**HANDBOOK**

**for**

**ACADEMIC AUDIT**

**A review process for high-risk activities**

Approved by QSC/UCQS: Oct 2008; Aug 2009; Jun 2013; Mar 2019; Jan 2022; minor revisions Nov 2023

**Introduction**

Academic Audit (previously termed ‘Internal Audit’) is an assurance-led process which complements the enhancement-led Academic Review process. It is designed to ensure that high-risk activities are properly managed, and the quality and standards of such activities are assured. Academic Audit provides an opportunity to periodically review the effectiveness of Schools’ management structures for collaborative activities.

The process was implemented in 2008 by the Planning & Management Executive (now University Executive) and the Senate. All off-campus activities carry higher risk and therefore require greater levels of scrutiny, although it is recognised that all such activities are not of equal risk. This additional scrutiny is mirrored in external reviews where the QAA continues to audit selected overseas activities for all Universities and undertakes subject reviews for selected institutions in addition to external institutional reviews.

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| **Scope of Academic Audits** |
| Activities to be included within the scope of the Academic Audit process includes:* Programmes for independent learners
* Programmes offered through Approved Learning Partners
* Programmes offered in joint collaboration with other partners including those in the UK
* Articulation arrangements with international partners or major UK partners
* Exchange student partnerships
* Industrial Partners that support student learning where the student receives credit
* Graduate Apprenticeships
* Other academic activities judged to be high risk, as determined by the Deputy Principal (Education & Student Life)
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| **Purpose of Academic Audits** |
| The purpose of the audit is:1. To ensure that the management of the partnership and the student experience are of a high standard.
2. To ensure that the School infrastructure is sufficient to:
* support the range of activities
* ensure each partnership is being properly managed and supported
* ensure risks are being properly managed
1. To consider and approve the School's risk assessment processes and arrangements for managing assessments/examinations across different locations and modes of study.
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| **Judgements following the Audit** |
| Upon conclusion of the Academic Audit, the Audit Team will form an overall judgement and may also provide recommendations. Possible outcomes include: 1. Full confidence that all activities are managed effectively
2. Confidence that most activities are managed effectively but with some areas of concern
3. Significant concern regarding effective management of activities.

Possible recommendations include:* For action (expectation that these are completed by the School)
* For consideration (expectation that these are considered by the School)
* For University consideration (considered at University Level)

The ***maximum*** period before a subsequent audit is normally three years but exceptional circumstances may result in this timeframe being either extended or reduced.Where the Audit Team does not have sufficient information or specialist expertise then the Team may defer the decision until additional information is available.The findings of the Audit Team will be recorded on a standard report template which is attached at Appendix 1. The report template may be modified where necessary.The Audit Team will present the completed report to the University Committee for Quality & Standards (UCQS) to provide University approval and to confirm that the audit process has been satisfactorily undertaken. |

**Evidence to be provided by the School for consideration by the audit team**

1. Narrative case
2. Learning materials
3. List of partnerships to be terminated including exit plans
4. Risk register
5. Risk assessment processes and arrangements for managing assessment/examinations across different locations and modes of study
6. Approved Learning Partner documentation
7. Joint Collaborative Partnership documentation
8. Exchange Partnership documentation
9. Articulation Partnership documentation
10. Industrial/Commercial Partnership documentation
11. Heriot-Watt Online / Independent Learners documentation
12. Graduate Apprenticeship documentation
13. Other information as determined by the Deputy Principal (Education & Student Life)

Further information on each piece of evidence required for the Academic Audit is detailed below.

