

**Academic Quality
Academic Registry**

Handbook on External Examining For Taught Programmes (Undergraduate and Postgraduate)

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Available at <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm>

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Foreword

On behalf of Heriot-Watt University, may I welcome you as a new External Examiner and thank you for undertaking this valuable role, which is an integral part of our quality assurance processes.

This *Handbook on External Examining for Taught Programmes (Undergraduate and Postgraduate)* has been produced to provide you with guidance on your role as External Examiner. If there is any aspect which is unclear or has been omitted, please do not hesitate to contact us (see below for contact details).

The Handbook is also intended to be used by Heriot-Watt University staff, both in Schools and in Professional Services, who are involved with External Examiners.

This Handbook and the External Examiner Report forms have been produced in accordance with the University's Charter, Statutes, Ordinances and Regulations. They have been informed by relevant external guidance, such as the UK Quality Code.

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School Contacts

For matters related to the programme which you are examining, please contact the relevant Programme Director of Studies or School administrator.

For matters related to appointment processes (such as UKVI right to work), the payment of fees and expenses, please contact the relevant School/programme administrator.

Part A: Information for External Examiners

1. Introduction

1.1 Heriot-Watt University

With a history dating back to 1821, Heriot-Watt University has established a reputation for world-class teaching and practical, leading-edge research, which has made the institution one of the top UK universities for business and industry. There are three campuses in the UK: Edinburgh, Scottish Borders (in Galashiels) and Orkney.

Heriot-Watt is Scotland's most international university with an unsurpassed international in-country presence. Degree programmes are delivered to approximately 32,000 students in more than 100 countries around the world. The University has a campus in Dubai (established in 2005) and a campus in Malaysia (established in 2012), and also has the largest international student cohort in Scotland. International in-country degree programmes are also delivered through more than 50 Approved Learning Partners and by independent distance learning.

All activities of Heriot-Watt University aim to embody the institution's four Values: Belong; Inspire; Collaborate; Celebrate.

Heriot-Watt University's mission is to create and exchange knowledge that benefits society. The University's vision and its objectives to 2025 are outlined in *Strategy 2025*.

Heriot-Watt University is organised into six Schools (five of which cover both undergraduate and postgraduate provision), with each having between one and five academic disciplines:

- School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society
- School of Engineering and Physical Sciences
- School of Social Sciences
- School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences
- School of Textiles and Design
- Edinburgh Business School (PG only)

Most External Examiners' remit will include examining multi-location, multi-mode provision (ie two or more campuses and via an academic partner or independent distance learning).

Although all Schools offer programmes at the UK, Dubai and Malaysia Campuses, meetings of Boards of Examiners at which an External Examiner is present are normally held at the Edinburgh Campus or, in the case of the School of Textiles and Design, at the Scottish Borders Campus.

At Heriot-Watt University Malaysia, separate External Examiners are appointed (in addition to those who cover all forms of provision) to Engineering degree programmes, in accordance with the requirements of the Malaysian Engineering Accreditation Council. These Engineering programmes are also covered by the HWU External Examiners whose remit includes oversight of Engineering programmes across all modes and locations. The arrangements for HWUM Engineering External Examiners are outlined in Appendix 4.

Further information on Heriot-Watt University: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/about/profile.htm>

1.2 Purpose of External Examining

External Examining is an integral, core part of the quality assurance processes of the UK HE sector and of each Higher Education Institution. The main purposes of the External Examining are:

- To verify that academic standards are appropriate, and comparable with other UK HEIs, for the award or award components which the External Examiner has been appointed to examine;
- To help Heriot-Watt University to assure and maintain the academic standards of its awards in accordance with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and applicable subject benchmark statements;
- To help Heriot-Watt University to ensure that its assessment procedures measure student achievement robustly and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and are conducted in accordance with the University's policies and regulations;
- To identify good practice and provide advice on the enhancement of programmes.

The effectiveness of Heriot-Watt University's external examining process is evaluated as part of the periodic Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR), as conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland.

1.3 External Examining of Multi-Mode, Multi-Location Programmes

For Heriot-Watt University, the External Examining system is of fundamental importance in assuring the quality and standards of the large number of programmes offered in multiple locations and by multiple modes of delivery. Three UK campuses, campuses in Dubai and Malaysia and a global network of academic partners are the most obvious examples of multi-mode, multi-location delivery; in addition, the University also provides opportunities for independent distance learning and work placement.

Management of multi-mode, multi-location provision poses particular issues for the University, not least in the assurance of quality and standards. The integrity of this provision at Heriot-Watt University is underpinned by two overarching principles which provide a safeguard for this type of academic activity and which govern all decisions and judgements regarding future international development, namely:

- The academic standards and the quality of learning of all awards must meet the formal Expectations and Core Practices of the UK Quality Code and must be properly located in the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework and be consistent with the Subject Benchmark Statements.
- Any programme offered in more than one location or by more than one mode of study must be of the same quality and standard and have the following identical components across all versions: learning outcomes; award/programme title; mandatory courses; core knowledge, skills and competencies. Courses (ie modules) within such programmes must have identical learning outcomes and core curriculum, although variation is permitted in content and assessment¹.

Where appropriate, all External Examiners are invited, via the report form, to confirm that the Board of Examiners considered the assessment results of student cohorts across all modes and locations, and to comment on differences in, and comparability of, the quality and standard of student performance.

¹ Policy on Programme Titles, Learning Outcomes and Courses <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/docs/multi-policy.pdf>. See also the accompanying briefing papers on the policy and its implementation: [Learning and Teaching Briefing Papers | Heriot-Watt University](#)

Heriot-Watt University has the additional post of **Chief External Examiner**, which provides oversight of a School's entire provision across its various modes and locations of delivery (the External Examiner still retains responsibility for an individual programme and its different versions). Schools must have at least one Chief External Examiner who has responsibility for overseeing programmes in all locations and for all variants. Schools may appoint two or more Chief External Examiners, as befits the scale of their multi-location, multi-mode provision and/or the range of disciplines.

Further information on the role and responsibilities of the Chief External Examiner is provided in Section 3; see also <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm>

2. Selection and Appointment of External Examiners

2.1 Appointment and Approval

The Senate of Heriot-Watt University has ultimate responsibility for the approval of External Examiners. Each taught programme (undergraduate or postgraduate taught) leading to an award of the University has at least one External Examiner. Additional External Examiners may be appointed if there is a large number of students or if the programme is offered in various modes or locations.

Nominations for External Examiners are made by Programme Teams/Programme Directors of Studies and endorsed by the School's Director of Learning and Teaching or the School's Director of Academic Quality. Nomination Forms and CV's are submitted to the central Academic Quality team where they are assessed for accuracy and completeness of information, then forwarded for consideration to:

- Dean of the University (Science and Engineering), or
- Dean of the University (Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences)

The Deans, with the delegated authority of the University Committee for Quality and Standards, consider and approve nominations on behalf of the Committee. Approved nominations are notified to the University Committee for Quality and Standards and thereafter to the Senate.

While partner organisations may be involved in nominating potential External Examiners, Heriot-Watt University retains sole responsibility for approving all External Examiners.

Pre-Approval

In compliance with UKVI, Schools are required to undertake "Right to Work in the UK" checks prior to approval of an External Examiner and prior to any external examining activity being undertaken. At the time of an External Examiner agreeing to be nominated for the role, the requisite documentation and evidence will be collected and verified (and retained) by Schools as part of the pre-approval process. Schools will also collect bank details information to enable fees and expenses to be paid. As a particular point to note, fees and expenses cannot be paid until "Right to Work in the UK" has been verified.

Post-Approval

Following approval, Academic Quality sends a letter of appointment to External Examiners, informing them of terms and conditions. A copy of the letter of appointment is sent to the Head of School.

Academic Quality maintains a central register of all External Examiner appointments, which includes all relevant information such as period of office, date of receipt of report and date of dispatch of response letter.

2.2 Criteria for Appointment

Full details on the criteria for appointment of External Examiners are available in Part B, Section 10, of this Handbook. Section 10 also outlines cases where exceptions to the required criteria may be permitted.

In summary, the key criteria for approval of an External Examiner nomination are as follows:

- An appropriate level of academic and/or professional expertise is evident;
- Ability to make an effective contribution to assessment process and to provide objective advice on assessment procedures can be demonstrated;
- There is no conflict of interest, including research-related or Honorary appointments;
- Normally no more than two External Examiner appointments are held simultaneously;
- The External Examiner is not normally from the same discipline in an institution where a HWU staff member is acting as an Examiner (see p.24, Section 10.6 iii) for exceptions);
- The External Examiner has not been a HWU staff member or student in the last three years;
- In programmes with two or more External Examiners, no two Examiners are from the same institution;
- A re-appointment has not been made until a period of five years has elapsed.

If an External Examiner's circumstances change significantly in such a way that the above criteria can no longer be met, he or she should notify the Head of School as soon as possible. In particular, any emerging, potential conflicts of interest should be highlighted.

2.3 Period of Appointment

Appointments are made for a period of up to four years (from 1 September to 31 August). A shorter appointment may be needed, for example, if a programme is due to be restructured or an existing External Examiner has resigned. In exceptional circumstances, an extension for one further year beyond the four year period may be permitted where a programme is being withdrawn or the School has had difficulty in seeking a replacement External Examiner.

External Examiners cannot be re-appointed until at least five years have elapsed since the last term of office.

An individual may be appointed simultaneously as both External Examiner and Chief External Examiner. The term of office need not be identical for both appointments.

2.4 Conflict of Interest

No External Examiner should be involved in any aspect of the assessment process (whether at the setting, marking or award stage), including examination for a prize or scholarship, if he or she may reasonably be regarded as having a professional or personal interest because of a current or previous relationship to, or friendship with, the proposed candidate(s). In addition, an External Examiner should not hold any Honorary positions within the School, nor be engaged in collaborative research activities with a member of Heriot-Watt staff from the discipline area being examined. In such circumstances, the External Examiner should decline to participate in the assessment process.

Due diligence with regard to conflict of interest will be undertaken by Schools as part of the pre-approval process. A form is available for this purpose within the Forms section of the External Examiner website:

<https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm>

If an External Examiner is in doubt as to any aspect related to conflict of interest, he or she should consult with the Head of School, who may in turn bring the matter to the attention of the Dean of the University if appropriate.

If a conflict of interest arises during the period of appointment, the External Examiner or the School should contact the Academic Quality team in the first instance.

2.5 Resignation

If External Examiners wish to resign from their position prior to the end of the period of appointment, a minimum of six months' notice should be provided and that examining duties for the current academic year are concluded. Letters of resignation should be addressed to the Head of School, who will in turn inform Academic Quality.

2.6 Disagreements

In rare circumstances, an External Examiner or Programme Team may consider that, despite reasonable, timely requests and offers of support, the other has not met, without good reason, their specified requirements.

In this situation, the External Examiner or the Programme Team should highlight the matter in the first instance to the Head of Academic Quality, who will determine to whom it is appropriate to refer the matter on to: the relevant Dean of the University or the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching). The relevant individual will investigate the matter and provide a report to all interested parties.

