Principle 1.1: Opportunity to Learn

Heriot-Watt University is committed to ensuring that all prospective students should have equal opportunity to learn and to acquire a Heriot-Watt degree, and that all enrolled students have an equal right to contribute to, and benefit from, the rich experience of participating in the University.

Principle 1.2: Student Experience

The academic experience must be sufficient to allow all students to complete their programme of study and to achieve intended learning outcomes in all locations and by all modes of learning.

The wider experience should be both enjoyable and rewarding for students, and provide them with opportunities for personal development beyond their formal studies, as is consistent with the culture and expectations of the geographical location and the mode of learning.

APPLICATION, ADMISSION AND ENROLMENT

Principle 1.3: Information given to Applicants

Information given to applicants on their programme of choice must be accurate, relevant, current and not misleading through omission. The information must be easily available, in a format in which key data and features are readily identifiable and sufficient to enable applicants to make informed decisions about routes and options. Applicants must be given access to the programme specification as approved by the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies Committee. The University and participating Schools must monitor regularly the information given by the partner to applicants.

Principle 1.4: Admission to Non-UK Campus Programmes

Policies and procedures for the recruitment and admission of students to all multi-location, multi-mode programmes must be clear, fair, explicit and must be consistently implemented. The University and Schools must ensure that admissions procedures to all multi-location, multi-mode programmes (overseas campus, partner or IDL) are consistent with the University's Ordinances, Regulations and Policies, and are applied fairly, courteously and expeditiously. Both the University and Schools must ensure that decisions on admissions are taken by those equipped to make the required judgements and competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities.

Principle 1.5: Entry Requirements

The University operates a contextualised admissions policy, whereby the entry requirements of all programmes must meet the institution's minimum criteria, but may differ according to mode or location of study in response to factors such as demand for places and the educational background of applicants.

Principle 1.6: Information given to Registered Students

Information given to registered students must be accurate, relevant, current and not misleading through omission. The information must be easily available, in a format in which key data and features are readily identifiable and sufficient to enable students to make informed decisions about routes and options within the programme.

Registered students must be given the programme specification as approved by the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies Committee. Additional information should include the University/School Student Handbook, appropriate channels for particular concerns, complaints and appeals, and the routes by which the University can be contacted directly.

The University and participating Schools must monitor regularly the information given by the partner to registered students.

Principle 1.7: Enrolment Process

All new and continuing students, whether studying at a UK or overseas campus, with a partner organisation or via independent distance learning, must enrol annually at the start of each academic session.

INDUCTION

Principle 1.8: Provision of Induction Activities

All students, irrespective of location or mode of study, must be provided with a programme of induction activities appropriate to their needs. Particular consideration must be given to the induction needs of direct entry students and students who enrol at times other than the start of the Academic Year in September.

Principle 1.9: Academic Socialisation Activities

Academic socialisation activities should be embedded into all programmes, including those offered in multi-location, multi-mode format, in order to support students, particularly undergraduate freshers, in making the transition to higher education and/or to studying at Heriot-Watt University.

Principle 1.10: Academic Mentoring

All students must be assigned a named member of academic staff as their mentor, whom they can contact in relation to a range of academic or pastoral matters.

LEARNING AND TEACHING

Principle 1.11: Programme Information

Students must be given access to course descriptors, which show the intended learning outcomes and teaching, learning and assessment methods of each course within their programme. In the case of IDL and partnership programmes, students must additionally be given access to a clear schedule for the delivery of their study materials and for the assessment of their work.

Principle 1.12: Learner Expectations

Students should receive a clear and realistic explanation of the expectations placed upon them for study of their programme in terms of, for example: attendance, participation and engagement, submission of assignments, workload planning, professionalism. All students, including IDL and partnership students, should be made aware of the nature and extent of autonomous, collaborative and supported aspects of learning.

Principle 1.13: Information on Learner Support

Students should have access to: a schedule for any learner support available to them through timetabled activities, for example tutorial sessions or web-based conferences; clear and up-to-date information about the learning support available to them locally and remotely for their programme; and the commitments of the University and, where appropriate, the partner organisation (or other support provider) for the support of their programme.

Principle 1.14: Quality of Learner Support

Staff providing learning support, whether they are member of HWU staff or an employee of a partner organisation, must have appropriate skills, and receive appropriate training and development. Support for learners, whether delivered through a partner organisation or through web-based or other channels, must meet the University's specified expectations for the quality of learner support.

Principle 1.15: Contact and Engagement

Students must have, at the outset of their programme, an identified contact (usually a mentor), either local or remote, who can give them constructive feedback on academic performance and guidance on their academic progression. Where appropriate, students should have regular opportunities for discussions with their peers about the programme. Students must have appropriate opportunities to give formal feedback on their experience of the programme.