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| **1. Narrative Case**Each School should produce a narrative of 2-5 pages describing the activities and future plans of its high-risk activities. The Narrative Case must be formally submitted to the Audit Team at least two weeks prior to the audit. This will normally include:* an overview of any issues (ongoing or resolved in the previous three years or since the previous audit) associated with any partnership, IDL arrangement or Graduate Apprenticeship
* historical information and forward business case (high level summaries)
* historical and projected student numbers (high level summaries)
* planned programme developments
* planned activities to support partners and their staff
* other planned enhancement activities
* current and planned development using the Virtual Learning Environment (i.e. Canvas)
* current and planned direct student support provided by the HWU staff
* support for student employment
* curriculum development to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of off-campus students

**2. Learning Materials**For programmes delivered through an ALP or to Heriot-Watt Online / independent learners a selection of learning materials should be provided. Where learning support is provided through a Virtual Learning Environment (i.e. Canvas) then access should be arranged so that the Team members can view the materials.**3. List of Partnerships to be terminated with exit plans**Where it is planned to end a partnership agreement then there should be an exit plan with details of the students to be supported during any teach-out together with financial arrangements and support arrangements for any students who are unlikely to complete their studies during a teach out phase.**4. A Risk Register**An updated risk register for the complete set of activities should be provided using the standard risk reporting template.**5. Risk Assessment Processes and Arrangements for Assessments/Examinations across different locations and modes of study**In line with the University's Policy on 'Examinations and other assessments held around the world in different time-zones' the School should provide evidence of their risk assessment processes and arrangements for managing assessments/examinations across different locations and modes of study.**6. Approved Learning Partner documentation***For every Approved Learning Partner** the current contract
* historical and projected student numbers
* feedback from students for the past 3 years
* student handbook
* exam performance and degrees awarded for the past 3 years compared to on-campus students and compared to other partners offering the same or similar programmes
* feedback from partner staff
* annual monitoring reports for the past 3 years
* visit reports for the past 3 years
* schedule of visits for the next 3 years
* a selection of learning materials

**7. Joint Collaborative Partnership documentation***For every Joint Collaborative Partner** the current contract/Memorandum of Agreement
* historical and projected student numbers
* feedback from students for the past 3 years
* student handbook
* exam performance and degrees awarded for the past 3 years compared to university norms
* Annual Board of Studies reports and School responses/action
* visit reports for the past 3 years for non-UK partners
* schedule of visits for the next 3 years for non-UK partners

**8. Exchange Partnership documentation***For every Partner supporting Exchange students** the current contract/agreement
* historical student numbers/balances of incoming and outgoing students
* feedback from students for the past 3 years
* Staff visit reports for the past 3 years
* Evidence of student performance

**9. Articulation Partnership documentation***For each articulation agreement** historical and projected student numbers
* feedback from students who have used the articulation route
* exam performance of students compared to on-campus students

Note that articulation arrangements exist with many Scottish FE colleges and are little more than agreements to work together. These need not be included. The objective is to manage arrangements with overseas partners and active Scottish partners and in particular cases where there are obligations on HWU. If in doubt this should be discussed with the Deputy Principal (Education & Student Life).**10. Industrial/Commercial Partnership documentation***For Industrial/Commercial partners that support student learning undertaken for credit** historical student numbers
* feedback from students for the past 3 years
* evidence that students are visited during their period with the partner
* evidence that successful learning has taken place (eg credit awarded)
* evidence of student performance
* evidence of risk assessment carried out for a placement (sample selection only)

**11. Heriot-Watt online (or independent learners) documentation***For Heriot-Watt online or independent learners** historical and projected student numbers
* feedback from students for the past 3 years
* exam performance and degree award for the past 3 years compared to on-campus students and to students studying through an ALP
* student handbook
* a selection of learning materials and support information

**12. Graduate Apprenticeship documentation*** historical student numbers
* feedback from students for the past 3 years
* evidence that students are visited at their workplace during their period of study
* evidence of student performance
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The information available in each School will vary and Schools are therefore encouraged to discuss the detail of the review and the evidence required with the Deputy Principal (Education & Student Life) well in advance of the Audit.

In some cases it will be sufficient to review a group of programmes in a School as a single activity with a single set of documents. This would be appropriate where the same approach is used for a number of partners or for a number of programmes. In other cases it may be more appropriate for different sets of documents to be prepared.

Four weeks prior to the Audit event, the School will submit the Narrative Case and all supporting documentation to the Audit Team for review. Following this, the Audit Team may request clarification or further information in advance of the Audit event, or on the day of the Audit.