If an External Examiner considers that the matters raised are so serious or have not been resolved satisfactorily by one of the aforementioned individuals, he or she may wish to submit a confidential report directly to the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, who will investigate the issue and provide a report in response.

In the event of an External Examiner being dissatisfied with the response from the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, he or she may ask the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland to investigate using its Scottish Concerns Scheme. The concerns procedure should be used only to highlight serious systematic or procedure problems at the institutional level regarding academic standards or quality of learning opportunities, and not, for example, one-off cases of ineffective practice. For the QAA Scotland Concerns Scheme, see <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/how-to-raise-a-concern-in-scotland>

2.7 Termination of Contract

The appointment of an External Examiner may be terminated by Heriot-Watt University before the end of term of office. Termination may occur in the following circumstances:

- Serious illness or other circumstances which render the External Examiner unable to fulfil his or her duties;
- Changes in the programme structure which result in the appointment no longer being applicable;
- A breach of confidentiality of the terms and conditions of appointment on the part of the External Examiner;
- A conflict of interest has emerged, which cannot be satisfactorily resolved;
- The performance of the External Examiner has been judged, in the context of this Handbook or the terms and conditions of appointment, to have been inadequate, such as repeated failure to attend Boards of Examiners or to submit an annual report or submission of an insubstantial report.

Decisions to terminate an External Examiner's contract are taken only after a full investigation has been conducted by the relevant Dean of the University and a recommendation on termination has been approved, on the basis of the Dean's report, by the University Committee for Quality and Standards.

3. Responsibilities of External Examiners

3.1 Role and Activities of External Examiners

The role and activities of External Examiners include:

- a) Review all draft degree exam papers and other forms of assessment contributing to the final award, including resit papers (and model answers).
- b) Review exam papers not in English prior to translation and consideration of completed scripts once translated. Comment on process and performance of those students.
- c) Review of all (or a representative sample as appropriate) of exam scripts, assessed coursework, dissertations and project reports. The External Examiner can expect to be sent or given access to a sample of assessments to review from all versions of the programme delivered outwith the UK campuses and may be invited to review further examples when visiting the institution for the Board of Examiners meetings. Only in exceptional circumstances will an External Examiner be invited to undertake a review of assessments at locations other than the relevant UK campus².
- d) Conduct formal *viva voce* examinations if an approved part of the assessment process (the School may provide an opportunity for the External Examiner to meet informally with a selection of students representing the entire cohort, if practical³).
- e) Review consistency and standards of internal marking and classification of student work including across variants (sample to be agreed in advance and from top, middle and bottom of range).
- f) Discuss and comment on programme structure, assessment process and award schemes.
- g) Being aware of differences in programme curricula between on- and off-campus variants and multi-campus variants.
- h) Consider the Board of Examiners' documentation as full member of Board.
- i) Attend as full member at all Boards of Examiners for the subject in which the External Examiner is involved (not years 1-3 unless the programme is only offered at Ordinary Degree level or if substantial numbers of students exit with an Ordinary Degree). If an Examiner is absent, written comments should be submitted for consideration at the Board (attendance may be by telephone/video link or Skype). See Sections 3.3, 6.2 and 13 on External Examiner Report.
- j) Evaluate the extent to which procedures governing special circumstances, academic misconduct and borderline cases have been considered fairly and equitably.
- k) Ensure that the recommendations of the Boards of Examiners are consistent with the aims and outcomes of the programmes, with Heriot-Watt University regulations and, in general, with practice at other institutions with which the External Examiner is familiar.
- l) Sign acceptance of final list of degree classifications awarded to candidates and note of any disagreement regarding a mark or classification to be awarded.
- m) Submit External Examiner report at end of each academic year and, if appropriate, at the end of period of office. See Sections 3.3, 6.2 and 13 on External Examiner Report.
- n) Notify the Head of School as soon as possible if unable to undertake or complete any aspect of External Examining responsibilities.

External Examiners may also be invited to comment on any proposed restructuring of the programme or on matters related to its operation. Occasionally, at the request of the University Committee for Learning and Teaching, External Examiners may be invited to comment on the development or review the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. Although there is no

² The Award Board for MSc programmes offered at the Orkney Campus is held at the Edinburgh Campus (as these programmes are part of the School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society), with Orkney staff participating by Skype; the External Examiner does, however, undertake an initial visit to the Orkney Campus.

³ Where a programme is delivered in more than one campus, the School will make arrangements for video-conference participation of students outwith the UK to ensure that the Examiner meets a representative selection of students across all locations. See also Section 3.2 g) and footnote 4.

formal requirement to participate in this process, the University welcomes, encourages and values the involvement of all key external stakeholders.

3.2 Rights of External Examiners

External Examiners are entitled to:

- a) Receive information core to the External Examining role, such as: programme structures; learning outcomes; details of learning, teaching and assessment processes; differences between versions of multi-mode/location programmes; draft exam papers, other forms of assessment and model answers; assessment and award regulations; marking schemes; process for dealing with borderline, unusual results or special circumstances; Board of Examiner procedures. See Sections 4.1 and 4.2 for full details of information provided to External Examiners.
- b) Receive a response from the Programme Team on comments provided in relation to draft exam papers and other forms of assessment.
- c) Request additional exam scripts and other assessments in addition to the sample provided for initial moderation.
- d) Be present at all Examiners' meetings at which significant decisions are to be taken in relation to their designated subject area.
- e) An equal vote at meetings of Boards of Examiners. The Chair has a deliberative and casting vote.
- f) Recommend the adjustment of marks/grades on particular courses for all students, based on his or her overview of internal marking processes. External Examiners may not by themselves alter the marks/grades awarded to individual, or an entire cohort, of students. Any recommendations for marks/grades adjustments require the approval of the Board of Examiners as a whole; the External Examiner does not have the right to take a final decision on any proposed alterations.
- g) Meet students, only if the selected students are representative of the entire cohort. In the case of programmes which are also offered at an overseas campus, through an Approved Learning Partner or via independent distance learning, such meetings must include students representing all modes and locations (for practical purposes, meetings involving students from different modes and locations can be conducted by Skype)⁴. External Examiners may not request that a *viva voce* examination be conducted; such formal oral examinations can only be undertaken if an approved part of the programme's assessment process. External Examiners can, however, request an informal meeting (including by Skype where there are cohorts of students at other locations/on other modes of study) with a selection of representative students to help gain a more complete overview of the quality and standards of a programme.
- h) Submit a separate, confidential report to one of more of the Senior Officers of the University: the Dean of the University; the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching); the Principal and Vice-Chancellor (see Section 2.6).

3.3 External Examiner Reports

At the end of each academic year (and, if appropriate, at the end of the period of office), External Examiners are required to submit a written report to the University (see Section 2.5 for the option of submitting additional reports). The report proforma is issued annually by Academic Quality and is also available on the External Examiners website at <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm>

⁴ The students with whom the External Examiner is meeting should be representative of the whole student profile. Therefore, while it might be practical to meet with students where a programme is offered only at, for example, the Edinburgh Campus, there might not be an opportunity to meet students where programmes are delivered in multi-locations/modes because the Edinburgh-based students would not constitute a representative sample of the entire cohort. In such cases, meetings by Skype can be held to ensure that the meeting with the External is representative of all students. If such representative meetings cannot be arranged, then the External Examiner will not, therefore, be able to hold face-to-face meetings with only a selection of students based at the campus which the External is visiting.

External Examiner reports are an integral part of the University's quality assurance processes and contribute to both University and School annual monitoring of programmes.

Areas for Comment

External Examiners have the right to comment on any matter they wish in relation to their role. However, Heriot-Watt University has a standard series of issues on which the views of External Examiners are required – these issues form the basis of the sections within the report proforma:

- Consistency of the programme outcomes with the programme title and programme content
- Consistency of the programme with QAA Subject Benchmark Statements
- Extent to which all the learning outcomes are assessed
- Appropriateness of the forms of assessment
- Quality of learning, teaching and assessment methods
- Assessment process and schemes for marking and classification
- Rigour of the assessment process
- Equity of treatment of students
- Standard of student performance
- Academic standards of the awards, including comparability with other institutions
- Length of time allocated to External Examiner for scrutinising papers and scripts
- Provision of sufficient evidence to fulfil External Examiner role
- Conduct of Board of Examiners
- Process for managing unusual results
- Quality and standard of student performance across all campuses or partner organisations
- Induction process
- Administration process
- Completion of issues raised in previous report(s)
- Areas of good practice
- Any other comments
- Summary of term of office

In the case of the MBA, External Examiners are also invited to comment on translated scripts.

Informative Reports

The report proforma is a combination of tick box and open comment sections. The template format is designed to ensure that key information is provided, both to the satisfaction of the University and QAA. In addition, External Examiners can comment on any other relevant matter. The completed report should, however, be consistent with the comments and judgements given by the External Examiner to the Board of Examiners.

External Examiners are requested not to refer to individual students or staff members by name or by designation in their reports, given that these reports are in the public domain and will be considered by the School Studies Committee, which features student representatives amongst its membership.

External Examiners are encouraged to complete all sections and to provide as full and informative a written report as possible, even if a verbal report was previously given at the Board of Examiners, so that the School and the University can be assured that the standard of awards is appropriate and assessment processes are rigorous and fair.

A comprehensive, informative and specific report also helps the School and the University to make enhancements. By contrast, a very brief, generic report does not provide the School or the University with sufficient independent evidence of the quality and standards of its provision. If a report is deemed insufficient in terms of the usefulness of its content, the External Examiner will be invited to return a more informative report.

Return of Reports

The external examining process is intended to be paper-free and so External Examiners should complete forms electronically and return these by email. The electronic submission of reports facilitates the prompt, onward transmission of reports across the University and to the Chief External Examiner (see Section 3.4 for this role).

Deadline dates for return of reports by External Examiners (there are separate dates for the return of the summative reports by Chief External Examiners; see Section 3.4 for this role):

- 30 June for undergraduate programmes
- 31 October for postgraduate taught programmes

Timely Submission of Reports

Heriot-Watt University is required to include External Examiner Reports and Responses in its annual accreditation submission to the accreditation authorities in Dubai (KHDA). Therefore, return of completed reports by the above dates is very much appreciated.

The report templates for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are available at:
<https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm>

Non-Submission of Reports

If an External Examiner has not submitted a report by the specified date, an email reminder will be sent by Academic Quality, highlighting the requirement to submit a report as a condition of the terms of appointment. In the unlikely event of non-submission following the initial reminder, a further reminder will be sent by the relevant School. If, exceptionally, the School reminder does not result in submission of the report, the External Examiner will be contacted by the Head of Academic Quality and, thereafter, if required, by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching).

Since External Examiner reports make an essential contribution to the monitoring and maintenance of quality and standards, the appointment of a replacement External Examiner will be recommended in exceptional cases of continued non-submission of reports.

Non-submission of reports is recorded annually on a School-by-School basis in the Summary Review of External Examiner Reports. This summary is considered by the University's Committee for Quality and Standards, and forms part of the Advance Information Set provided as part of the institution's QAA Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR).

Fees are paid to External Examiners only upon receipt of reports.

Consideration of External Examiner Reports

See Sections 6.2 and 13 on Heriot-Watt University's process for considering External Examiner Reports.