Principle 1.16: Learning Materials and Tutor Guidelines

Programmes offered through an Approved Learning Partner or to independent distance learners must provide a comprehensive set of learning materials, either in printed or electronic format, for use by students as well as guidance notes for ALP Tutors.

ASSESSMENT

Principle 1.17: Information on Assessment

Students must have access to information on: the ways in which their performance will be assessed, and the relative weighting of courses or components thereof in respect of overall assessment; clear rules and regulations for progression and award; the form and timing of feedback to be provided on their academic performance; assessment requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies.

Principle 1.18: Student Responsibilities in Assessment

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

Principle 1.19: Promoting Effective Learning through Assessment

In all versions of a programme, assessment must be designed so as to promote effective learning, and formative assessment must be incorporated into all courses in order to provide students with the opportunity to learn and improve their performance.

Principle 1.20: Variety of Assessment Methods

All programmes should incorporate a balance between exams and other forms of assessment. Where examination is the principal form of assessment in non-campus based programmes, Schools must be able to demonstrate how other forms of assessment are used to support and develop student learning.

Principle 1.21: Volume and Timing of Assessment

Schools must ensure that the amount and timing of assessment enables effective and appropriate measurement of students' achievement of the course learning outcomes.

Principle 1.22: Security and Authenticity

Schools, whether or not working through a partner, must be confident that a student's assessment is the original work of that student only, particularly where the assessment is conducted through remote methods which might be vulnerable to interception or other interference.

Students themselves need to be confident that any mechanisms, such as web-based methods or correspondence, for the transfer of their work directly to assessors, are secure and reliable, and that there is a means of proving or confirming the safe receipt of their work.

Principle 1.23: Feedback on Assessment

All students, irrespective of their location or mode of study, must be provided with appropriate and timely feedback on their performance in assessment. Schools have the flexibility to determine the form and extent of feedback; this information must be clearly articulated in Student Handbooks and other documentation and must be brought to the attention of students.

REPRESENTATION AND FEEDBACK

Principle 1.24: Representation: On-Campus Students

Representative processes must be in place at the University and School levels on the UK and all overseas campuses to enable students to engage collectively as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their learning experience.

Principle 1.25: Representation: Students on Partnership or IDL Programmes

The University and Schools must put in place mechanisms to facilitate the representation of the collective student view on partnership and IDL programmes, tailoring these as appropriate to the mode of delivery.

Principle 1.26: Feedback from All Students

All students, irrespective of mode of location of study, must be provided with opportunities on a regular basis to feed back on their experience (both learning and general experience).

Principle 1.27: Responding to Student Views

The University and Schools must provide a formal response to issues raised by all groups of students (UK and overseas campuses, IDL and partnership), indicating areas addressed and equally providing a rationale for issues which have not been taken forward.

AWARD

Principle 1.28: Achievement of Award Criteria

A student who has satisfied all the specified criteria for the award of a degree, diploma or certificate shall be entitled to receive the award.

Principle 1.29: Authority for Transcripts and Certificates

The University shall have sole authority for awarding, and ensuring the accuracy of, certificates and transcripts relating to all its programmes, irrespective of mode or location of study.

Principle 1.30: Publication of Transcripts and Certificates

The University shall issue a transcript of assessment results to each student upon completion of the programme or study or upon withdrawal from the institution. An award certificate will be issued, in addition, to each student upon successful completion of the programme or upon withdrawal if a student has successfully met the criteria for an intermediate award.

EMPLOYMENT

Principle 1.31: Development of Professional Skills

All students on taught programmes must be provided with the opportunity to develop the four HWU Graduate Attributes (*Specialist; Creative; Professional; Global*) and, as a consequence, be able to demonstrate the distinctive quality of the HWU graduate: *Professionally Educated, Globally Employable*.

Principle 1.32: Provision of Career Advice and Guidance

All students must be provided with career education, information, advice and guidance, and must be made aware of the extent and range of such services available to them before, during and after their time at the University.

Principle 1.33: Future Academic or Career Progression

All students must be made aware throughout the duration of their programme of how the knowledge, understanding and skills acquired during study are intended to be of use in developing future academic or career progression routes.

Principle 1.34: Engagement with Employers and other Stakeholders

Close collaboration must be promoted and practised between the Careers Service, Schools, employers and other relevant stakeholders in order to improve the academic and career development of students.

Principle 1.35: Monitoring and Improvement

The provision of career education, information, advice and guidance will be evaluated at institutional and School levels to promote continuous improvement.