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| **Frequency of audits** |
| All high-risk activities will normally be audited every three years, or since the date of the last Audit, but exceptional circumstances may result in this timeframe being either extended or reduced.For any Audit, the Audit Team may recommend that the next Audit should be carried out after two years rather than the normal three. Where an activity requires a further review in one-year then this would be considered as a follow-up audit rather than a new audit.   |

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| **Audit Team** |
| Audit Teams will comprise:* Deputy Principal (Education & Student Life)
* A Dean
* A Senior Academic staff member (normally a Director of Learning OR a Director of Academic Quality OR a member of UCQS)
* A School representative (Academic or Professional Service staff)
* One member of Academic Quality
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|  **Academic Audit meeting** |
| Audit panel members are expected to have fully reviewed all documentation ahead of the audit meeting which might normally last 3 hours.A typical schedule for an audit meeting is given below:

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| **Time** | **Activity** |
| 45 minutes  | The Audit Team share their observations and collectively identify any issues that require further discussion with the School team |
| 45 minutes | The Audit Team meet with key members of School staff to discuss issues raised in the review |
| 45 minutes  | The Audit Team reflect on the documentary evidence provided and discussions with School staff in order to collectively agree outcomes and recommendations |
| 20 minutes | The Audit Team meet with key members of School staff to resolve any outstanding issues and report on their conclusions |
|  | Final Team meeting (if necessary) |

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**APPENDIX 1: STANDARD TEMPLATE FOR AUDIT REPORT**

Academic Audit Report

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| **School of** |
| Date: Location:  |

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| Purpose  |
| The University carries out an Academic Audit of high-risk activities in each School on a 3 year cycle to: 1. Ensure that the management of the partnership and the student experience are of a high standard
2. Ensure that the School infrastructure is sufficient to:
* Support the range of activities;
* Ensure each partnership is being properly managed and supported;
* Ensure risks are being properly managed
1. To consider and approve the School's risk assessment processes and arrangements for managing assessments/examinations across different locations and modes of study.

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| **Audit Team**  |
| * **Chair**: Professor Malcom Chrisp (Deputy Principal, Education and Student Life)
* **Dean**:
* **Senior Academic**:
* **Member of Academic Quality**:
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| **School staff consulted**  |
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1. Introduction

On [DATE], the Audit Team considered the following evidence provided by the School/Institute:

1. Narrative Case
2. Learning materials
3. List of partnerships to be terminated including exit plans
4. Risk register
5. Risk assessment processes and arrangements for managing assessment /

examinations across different locations and modes of study

1. Approved Learning Partner documentation
2. Joint Collaborative Partnership documentation
3. Exchange Partnership documentation
4. Articulation Partnership documentation
5. Industrial/Commercial Partnership documentation
6. Heriot-Watt Online / Independent Learners documentation
7. Graduate Apprenticeship documentation

A summary of the key discussion points and decisions made by the Audit Team are outlined below.

Approved Learning Partners

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Partner** | **Country** | **Programmes** | **Approval** | **Conditions** |
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Joint Collaborative Partners

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| **Partner** | **Country** | **Programmes** | **Approval** | **Conditions** |
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Articulation Agreements

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Partner** | **Country** | **Programmes** | **Approval** | **Conditions** |
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Student Exchange Agreements

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| **Partner** | **Country** | **Programmes** | **Approval** | **Conditions** |
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Programmes with Industrial Placements

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| **Programmes** | **Approval** | **Conditions** |
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Heriot-Watt Online / Independent Learners documentation

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| **Programmes** | **Approval** | **Conditions** |
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Graduate Apprenticeship documentation

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| **Programmes** | **Approval** | **Conditions** |
|  |   |  |

1. Actions and Recommendations

2.1 Overview

2.2 School Actions

2.3 School Recommendations

2.4 University-level recommendations

1. Date of next Audit

The next Academic Audit of the School of [INSERT] will take place in 3 years during the Academic Year 20XX/XX.

1. Report sign-off

The Academic Audit Report for the audit of the [School], held on [DATE], has been reviewed and approved by the audit team.

The report will be submitted to the University Committee for Quality & Standards to confirm that the audit process has been carried out satisfactorily and to approve the report.