3.4 Role of the Chief External Examiners

In 2012/13, Heriot-Watt University introduced the role of Chief External Examiner to strengthen further its oversight of the quality and standards of its extensive multi-mode, multi-location provision. All Schools have at least one Chief External Examiner, with numbers varying according to the scale of each School's multi-mode, multi-location provision.

Full details of the remit and criteria for appointment of Chief External Examiners are available at; <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/docs/academic-registry/externalexaminers-chiefremit.pdf>. The principal duties are as follows:

- Comment on versions of a programme
- Oversight of effectiveness of moderation procedures
- Review minutes (and related documents) of all Award Boards within the Programme(s)
- Comment on the effectiveness of External Examining team
- Review sample of student work from all locations and modes
- Identify versions of programme where there are disparities, areas of concern or good practice
- Conduct an end-of-year paper-based review, including the reports of External Examiners, and report on such to the University⁵
- Attend Exam Board, at least in first year

⁵ Following consideration by the University, External Examiners will receive a copy of the relevant Chief External Examiner's Report.

- Attend University/School briefing, at least in first year

The role of the Chief External Examiner does not include:

- Commenting on assignment tasks or examination papers/questions
- Reviewing or making judgements on course assessment results, progression decisions or award decisions
- Meeting with individual students
- Scrutinising the activities of individual External Examiners
- Commenting on the judgements of individual External Examiners

4. Briefing and Induction

Both the University and individual Schools have a range of briefing and induction sessions and materials to support External Examiners in preparing for, and undertaking, their duties.

4.1 University Briefing/Induction

The University provides, on alternate years, a half-day briefing/induction session for new External Examiners and Chief External Examiners. In these sessions, the following topics are covered:

- Background on Heriot-Watt University, particularly the international dimension
- Key aspects of quality assurance
- The role of the External Examiner (or Chief External Examiner)
- The University's assessment procedures and its grading system
- The External Examiner's report, the process of consideration and its public availability

The briefing/induction sessions are organised by Academic Quality. Academic and administrative staff from Schools will join the session if one of their External Examiners is in attendance. The sessions also provide an opportunity for External Examiners to raise any matters or ask any questions in relation to their role. After the University briefing, External Examiners will join School colleagues for discipline-specific sessions.

The University recognises that it is not always possible, nor necessary, for External Examiners to attend one of the scheduled institutional briefing/induction sessions, particularly for those individuals who are experienced External Examiners. Therefore, all materials are available as an online induction package at: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm> (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sRJmKnA5fY&feature=youtu.be>).

This Handbook is part of the briefing information provided to External Examiners. Other relevant material provided by Academic Quality includes: arrangements for submitting the annual report and the report template; process and form for claiming expenses (fees and expenses are processed by each School). This information is available on the External Examiners website at: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm>

The report template and other relevant updated or modified information is issued annually to all existing External Examiners.

4.2 School Briefing/Induction

The School will provide the following information to External Examiners:

- Programme-related information:
 - Programme structure and course descriptors;
 - Programme specification, including learning outcomes; learning, teaching and assessment methods; awards;
 - Assessment regulations, including resits, discretionary credits and award criteria;
 - grading and classification schemes;
 - different offerings of the programme by mode and location;
 - recently introduced changes;

- student handbooks;
- particular requirements of Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRB's)
- Assessment-related procedures, including: paper setting procedure; marking process (double-marking; procedure for resolving disagreements between markers); moderation policy; arrangements for sampling of assessments; process for dealing with academic misconduct; process for dealing with borderline cases, unusual results or special circumstances;
- Criteria for assessment, marking and grading;
- Assessment weighting;
- Draft exam papers, other forms of assessment and model answers;
- Past exam papers and examples of past projects/dissertations;
- Reports from previous External Examiners and previous/current Chief External Examiners;
- Matters related to the Board of Examiners: dates of meetings; members; role of External Examiner at the Board; access to minutes of previous meetings;
- Arrangements for meeting with students (either informally or formally as part of a *viva voce* examination) and the principles for selection of candidates;
- Opportunities for visiting the School, meeting staff and other External Examiners and discussing broader matters related to the development of the programme.

The School will issue annually a variant of the above information as relevant to existing External Examiners.

With agreement from the School, the External Examiner may request other relevant information.

New External Examiners are normally invited to join colleagues in Schools in the afternoon following a morning University induction/briefing session. Alternatively, a face-to-face briefing may be arranged a day or two prior to a meeting of the Boards of Examiners. Schools will provide particular support to External Examiners who do not have prior experience of the role or who have been appointed from industry or business.

These discussions will provide an opportunity to explain in detail matters related to the programme, including multi-mode/location versions, any differences between various offerings and how the External Examiner is expected to review the different versions.

5. Operation and Conduct of Boards of Examiners

Processes for the operation, conduct and composition of Boards of Examiners for taught programmes or programmes featuring a taught component are set out in the relevant University Regulations: <http://www.hw.ac.uk/documents/regulations.pdf>

At Heriot-Watt University, "Boards of Examiners" is a generic term used to describe three specific Boards:

- Assessment Boards: meet at the end of each semester to consider the results of individual units of learning (referred to as "courses" at HWU; known as "modules" in some other HEIs) and to assign grades.
- Progression Boards: operate at the level of the programme of study; meet after the second semester and re-assessment diets of exams to consider all the course assessment results and to make decisions on: progression; re-assessment; intermediate awards.
- Award Boards: operate at the level of the programme of study; meet after the second semester and re-assessment diets of exams to consider all the course assessment results and to make decisions on awards.

Since External Examiners are required to attend only Awards Boards, Section 5 focuses on the operation and composition of Award Boards, and role of External Examiners in relation to Award Boards.

5.1 Pre-Board Activities

The deliberations, recommendations and decisions of Award Boards are facilitated by a number of fundamental pre-Board activities, which do not directly involve the External Examiner. However, the External Examiner is entitled to ask for clarification, make comments or raise issues on any matter related to these activities.

- Grades are assigned to individual course results by Assessment Boards.
- Decisions on special circumstances are considered and approved in advance of the Award Board, in accordance with the University's *Policy on Special Circumstances in Assessment* (<https://www.hw.ac.uk/students/doc/mc-policy.pdf>)
- Suspected cases of academic misconduct (including plagiarism) are investigated in advance of the Assessment and Award Boards, in accordance with University's *Student Discipline Regulations and Procedures* (available at: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/students/studies/record/discipline.htm>)

5.2 Operation of Award Boards

Each programme of study is required to have an Award Board of Examiners, which meets after the spring diet of examinations and, if required, after the resit diet of examinations.

The Award Board considers the requirements for award together with the decisions on individual courses as taken by the Assessment Boards.

Results/Grades of Individual Courses

The Award Board confirms the grades determined by the Assessment Boards and only in exceptional circumstances can these grades be adjusted, as per the University's *Guidelines on Examination Procedures*. The Award Board must record its justification for any adjustments to course grades.

Recommendations for Award

The Award Board makes recommendations for an award with respect to each student as follows:

- 5.2.1 The Award Board for the *classified degree of Master awarded as a first degree* makes one of the following recommendations to the Senate in respect of each candidate:
- that the degree be awarded with honours of the first class, second class (upper division), second class (lower division), or third class
 - that exceptionally the candidate be awarded an appropriate degree of Bachelor with honours, or
 - that the degree be not awarded.
- 5.2.2 The Award Board for the *unclassified degree of Master awarded as a first degree* makes one of the following recommendations to the Senate in respect of each candidate:
- that the degree be awarded with merit, or
 - that the degree be awarded, or
 - that exceptionally the candidate be awarded an appropriate degree of Bachelor with honours, or
 - that the degree be not awarded.
- 5.2.3 The Award Board for the *classified degree of Bachelor with honours* makes one of the following recommendations to the Senate in respect of each candidate:
- that the degree be awarded with honours of the first class, second class (upper division), second class (lower division), or third class
 - that the degree be awarded as an ordinary degree, or
 - that the degree be not awarded.
- 5.2.4 In exceptional circumstances if a candidate is prevented by illness or other sufficient cause from either attending or completing the degree examinations which form part of the final

assessment for a programme of study leading to the award of a degree of bachelor with honours or to the award of the degree of Master as a first degree, the Award Board may make one of the following recommendations:

- that the candidate be allowed to be examined at a specified time in all of the examinations previously not attended or completed, or
- that the candidate be allowed to proceed to the next stage of study, or
- that the degree be awarded (either as classified or as unclassified, ie with honours), or
- that the degree be not awarded, or
- that the candidate be required to withdraw from the University.

5.2.5 The Award Board for the *degree of Bachelor (ie Ordinary degree)* makes one of the following recommendations to the Senate in respect of each candidate:

- that the degree be awarded, or
- that the degree be awarded with distinction, or
- that the degree be not awarded.

5.2.6 In exceptional circumstances if a candidate for an ordinary degree is prevented by illness or other sufficient cause from either attending or completing the final degree examinations the Award Board may recommend either:

- that the candidate be allowed to be examined at a specified time in all of the examination previously not attended or completed, or
- that the degree be awarded (exceptionally, with distinction), or
- that the degree be not awarded, or
- that the candidate be required to withdraw from the University.

5.2.7 The Senate may accept any or all of the recommendations of the Award Board.

5.3 Composition of Award Boards

5.3.1 The Award Board consists of the following members:

- a) The Chair, who is the Head of School, the Director of Learning and Teaching or a nominee of the Head of School. For the appointment of a nominee as Chair, the Head of School submits an application for approval to the University Committee for Quality and Standards. Irrespective of designation, all Chairs need to attend one of the 'Examination Board Chairs' briefing sessions.
- b) The External Examiner(s)
- c) The members of the academic staff or at least one representative of the academic staff involved in the teaching and the setting and marking of examinations and assessment of each course within the relevant stage of the programme, as nominated by the Course Co-ordinator.
- d) The School Examination Officer or equivalent.
- e) Such other members as the Senate may from time to time determine.

5.3.2 One of the Deans of the University acts as an observer at the Award Board, or one of his or her Associate Deans. Alternatively, at the Dean's discretion, a nominee who is normally a senior member of academic staff, can act as the Dean's representative. The Dean, the Associate Dean or his or her nominee cannot, however, be a member of the academic staff of the School offering the programme.

5.3.3 The quorum for a meeting of an Award Board is three members of the Board or one third of its membership whichever is larger in number.

5.4 External Examiner at Boards

Attendance at Boards

Attendance at relevant meetings of Award Boards of Examiners is one of the terms and conditions of appointment of all External Examiners.

If an External Examiner is unavoidably and exceptionally absent from a Board meeting where their presence is formally required, written comments should be provided for consideration at the meeting. Alternatively, tele/video-conferencing or a Skype session may be arranged – the University uses these facilities for a number of Boards of Examiners to enable colleagues at overseas campuses to participate in the Board's deliberations. In the absence of the External Examiner, a Dean of the University or his or her nominee must be present at the meeting.

External Examiners are not normally required to attend Progression Boards (for stages 1, 2 or 3 of a four-year Honours degree) where intermediate awards can be recommended, as assurance of these awards is determined by a process of interpolation. If, however, significant numbers of students exit at the end of Stage 3 of an Honours programme with an Ordinary degree, then the External Examiner should attend the relevant Board.

External Examiners must be present at Progression Boards for Postgraduate Taught Programmes where final awards of PG Certificate and PG Diploma are being recommended.

Information for Boards

The School is responsible for providing the External Examiner with all information related to the Board, such as:

- dates of Board meetings and the related schedule/process (provided sufficiently far in advance to enable the External Examiner to make arrangements to attend the Board and any required pre-Board meetings);
- samples of marked exam scripts and other assessments, including internal moderation reports;
- guidelines and procedures related to assessment processes, eg: School's moderation policy; discretionary award of credits; classification criteria;
- spreadsheets of provisional results, awards and classifications (usually made available once the External Examiner has arrived at the University);
- details of unusual results and proposed actions.

External Examiners may request that certain exam scripts and other assessments, in addition to those provided by the School, be sent for scrutiny prior to the Board of Examiners meeting. Schools will discuss and agree with External Examiners their precise requirements for additional scripts and/or assessments. The guiding principle is that External Examiners should receive sufficient evidence to determine that internal marking and classification are of an appropriate standard and are consistent.

Role of the External Examiner in advance of the Board

Prior to the Board meeting, External Examiners will have sufficient opportunity to view all students' exam scripts, coursework, projects and dissertations, and to discuss any matters related to the assessment process with the Programme Team. Some assignments might be provided electronically for consideration by the External Examiners; Schools will make arrangements for this process.

External Examiners may request to be invited to attend presentations by students on their projects or dissertations.

Role of the External Examiner at the Board

The External Examiner will have the opportunity during, or at the end of, the Board meeting to comment on such matters as: exam questions, student performance, the assessment process and schemes for marking and classification.

On any matter requiring a vote, all members of the Board of Examiners, including the External Examiner, are entitled to an equal vote at meetings of the Board. The Chair, rather than the External Examiner, has a deliberative and casting vote.

External Examiners may not by themselves alter the marks/grades awarded to individual, or an entire cohort, students. However, External Examiners may recommend the adjustment of marks/grades on particular courses for all students, based on his or her review of internal marking processes. Any such recommendations require the approval of the Board of Examiners as a whole; the External Examiner does not have the right to take a final decision on any proposed adjustments.

Ratification of Decisions

No University degree can be awarded without participation in the examining process by at least one External Examiner. An External Examiner must sign the final list of agreed award decisions as evidence that he or she endorses the awards and associated classifications.

If an External Examiner is unwilling to provide endorsement, steps should be taken by the School to resolve the relevant issues. If matters cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the External Examiner, he or she should submit a separate, written report as per the process to be followed in Section 2.6 Disagreements. Schools should have in place procedures for informing students of any delay in finalising and communicating their results.

Appeals by students against the decisions of Award Boards of Examiners are progressed in accordance with the University's Regulations and Procedures on Student Academic Appeals (available at: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/students/studies/complaints/student-appeals.htm>).

6. External Examiner Reports

6.1 Submission of Reports

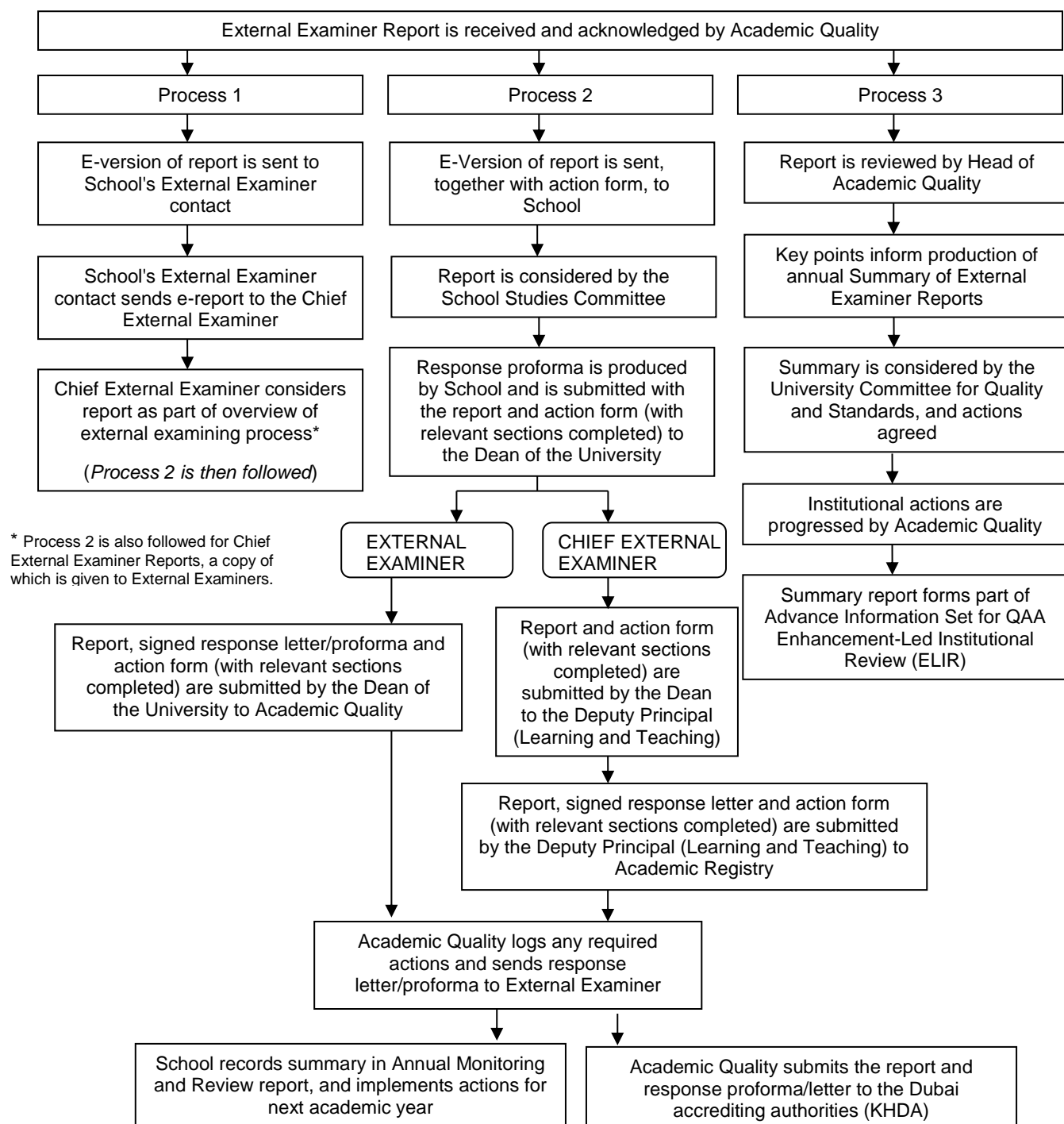
See Section 3.3 for details on: the format and content of External Examiner Reports; the process for submitting reports; submission deadline dates. See Section 13 for responding to reports.

6.2 Consideration of Reports

When an External Examiner has submitted his or her report, receipt of the report will be acknowledged by an email from the Head of Academic Quality; the process of consideration will also be briefly summarised in the email.

Heriot-Watt University's process for considering External Examiner and Chief External Examiner Reports is summarised below. The process is almost identical for both types, except that the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) is involved in the consideration of Chief External Examiner Reports.

Heriot-Watt University's process for considering Chief/External Examiner Reports is as follows:



Full details of the process are contained in the *Procedure for the Review of External Examiner Reports for Taught Courses* available at: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/docs/academic-registry/externalexaminers-scrutinyprocedures.pdf>.

A process similar to that outlined in Process 2 will be followed in cases where an External Examiner has chosen to submit a separate, confidential report to one of the University's Senior Officers (see Section 2.5).

The prompt receipt of reports (see Section 3.3) provides Schools with sufficient time to consider the External Examiner's recommendations and take appropriate action before the start of the next academic year, as well as enabling the University to meet deadlines set by the external accreditation authority in Dubai (KHDA).

In addition to the formal response proforma/letter of reply, Schools will inform External Examiners at a subsequent stage of completed or ongoing actions, and will provide any updated programme or assessment-related information, as appropriate. External Examiners will have the opportunity to confirm in their next report whether or not issues raised in their previous report(s) have been satisfactorily responded to and/or addressed.

Multi-Mode/Location Programmes

In relation to multi-mode/location programmes, External Examiners will be made aware that relevant information within their reports will be shared, where appropriate, with staff at overseas campuses and partner organisations.

Student Representatives

Student representatives, as members of the University Committee for Quality and Standards, have the opportunity to scrutinise and comment on general issues and themes identified in the Annual Summary Review of External Examiner Reports. School-specific issues identified by External Examiners are considered by student representatives as part of the process of reviewing External Examiner Reports through the School Studies Committee (see Appendices section 3).

7. Confidentiality, Data Protection and Freedom of Information

In terms of the Data Protection Act 1998, the term 'examination' includes 'any process for determining the knowledge, intelligence, skill or ability of a candidate by reference to his/her performance in any test, work or other activity'.

Students have certain subject access rights on the examination process. Information recorded by students during examination (eg examination scripts) is specifically exempted from subject access provisions. All other data associated with examinations including 'raw' examination marks, Examiners' comments and Board minutes are covered by subject access provisions.

7.1 Examination Scripts

Comments made by Examiners are accessible by a student and should be both intelligible and appropriate. Comments should not be made directly on examination scripts but on an attached sheet.

7.2 Progression and Award Board Minutes

Progression and Award Board Minutes constitute personal data which is being processed for the purpose of determining the results of examinations and therefore will be accessible by students making a subject access request. Data has to be disclosed even if students are not actually mentioned by name.

7.3 External Examiner Reports

As part of the process of ensuring that students are engaged in commenting on External Examiner Reports, all reports are considered by School Studies Committee, which features student representatives (School Officers) amongst its membership. All students are informed of the means by which they can request access to a copy of an External Examiner Report.

For the wider student population, reports are disclosable under the terms of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, unless particular parts of them qualify for an exemption and External Examiners should be aware of this when writing such reports. External Examiners are

advised on this matter in the letter of appointment. External Examiners should not refer to individual students or staff members by name in their reports. The University will remove any reference to named individuals prior to the report being circulated for consideration.

Confidentiality of reports should always be observed until the University has sent its response proforma/letter on a report to an External Examiner. Whilst the University is considering its response to the report, the report should be read only by appropriate members of staff and the consent of an External Examiner should be sought before a report may be viewed by an individual outwith the School concerned or the formal line of scrutiny specified. The only exception to this restriction on access is that, as per the University's policy, External Examiner reports will be sent immediately on receipt by the School to the relevant Chief External Examiner in order that he or she may promptly undertake the required review of multi-mode/location provision (see Section 3.4).

Where an External Examiner has asked to make a report in confidence to the Principal and Vice-Chancellor or other Senior Officer of the University, the External Examiner is asked to indicate in the report whether or not he or she consents to the report being made available to successive External Examiners.

External Examiners should note that when the University has sent its response letter, reports may be made available for internal and external reviews, audits and accreditation events (at programme, School or institutional levels, the latter including overseas accreditation authorities). Reports are also disclosable under the terms of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, and to data subjects under Section 7 of the Data Protection Act (1998), unless particular parts of them qualify for an exemption and External Examiners should be aware of this when writing such reports.

8. Fees, Expenses and Travel Arrangements

8.1 Fees

Fees are payable to External Examiners on receipt of a completed report, and cannot be authorised for payment until the report has been received. The Examiners' fees are determined and reviewed by the University Committee for Quality and Standards in consultation with Schools.

Examiners' fees are normally calculated on the basis of the number of students (by FTE, ie full-time equivalent) examined for a particular award.

The fee is calculated by the School, to whom any enquiries relating to fee payment for taught programmes should be made. Fees are paid and processed by Schools.

If an External Examiner is also acting as a Chief External Examiner, a separate fee will be paid for each role.

It is essential that, prior to final approval of appointment, all External Examiners complete a Heriot-Watt University New Staff Details Form, a Conflict of Interest form and provide proof of entitlement to work in the UK, otherwise payment of fees cannot be made. A signed declaration of right to work in the UK is also required. Proof of tax exemption should be submitted if appropriate. It should be noted that all fees are normally paid directly into an Examiner's bank account in pounds sterling on receipt of account details.

The New Staff Details, Conflict of Interest and Declaration to Work in the UK forms will be provided by Schools, but are also available on the Forms section of the External Examiner website: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm>

8.2 Expenses and Travel Arrangements

Expenses incurred by External Examiners may include:

- Travel
- Accommodation

- subsistence

At the request of the External Examiner, travel and accommodation arrangements can be made by the School. Alternatively, External Examiners may make their own arrangements in accordance with the University's guidelines on reasonable expenses. Travel will be to the relevant UK campus: only by exception and with approval of the Head of School and the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), will External Examiners be invited to travel to one of the University's overseas campuses.

Reasonable expenses incurred in connection with an External Examiner's duties should be itemised on the relevant Expenses Claim Form, which is available within the Forms section at <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm>. Expense claims will not normally be processed without all receipts attached. Expenses are paid and processed by Schools.

Guidelines on expenses are provided within the University's Travel and Expenses Policy, and are available at <https://www.hw.ac.uk/documents/travel-expenses-policy.pdf>. The Policy provides advice on matters such as types of travel expenses which will be reimbursed and limits on claims for accommodation and subsistence.

Expense claims are normally processed on receipt of the Expense Claim Form and relevant receipts. A fee payment will be processed once a completed report has been received. External Examiners may choose to submit their Expense Claims separately from, and earlier than, their completed report if the assessment process for the academic year has not yet been concluded (eg examination of dissertations has yet to be undertaken).

9. Further Information

A variety of sector-wide information is available on the External Examining; for example:

- the Higher Education Academy's *Handbook for External Examining* (2012) – this handbook is aimed specifically at External Examiners and provides a useful, comprehensive source of information <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/external-examining>

Part B: Information for Heriot-Watt University Staff

The External Examining information presented in this section is intended primarily for staff of Heriot-Watt University, particularly academic and administrative staff in Schools.

Heriot-Watt University staff should read Part B in conjunction with Part A, since core information related to the role of Schools in relation to External Examiners is presented in the first part of this Handbook.

10. Selection and Appointment of External Examiners

10.1 Number of External Examiners

At least one External Examiner should be appointed for each subject or group of subjects within a programme of study for an undergraduate award, higher degree of Master, postgraduate diploma/certificate or graduate diploma/certificate.

The number of External Examiners for a particular discipline should be sufficient to cover the range of programmes in that discipline. More than one External Examiner may be needed where there is a large number of students or where the programme covers a wide range of subject areas.

In addition to programme-specific External Examiners, each School should have at least one Chief External Examiner to oversee the quality and standards of its multi-mode, multi-location programmes. For more information on the role of Chief External Examiner, see Section 3.4 and the role description, remit and criteria in the Chief External Examiner section at <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm>

10.2 Appointment of New External Examiners

Prior to submission for approval, Schools should undertake the Right to Work in the UK process for any potential new External Examiners, as no appointments can be approved until these checks have been undertaken. In addition, Schools should also assure themselves that there are no conflicts of interest. Relevant Declaration to Work in the UK and Conflict of Interest documentation can be found on the Forms section on the External Examiner website <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm>

Once the pre-approval processes have been undertaken, recommendations for the appointment of new External Examiners should be made by Schools on the *Nomination Form for External Examiners for Taught Programmes* available at <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm> (see under Forms section).

Nominations are usually made by Programme Teams/Directors of Studies and must be endorsed by the Head of School or the School's Director of Academic Quality or Director of Learning and Teaching. The *Nomination Form* should include details of other Examiners who are also responsible for the same programme/course.

The *Nomination Form* should be accompanied by a brief CV. The CV should provide evidence that the proposed External Examiner is competent to examine at the appropriate level. The Examiner will be required to comment on standards of student performance, the University's awards, the syllabus and teaching and assessment methods. It is normally expected that an Examiner should have experience in the areas of teaching, programme assessment and research as well as technical experience in the subject of the degree. The CV should address such points. A School may have additional requirements such as professional experience.

CV's with extensive and detailed lists of publications, grants awarded, exhibitions held or professional contracts undertaken give only general information and are not evidence that a person is suitable to act as an Examiner. In certain instances it may be appropriate for the Head of School to attach a short statement stating the rationale for a particular proposal, such as the appointment of an Examiner from industry or business.

Appointments may be up to a maximum of four years in duration. Any proposed appointment not extending over a four-year period should include a statement of explanation.

Appointments of replacement Examiners should be made at least six months prior to the completion of an existing examinership.

An individual may be appointed simultaneously as both External Examiner and Chief External Examiner. The term of office need not be identical for both appointments.

See Section 2.1 on the process for approving External Examiners.

10.3 Extension of Appointment

Applications for extensions of one year, to existing appointments of four years, will be considered only in exceptional circumstances, where a programme is due to be terminated or where a new Examiner is unable to take up his or her position as planned. Extensions may also be permitted where there is a need to ensure overlap between appointments, so that all Examiners for a particular programme do not complete their period of appointment at the same time. Applications for extension of appointment should be made on the standard Nomination Form and should include a statement indicating the reason for the proposed extension.

10.4 Extension of Remit

Applications may be made to extend the remit of an External Examiner, for example, from an undergraduate version of a programme to a postgraduate version. Applications for extension of remit should be made on the standard Nomination Form and should include a statement indicating the reason for the proposed extension.

10.5 Replacement External Examiner (Temporary and Permanent)

The procedure for appointment of a permanent replacement External Examiner, following the completed term of office or resignation of the existing Examiner, is the same as that outlined in Section 10.2: Appointment of New External Examiners.

If an External Examiner is unable to undertake or complete his or her examining duties due to ill-health or other unforeseen circumstances (see Section 2 for examples), the School may wish to appoint a temporary, replacement External Examiner. In such events, there are two options:

- a) Extend the remit of another existing External Examiner for the requisite period of time (see Section 10.4)
- b) Bring forward the proposed appointment of a new External Examiner (see Section 10.2)

10.6 Criteria for Appointment

In making recommendations for the appointment of an External Examiner, Schools should take the following into consideration:

- i) Only persons with the appropriate level of academic and/or professional expertise and experience in relation to the relevant subject area and assessment who are able to command authority should be appointed. However, well qualified candidates with no previous experience as an External Examiner should not be excluded.

Consideration should be given to an individual's ability to make an effective contribution to the efficiency and sustainability of the assessment process and to provide objective advice on assessment related procedures.

Although not provided in detail in the new UK Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining* of the former Code, recommended the appointment of External Examiners who show appropriate evidence of the following; these guidelines are still valid:

- a) knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality.
 - b) competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof.
 - c) relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate.
 - d) competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures.
 - e) sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers.
 - f) familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed.
 - g) fluency in English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that external examiners are provided with the information to make their judgements).
 - h) meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.
 - i) awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula.
 - j) competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.
- ii) In order to have sufficient time for the proper performance of their functions and in recognition that external examining duties are likely to coincide with key assessment periods at the External Examiner's own institution, individuals should normally be expected to hold no more than two External Examinerships simultaneously.
 - iii) An External Examiner should not be appointed from the same cognate discipline in an institution where a member of the University is serving as an Examiner. Exceptions may however occasionally be unavoidable in the case of subjects taught in only a very small number of institutions. In such exceptional circumstances, the members of staff of either institution should not be members of the same Board of Examiners at either institution.
 - iv) Former members of staff (and students) should not be invited to become External Examiners before a lapse of at least three years or sufficient time for students taught by a member of staff to have passed through the system, whichever is the longer.
 - v) In exceptional circumstances an Examiner may be appointed from abroad provided s/he is sufficiently familiar with the higher education system in the UK.
 - vi) An Examiner should normally be appointed for a period not exceeding four years and may exceptionally be reappointed for one further year.
 - vii) An External Examiner for the same programme should not be drawn sequentially from the same institution. If exceptions are unavoidable, a statement should be submitted with the nomination.
 - viii) An External Examiner, having completed a period of appointment may not normally be reappointed for any programme offered by the University until a period of five years has elapsed.
 - ix) Special provisions may be made where there is a very limited number of potential External Examiners.
 - x) An External Examiner should not hold any position which might lead to a conflict of interest, such as
 - being a member of the Court or a staff member at a partner organisation

- having a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a staff member or student involved in the programme (this includes research-related activities)
- having to assess colleagues who have been enrolled as students on the programme

Schools should ensure that due diligence with regard to conflict of interest has been undertaken in advance of a Nomination Form being submitted to Academic Quality.

Following appointment, if a potential conflict of interest arises because of a change in circumstances, the School should seek advice from Academic Quality.

It is recognised that an External Examiner may not fulfil all of the above criteria; for example, he or she may be involved in business or industry sectors or may be a first-time External Examiner. In such circumstances, appropriate training and support must be provided, particularly in relation to academic expectations. For example, it may be appropriate to extend or overlap an existing External Examiner's appointment to provide support to an inexperienced External Examiner.

11. Induction of, and Information for, External Examiners

Section 4 covers briefing and induction of External Examiners by both the University and Schools, and provides an overview of the types of materials and information which Schools should provide for External Examiners.

Prior to approval of appointment, Schools should ensure that External Examiners complete the New Staff Details Form, the Conflict of Interest Form and the Declaration to work in the UK Form. Schools should also confirm that the External Examiner has the right to work in the UK by carrying out the checks specified by HR. See the Forms section on the External Examiner website: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm>

12. Liaison with External Examiners

12.1 Draft Exam Papers/Assessment Tasks and Model Answers

Part of the role of External Examiners is to review draft exam papers and, where appropriate, other assessment tasks, particularly to ensure that questions are at the appropriate level. Schools must also send model answers/solutions for scrutiny by the External Examiner, and likewise include the marking scheme. The School will make a decision on the extent to which the Examiner's recommendations are incorporated, and will also determine whether the External Examiner should receive the amended version of the exam paper/assessment task.

In recent reviews of External Examiner Reports conducted by Academic Quality, several Examiners highlighted that they had not received a reply from Schools in response to the comments they had provided on draft exam and/or other assessment papers, and that they would have appreciated being informed on the extent to which their recommendations had been taken on board.

As a matter of courtesy and in acknowledgement of the value which the University and Schools place on the role of External Examiners, Schools should ensure that they respond formally to all comments submitted by External Examiners on draft assessments and model answers/solutions.

12.2 Sample Scripts and Other Assessments

Where a sample of completed scripts and other assessments has been selected for the External Examiner to review, the principles of selection should be agreed in advance. The guiding principle for any selection is that the External Examiner should have seen evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and are consistent. External Examiners should see at least a sample of scripts from the top, middle and bottom of the range, and from all variants of multi-mode/location programmes (and languages other than English in the case of the MBA). Internal moderation reports should likewise be provided. In this way, the

External Examiner can make a fully informed view of the internal marking process. Schools should ensure that the moderation reports are consistent across the whole sample, as this is an area for addressing which External Examiners frequently highlight in their reports.

Schools should ensure that External Examiners have sufficient time in which to scrutinise the sample of assessments prior to meetings of Boards of Examiners.

12.3 Arrangements for Visiting the School

Schools should ensure that External Examiners have sufficient advance notice of the occasions when they are expected to, or can opt, to be in attendance at the University:

- Dates of meetings of Boards of Examiners and any pre-Board activities, such as meetings with students
- Dates of student presentations, to which the External Examiner may be invited
- Arrangements for travel and accommodation

External Examiners should not be invited to visit overseas campuses or partner organisations, unless such a visit is essential to fulfil properly their external examining role. In preference, External Examiners should be sent a sample of student assessments from across all modes and locations of study, or such assignments should be made available for the External Examiner to review when visiting the relevant UK campus. E-versions of assignments may be used for this purpose.

12.4 Board of Examiners

If an External Examiner is unable to attend a Board of Examiners, arrangements should be made for tele/video-conferencing or Skype to facilitate the External Examiner's participation in the Board. If this is not possible, the School should seek his or her views in writing and these should be communicated at the meeting. In this situation, a Dean of the University or representative must be present where an External Examiner cannot attend, either in person or remotely. An Award Board cannot proceed without the input of the External Examiner.

Prior to the Board meeting, External Examiners should be given sufficient opportunity to view students' exam scripts, coursework, projects and dissertations in advance of the Board – this opportunity is particularly important in cases where the External Examiner has seen only a sample of scripts, or has not yet seen examples from the versions of the programme offered in different modes or locations.

The External Examiner should be given the opportunity during, or at the conclusion of, the Board meeting to comment on such matters as: the overall quality and standard of the programme; exam questions; student performance; the assessment process; schemes for marking and classification.

On any matter requiring a vote, all members of the Board of Examiners, including the External Examiner, are entitled to an equal vote at meetings of the Board. The Chair, rather than the External Examiner, has a deliberative and casting vote.

External Examiners may not by themselves alter the marks/grades awarded to individual, or an entire cohort, students. However, External Examiners may recommend the adjustment of marks/grades on particular courses for all students, based on his or her review of internal marking processes. Any such recommendations require the approval of the Board of Examiners as a whole; the External Examiner does not have the right to take a final decision on any proposed adjustments.

In exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to suspend a Board of Examiners, at the request of the Chair and/or the Dean of the University. The University has in place a formal Process for Managing Suspended Boards of Examiners, which is differentiated according to type of Board and severity of issue (<https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/exam-guidelines.htm>).

12.5 Meetings with Students

Some Schools conduct formal *viva voce* examinations at which the External Examiner is present as part of the assessment process. For other Schools, meetings between students and the External Examiners are not a formal part of the assessment process – they enable the External Examiner to gain a more rounded overview of the quality and standards of the programme.

The principles for selection of students for either *viva voce* examinations or meetings with the External Examiner should be included in the programme's Student Handbook.

In the case of informal meetings, students should be reassured that the aim of the discussion is for the External Examiner to build up a picture of the cohort as a whole, rather than evaluate the performance of individual students, and that the outcomes of the meeting do not contribute to any discussions of, or decisions on, award and/or grades.

Informal meetings with students should be offered only if the selection of students is representative of all versions of the programme. If a programme is offered, for example, at the Edinburgh, Dubai and Malaysia Campuses and/or via an Approved Learning Partner or independent distance learning, it would not be appropriate for the External Examiner to meet only Edinburgh-based students simply because the Board of Examiners' meeting was taking place at the Edinburgh Campus. In such cases, informal meetings can take place by Skype or similar means to ensure that the students with whom the External is meeting are representative of all modes and locations of study. If it is not possible to arrange a representative meeting, then the External Examiner may not meet with students.

12.6 Ratification of Decisions

No University degree can be awarded without participation in the examining process by at least one External Examiner. An External Examiner must sign the final list of agreed award decisions as evidence that he or she endorses the awards and associated classifications. If an External Examiner has not been in attendance at an Award Board, arrangements should be made to gain this signed approval.

If an External Examiner is unwilling to provide endorsement, steps should be taken by the School to resolve the relevant issues. If matters cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the External Examiner, he or she should submit a separate, written report as per the process to be followed in Section 2.6 Disagreements. Schools should have in place procedures for informing students of any delay in finalising and communicating their results.

13. Consideration of External Examiner Reports

13.1 Submission of Reports

See Section 3.3 for details on: the format and content of External Examiner Reports; the process for submitting reports; submission deadline dates.

13.2 Consideration of Reports

The University's process for receiving, considering and responding to External Examiner Reports is outlined in Section 6.2.

All External Examiner reports should be considered by the School Studies Committee, particularly to ensure that student representatives have an opportunity to comment on the reports. The process for, and guidelines on, sharing External Examiner reports is included here in the Appendices (see Section 3).

Schools should ensure that External Examiner reports are considered by all relevant individuals, such as: Head of School, Director of Learning and Teaching, Director of Academic Quality and Programme Directors of Studies across all campuses. Depending on the content of the report, particular issues may be brought to the attention of individual staff members, eg the School Office in the case of administrative matters.

The collective views of both the School Studies Committee and the individuals named above should then inform the production of the reply letter to the External Examiner (see Section 13.3).

The Academic Quality will be responsible for progressing all institutional actions highlighted in individual reports and in the overall annual Summary Report.

13.3 Responding to Reports

In Schools, all External Examiner Reports must be considered by the School Studies Committee and the Director of Academic Quality as Chair of that Committee. Other individuals may be invited to consider the reports in addition, eg the Head of School and/or the Director of Learning and Teaching.

A formal reply proforma⁶ and accompanying letter are then produced, indicating proposed actions and explaining why particular recommendations are not being addressed. The response should be produced in consultation with all relevant parties, including colleagues at the Dubai and Malaysia Campuses. If appropriate, the response should highlight actions to be taken forward by specific campuses or by partner organisations. The letter part of the response is signed by the Head of School or the Director of Learning and Teaching or Director of Academic Quality.

The report, response proforma and letter of reply are considered by the relevant Dean of the University to ensure that appropriate action has been taken. The reply letter is not countersigned by the relevant Dean, but the Dean's signature on the Action Form which accompanies the report and reply letter is used to indicate endorsement of the School's response. In the case of replies to Chief External Examiners, the letter is countersigned by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching).

The Dean of the University and/or the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) may request that a revised response proforma or letter of reply is produced if:

1. he or she identifies issues within the report which have not been addressed in the original letter, or
2. he or she identifies institutional-related matters within the report, which the Head of School is not able to address.

Once the process for considering and responding to reports has been completed, Academic Quality will send the letter of reply to the External Examiner and log any actions required.

As a matter of courtesy, Schools should inform External Examiners at a subsequent stage of completed or ongoing actions, including any relevant institutional matters, and should provide any updated programme or assessment-related information, as appropriate. External Examiners are invited to confirm in their report whether or not issues raised in their previous report(s) have been satisfactorily addressed.

All individuals involved in the scrutiny of External Examiner Reports are requested to respond and act in a timely, prompt manner so that there are no unreasonable delays between receipt of report and issuing of response proforma and accompanying reply letter. The following timescales were published in agreement with Schools:

Timescales for Responding to Chief/External Examiner Reports:

- Schools: 3 weeks
- Deans of the University: 2.5 weeks

⁶ A University, standard response proforma, which should be used by all Schools, is available in the forms section of the External Examiner website: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm>

- Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching): 2.5 weeks (Chief External Examiner reports only)

These timescales also enable the University to provide all requisite reports, response proformas and reply letters to accrediting authorities such as KHDA in Dubai. An escalation process, as approved by the University Committee for Quality and Standards, is in place to ensure timely response to External Examiners.

Part C: Appendices

1. Information on Heriot-Watt University's Academic Structure and Assessment Scheme

Note: the Edinburgh Business School and its programmes and awards (primarily the MBA) have their own structures and assessment schemes, reflected in separate regulations:

<http://www.hw.ac.uk/documents/regulations.pdf>

1.1 Academic Structure

The academic year for Heriot-Watt University's campus-based programmes comprises two semesters. Semester 1 begins with a 10-week teaching period in mid-September and concludes with an assessment period in December. Semester 2 begins with a 10-week teaching period in mid-January and concludes with an assessment period in May. A third semester is provided in some specialist programmes, such as degree entry/foundation programmes.

All taught programmes and awards, irrespective of mode or location of study, adhere to, and are credit-rated according to, the national Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF; see Section 2). Programmes consist of individual units of learning known as "courses" ("modules" in some other HEIs) as follows:

- Each course is rated at 15 SCQF credits, based on 150 student effort hours
- For undergraduate programmes, each stage (year of study) within a programme comprises 8 courses, equating to 120 SCQF credits/1200 student effort hours. Undergraduate programmes typically comprise four stages (Honours degree) or five stages (Integrated Masters). See Section 2 for further information on qualifications and credit-rating.
- Postgraduate taught programmes comprise, for the award of Masters, 8 courses (each of 15 SCQF credits) and one dissertation or one dissertation and project (total rating of 60 SCQF credits). See Section 2 for further information on qualifications and credit-rating.

In addition to the SCQF, programmes/courses at the Malaysia Campus are credit-rated according to the in-country national system used by the Malaysian Qualifications Authority.

1.2 Assessment Scheme

The University has a single assessment scheme for both undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, known as the Heriot-Watt Assessment and Progression System (HAPS). The key features of HAPS are as follows: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/docs/examdoc4.pdf>

1.2.1 Assessment marking ("evidence" based on marks) is explicitly separated from decisions (grades) returned by Course Boards.

1.2.2 Assessments are marked according to a numerical marking scheme; an overall results of each course is communicated in the form of a letter grade:

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

Online results available to students display both marks and grades; the official University transcript communicates only grades.

- 1.2.3 No adjustment of marks can be made in relation to making decisions based on grades, with the exception that where decisions on performance in a course are based on marks, then adjustment of those marks is permitted.

Credits, Pass and Progression

- 1.2.4 To pass a course a minimum of Grade D is required.
- 1.2.5 To gain credit points for a course a minimum of Grade E is required.
- 1.2.6 In order to progress on an undergraduate programme, a minimum of Grade D is required in all courses which are pre-requisites for subsequent courses and in all courses designated as requiring a minimum of Grade D in the structure of each programme of study.
- 1.2.7 In courses which are neither pre-requisites nor designated as requiring a minimum of Grade D, a minimum of Grade E is required to gain the credit points for each such course.
- 1.2.8 To progress to Masters level on a taught postgraduate programme a minimum of Grade D is normally required in all courses.
- 1.2.9 Criteria for pass, progression and credit points are specified in the structures for each programme. The Undergraduate/Postgraduate Studies Committee may approve criteria above the minimum standards specified in paragraphs 1.2.4-1.2.8.

Re-assessment

- 1.2.10 A student who has not fulfilled the specified minimum standards for a course may be re-assessed in that course.
- 1.2.11 For students on undergraduate programmes, there will be one re-assessment opportunity.
- 1.2.12 There will be no re-assessment opportunity for final year qualifying courses for undergraduate Integrated Masters or for Honours degree classification.
- 1.2.13 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.
- 1.2.14 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 Board of Examiners.

Repeat

- 1.2.15 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.
- 1.2.16 All conditions and requirements specified in the course descriptor, including one opportunity for re-assessment, will apply to the repeated course.

Award Criteria

- 1.2.17 The criteria for the awards associated with each programme of study are specified in the structures for each programme. Award criteria may be based on a profile of grades or an average of marks.
- 1.2.18 Where scaling or modification of marks had been applied for the purposes of award, the final, modified mark (and not the initial, raw mark) is used in calculating the award.

Discretionary Award of Credits

- 1.2.19 Where a student is short of credits for the target award, the Progression Board may determine that the student's performance has been affected by illness or other extenuating circumstances or that the student has satisfied the overall criteria for the award.
- 1.2.20 In consequence, a recommendation of award may be made as considered appropriate by the Board of Examiners by applying a discretionary award of credits to ensure that the student possesses the requisite credit points for the target award.
- 1.2.21 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 (after unsuccessful re-assessment) or award.
- 1.2.22 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 credits), but may not be used for the dissertation/project.

2. Information on the Scottish Higher Education Sector

2.1 Overview

There are 19 higher education institutions in Scotland, comprising universities, an art school, a conservatoire and a rural college. For further information, see Universities Scotland website at: <http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/>

2.2 Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

All secondary and tertiary level qualifications (included vocational qualifications) in Scotland are part of the national Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Qualifications are related by level and credit points.

The framework comprises 12 levels, ranging from Access 1 (Level 1) to Doctorate (Level 12).

SCQF/HWU Credits and Levels of Awards: Taught Programmes

Award	Total Credits	Level
PGT Masters	180	11
PGT Diploma	120	11
PGT Certificate	60	11
Integrated Masters	600	11
Honours	480	10
Ordinary	360	9
Diploma HE	240	8
Certificate HE	120	7
Graduate Certificate (60 credits) and Graduate Diploma (120 credits) are also awards of the University/SCQF. The majority of credits for the HWU awards must be at level 11; credits lower than level 9 are not permitted.		

Correspondences between HE Qualifications Frameworks in UK, Ireland and Europe

Typical Higher Education Qualifications within each level	England, Wales, N.Ireland	Scotland (SCQF)	Republic of Ireland	European Qualif. Framework	Corresponding Framework for Qualif's of European HE Area
Doctoral Degrees	8	12	10	8	Third cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Master's degrees (PGT + Integrated UG Masters)	7	11	9	7	Second cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Postgraduate Diplomas Postgraduate Certificates				7	Intermediate qualifications within second cycle
Bachelor's Degrees with Honours/Honour's Bachelor Degrees Irish Higher Diploma	6	10	8	6	First cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Bachelor's Degrees /Ordinary Bachelor Degrees Graduate Diplomas Graduate Certificates		9	7		
Foundation Degrees (eg FdA, FdSc) Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE) Higher National Diplomas (HND) Irish Higher Certificate		5	8	6	5/4
Higher National Certificates (HNC) Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE)	4	7	3		

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), see: <http://www.scqf.org.uk/>

2.3 The Quality Framework in Scotland

Scottish higher education institutions utilise the same reference points as the rest of the UK in terms of assuring quality and standards, eg the Quality Assurance Agency's *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*. <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

In addition, QAA has a separate Scottish office, known as QAA Scotland, to develop and operate quality assurance and enhancement arrangements that reflect the needs of higher education in Scotland.

As well as the UK-wide framework, an enhancement-based framework operates in the Scottish HE sector, known as the Quality Enhancement Framework. The Framework, which was developed in partnership by QAA Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council, NUS Scotland and Universities Scotland, comprises five integrated elements:

- **a comprehensive programme of internal reviews**, carried out by higher education institutions with guidance from the Scottish Funding Council.
- **Enhancement-led institutional review**: external reviews run by QAA Scotland that involve all Scottish higher education institutions over a four-year cycle.
- **improved forms of public information about quality**, based on addressing the different needs of a range of stakeholders including students and employers. See the [Scottish Funding Council](#) website for guidance on the public information requirements in Scotland.
- **a greater voice for student representatives** in institutional quality systems, supported by a new national development service. [spargs](#) (student participation in quality scotland), hosted by NUS Scotland, assists and supports students, students' associations and institutions to improve the effectiveness of student engagement in quality processes and provides advice to the SFC and institutions on good practice in student engagement.
- **a national programme of Enhancement Themes**, managed by QAA Scotland. The programme encourages academic staff, support staff and students to share current good practice and collectively generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching.

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland>

3. Sharing External Examiner Reports with Students

3.1 Background: Requirement to Share External Examiner Reports with Students

In the QAA's Report on the Transnational Education Review of the University's Dubai Campus (publ. June 2014), it was recommended that Heriot-Watt University should keep under review University policy and practice in relation to the Quality Code, in particular in ... sharing reports of external examiners with students (para 66).

In response to this recommendation, QAA Scotland advised that HWU was not meeting the overall Expectation of Chapter B7 on External Examining due to its practice of not sharing reports with students. The overall Expectation for the UK Quality Code in respect to Chapter 7 on External Examining is that **"Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners"**. Indicator 15 of Chapter B7 states, inter alia: "...*Institutions ensure that student representatives are given the opportunity to be fully involved in this process, enabling them to understand all the issues raised and the institution's response.*

At its meeting on 7 May 2014, the then Learning and Teaching Board discussed how External Examiner Reports could be made available to students and how students could be involved in considering both reports and responses. The process agreed by the Board is outlined in the sections below.

Implementation date for sharing External Examiner Reports with students: from 2014/15.

Subsequent to the Learning and Teaching Board's decision, the Student Engagement Manager (Student Union) met on 12 May 2014 with the Head of Academic Quality to consider the most effective means of engaging students in the consideration of External Examiner Reports. Outcomes are likewise reflected in the process specified below.

3.2 Sharing Reports with Students: Guidelines for Schools

Scope

Student representatives should be involved in the consideration of all External Examiner Reports, including those provided by Chief External Examiners⁷, and all associated responses from Schools to such reports.

School Studies Committee

Schools may choose to post all External Examiner Reports on VISION for all students to view; there is no requirement, however, to do so. If this approach is adopted, this must be in addition to the required University process (see below), particularly since making reports available in this way is not likely to engage students actively in considering and reflecting on them.

There is no requirement for Schools to use mechanisms, such as Student-Staff Liaison Committees, additional to the standard University process for scrutiny of reports.

The University's agreed process is that External Examiner reports and responses should be considered through the Schools Studies Committee in collaboration with student representatives on that Committee.

The School Studies Committee was agreed by the Learning and Teaching Board to be the most appropriate forum for enabling students to consider reports, particularly since its remit includes the requirement *to receive summaries of comments from Chief External Examiner and External Examiner Reports and recommendations for action*"

Annual Monitoring and Review

The Annual Monitoring and Review process, to which students contribute and which is also within the remit of the School Studies Committee, will continue to provide an overarching process for summarising issues and responses to External Examiner reports (through the SRER – Student Review and Evaluation Report).

Schools may choose to make available the AMR External Examiner Report extract/summary available to all students.

Process

External Examiner Reports will be circulated electronically to Schools by Academic Quality as per the standard process. Responses will continue to be drafted by Schools as per the current process. Prior to the response being returned to the External Examiner, both report and draft response should be considered by the School Studies Committee.

It is likely to be the case that, as regards undergraduate External Examiner Reports which are submitted in June/July, there will be no meeting of the School Studies Committee scheduled during the summer vacation period. In such cases, the reports and responses should be made available at the next scheduled meeting and any substantive comments from students should inform the SRER/AMR report.

The timing of postgraduate taught and Chief External Examiner Reports and responses (November-February) will be more conducive to consideration at a meeting of the School Studies Committee.

⁷ In this document, the term "External Examiner Report" encompasses both Chief External Examiner and traditional External Examiner reports. The processes outlined should be taken to refer to both reports in all cases.

Schools may devise their own process for expediting consideration of reports and responses by the School Studies Committee, eg through VISION.

Communication to External Examiners

All External Examiners and Chief External Examiners will be notified that, as from 2014/15, their reports will be considered in full by student representatives and, as such, no individuals (neither staff nor students) should be mentioned by name.

3.3 Sharing Reports with Students: Guidelines for School Officers and Student Union

The Student Engagement Manager, Student Union, will provide guidance to School Officers, as part of the annual Officer Training Session (or other session as appropriate), in reviewing and commenting on External Examiner Reports and responses.

The information provided in this section will be used as a basis for guidance and training by the Student Union, with a view to enabling active engagement by the School Officers on School Studies Committees in considering External Examiner Reports. A separate note is provided on the areas of comment within External Examiner Reports and what these mean/are likely to be included.

- a) External Examiners are generally experienced academic staff members at other UK universities who have been appointed by Heriot-Watt University for a period of four years to provide an external, independent overview of the quality and academic standards of the University's undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. Heriot-Watt also has a number of External Examiners who are employed in relevant industries.
- b) External Examiners comment on quality and standards by reviewing a sample of student assessments, and by taking part in the Board of Examiners meeting where student assessment results/awards are considered. External Examiners do not mark student work, nor do they set assessment questions. The individuals present in exam venues when students are sitting an exam are known as "Invigilators"; these are not External Examiners.
- c) External Examiner Reports are one of a number of sources of information utilised by Schools in their annual review processes; others include: feedback from students; data on assessment and progression; reports by professional bodies; reviews of individual courses. Comments from the External Examiner will also have been provided at the relevant Board of Examiners meeting.
- d) Although External Examiner Reports are extremely important in assuring the academic standards of the University's programmes and in providing information on learning, teaching and assessment, Schools are not duty bound to accept all recommendations made by External Examiners. Schools will give consideration to all such suggestions, and will indicate, in the response letter, the rationale for accepting or not accepting particular recommendations. Reasons for not accepting certain suggestions might be a conflict with University regulations or policies. In other case, Schools may already be engaged in the process of addressing particular points made by an External Examiner; any such instances will be indicated in the response letter.
- e) Heriot-Watt University has a significant number of programmes delivered outwith the UK campuses: at overseas campuses in Dubai and Malaysia; at partner organisations; via independent distance learning. External Examiner Reports cover all versions of a programme, wherever and however it is delivered; there are no separate reports for, for example, Dubai-based programmes⁸. The Chief External Examiner has a more over-arching role, scrutinising quality and standards across all programmes and commenting on, for example, different approaches to assessment, learning or teaching.
- f) External Examiner Reports vary in length and depth of comments provided – a more comprehensive report does not mean that there are problems with a programme; rather, the level of detail tends to reflect the particular style of individual Examiners. Such reports are particularly informative for Schools. By contrast, a very brief report, while positive, is less useful for future development. In such

⁸ The only exception is in the case of Engineering programmes offered at the Malaysia Campus, where separate HWUM External Examiners have been appointed in order to meet the requirements of the Engineering Accreditation Council. These programmes are also considered by the HWU-wide External Examiners who will report on the programmes across all modes and locations.

instances, External Examiners are politely requested to provide a more comprehensive report for the next year.

- g) While full reports and responses will be made available only to student representatives on School Studies Committees, through both Freedom of Information and in accordance with the UK Quality Code, all students are able to request a copy of a report either from the School or from the Academic Registry. See Section 3.5.

Suggested Statement for Students on External Examiners/Reports

The following statement may be useful for Schools and the Student Union in providing students with information on: the purposes of External Examining; how students are involved in consideration of their reports; how students can request a copy of reports. It should be emphasised to students, particularly if a request has been made by an individual student for a copy of a report, that they should not under any circumstances contact External Examiners directly and the above processes are the means by which students engage with External Examiners.

Students may ask how the University knows that their degree is broadly of the same standard as degrees awarded for similar programmes by other universities. If they are studying outwith a UK campus, students may also ask about the similarity between the standard of their programme and that delivered in the UK.

In the UK, all universities operate a system of external examining, which is one of several ways that Heriot-Watt is assured that academic standards are being met, are similar to those at other universities and are identical across all versions of a programme, wherever and however it is delivered.

An External Examiner is generally an experienced academic from another UK university who provides an independent view on the quality of teaching and assessment on HWU programmes and on whether the work of students is at an appropriate standard. At Heriot-Watt, External Examiners will also comment on the similarities and differences between a programme being delivered in different locations (eg the Edinburgh, Dubai and Malaysia Campuses).

The External Examiner makes these comments by looking at a sample of student work (eg coursework assignments, exams, projects and dissertations), discussing the student work with academic staff at HWU and attending the Exam Board to consider assessment results/awards.

After the Exam Board, External Examiners produce an annual report, which includes their comments on student work, on teaching and assessment, and also highlights any good practice they have identified, as well as any areas of concern. External Examiner Reports are considered by senior individuals in the University and in Schools, and a letter of reply is sent to the External Examiner. Students are able to consider External Examiner Reports and replies through their representatives on the School Studies Committee.

Students can request a copy of the External Examiner Report for their programme by emailing their School Office ([insert contact email](#)) or by contacting Academic Quality (externalexaminerstaught@hw.ac.uk). On receipt of reports, students will be invited to sign a Confidentiality Agreement, which will outline conditions related to appropriate use of the Report.

Confidentiality Agreement for Students on Accessing External Examiner Reports

The Directorate of Governance and Legal Services has produced a Confidentiality Agreement which Schools and the Academic Registry should use when releasing reports to students other than School Officer members of the School Studies Committee (see Appendix). Students should sign the Confidentiality Agreement, with the original retained by the School or Academic Registry, as appropriate, and a copy provided to the student along with the report.

Schools should explain the confidentiality agreement to School Officers who will be reviewing External Examiner Reports as part of their role on the School Studies Committee. It is assumed that, as per all members of the Committee, student representatives will treat all matters of business related to the Committee in confidence as appropriate. However, School Officer members of the School Studies Committee should still be required to sign a separate, one-off Confidentiality Agreements for all External Examiner Reports (see Appendix).

3.4 Summary of External Examiner Reports

Academic Quality produces an annual summary of common themes/recommendations from External Examiner Reports, which is considered by the University Committee for Quality and Standards and by the University Committee for Learning and Teaching. Student Union Sabbatical Officers will continue to receive this annual Summary through their membership of the Committee for Quality and Standards and of the Committee for Learning and Teaching.

3.5 Accessibility of External Examiner Reports to all Students

In the University's QAA ELIR3 Technical Report (March 2015), the University was asked to consider making External Examiner Reports available to all students; this process would be in addition to that specified in this current document, whereby student representatives are given the opportunity to consider External Examiner Reports and responses through School Studies Committees.

At its meeting on 14 October 2015, the then Quality and Standards Committee noted the range of measures which had been put in place to make External Examiner Reports available to all students:

- Contact details for requesting access to a report have been provided on the External Examiner website (contact is a staff member within the Academic Quality section, Academic Registry);
- "Sharing External Examiner Reports with Students" Guidance has been updated to provide information on how any student (and not just student representatives) can request access to External Examiner Reports. This present document is available on the External Examiner website, and there is also as a link from the "Examinations and Assessment" student webpages;
- The "Examinations and Assessment" student webpages also provide a list of current External Examiners by programme: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/students/studies/examinations.htm>;
- Information on how students can request access to External Examiner Reports has been added to all Student Handbook templates.

Students can request the External Examiner Report for their programme by emailing externalexaminerstaught@hw.ac.uk; any student who has requested access to a report will be required to sign the Confidentiality Agreement for all External Examiner Reports for Taught Programmes (see Appendix).

At its meeting on 14 October 2015, the then Quality and Standards Committee agreed that the above measures were sufficient in making External Examiner Reports more accessible to all students.

Academic Quality

Approved by the Learning and Teaching Board, 22 October 2014; updated to include Section 5 and approved by the Quality and Standards Committee, 14 October 2015.



**CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT:
RELEASING EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORTS ON TAUGHT PROGRAMMES TO
STUDENTS**

Confidentiality

I acknowledge that as a Student Representative/Student (*delete as appropriate*) at Heriot-Watt University ("the University) I may obtain or have access to External Examiners reports and information, both written or oral including but not limited to intellectual property, personal data, drawings, samples, know-how and/or data in any form whatsoever, together with proprietary information relating to business activities (whether belonging to the University or to any third party) which the University has a legal obligation or commercial need to keep confidential ("Confidential Information").

I hereby undertake to preserve complete confidentiality of such Confidential Information; not to publish or otherwise disclose or in any way permit the disclosure of such Confidential Information; not to use such Confidential Information other than is expressly permitted in writing by the University; not to reproduce in any manner or form any of the Confidential Information or any part of it or notes in any form which I make of it other than expressly permitted by the University; and not to store Confidential Information in any computer or electronic information retrieval system outwith the University or transmit it in any form by any means outwith the University.

Miscellaneous

I understand that this document has legal effect and that I have read and understood its terms, and that I have the right to seek independent legal advice regarding its implications.

I acknowledge that in the event of any dissatisfaction I may have arising from the above, I may lodge a complaint with the Secretary of the University for arbitration.

I understand that this duty of confidentiality continues in perpetuity; that is, the terms of agreement will continue to apply after my term of office at the University ends.

Signed:

Date:

Name:

Address:

4. Heriot-Watt University Malaysia – Engineering Accreditation Council External Examiners

The Malaysian Engineering Accreditation Council requires External Examiners to be appointed to provide oversight of the Engineering programmes delivered at the University's Malaysia Campus. This section provides an overview of roles and responsibilities of Engineering Accreditation Council External Examiners at Heriot-Watt University Malaysia (referred to hereafter as HWUM External Examiners).

4.1 Roles and Activities of HWUM External Examiners

- a) Visit HWUM once every two years.
- b) Review of all (or a representative sample as appropriate) of exam scripts, assessed coursework, dissertations and project reports.
- c) Review consistency and standards of internal marking and classification of student work, including across variants (sample to be agreed in advance and from top, middle and bottom of range).
- d) Discuss and comment on programme structure, assessment process and award schemes.
- e) Notify the Head of School as soon as possible if unable to undertake or complete any aspect of External Examining responsibilities.

4.2 Rights of HWUM External Examiners

HWUM External Examiners are entitled to:

- a) Receive an induction/briefing from on their role, as provided by HWUM.
- b) Receive information core to the External Examining role, such as: programme structures; learning outcomes; details of learning, teaching and assessment processes; differences between versions of multi-mode/location programmes; exam papers, other forms of assessment and model answers; assessment and award regulations; marking schemes; process for dealing with borderline, unusual results or special circumstances; Board of Examiner procedures. See Sections 4.2 of this Handbook for full details of information provided to External Examiners.
- c) Receive a response from the Programme Team on comments provided in relation to exam papers and other forms of assessment.
- d) Request additional exam scripts and other assessments in addition to the samples provided for initial moderation.
- e) Meet students, only if the selected students are representatives of the entire cohort.

4.3 HWUM External Examiner Reports

At the end of a visit to HWUM (and, if appropriate, at the end of the period of office), HWUM External Examiners are required to submit a written report to the University.

External Examiner reports are an integral part of the University's quality assurance processes and contribute to both University and School annual monitoring of programmes.

Areas for Comment

HWUM External Examiners have the right to comment on any matter they wish in relation to their role. However, there is a standard series of issues on which the views of HWUM External Examiners are required. The HWUM report should contain, but is not limited to, the following:

- a) Assessment of programme objectives and outcomes.
- b) Assessment of OBE (outcomes-based education) implementation and achievement of the programme objectives by the students.
- c) Assessment of staff quality including qualifications and industry exposure. This is to include assessment of loading of each staff in teaching, research, consultancy and supervision of student projects.
- d) Assessment of staff-student ratio and student workload. If found to be insufficient, corrective action shall be taken by the Institute for Higher Learning.
- e) Assessment of preparation process of examination papers i.e. procedures for setting and vetting, quality assurance, confidentiality and security.
- f) Assessment of examination papers and marking schemes set for the standard of questions, coverage of syllabus, adequate balance between theory and application, setting of questions of equal level, adequate choice of questions, and appropriateness of marking scheme.
- g) Assessment of the marked answer scripts based on a sample of good, average and weak candidates. Fairness/disparity of marking, follow-through method adopted if answer to one section is wrong, response of candidates to the question, and distribution of marks.

- h) Assessment of coursework, laboratory work, assignments, design projects, final-year projects.
- i) Assessment of examination procedures and regulations.
- j) Management commitment towards the programme.
- k) Assessment of assessments moderation process.

Return of Reports

HWUM External Examiners should complete the forms electronically and return these by email.

Deadline for return of reports by HWUM External Examiners: two months after date of the visit to HWUM.

Fees are paid to all External Examiners, including HWUM External Examiners, only upon receipt of reports.

Response to Reports

As per the standard HWU process, a response letter will be provided to all HWUM External Examiners by the School (see section 13.3 above). A senior member of the HWUM Programme Team, eg Programme Director, may draft the response letter; however, it should be signed by the Director of Learning and Teaching or Director of Academic Quality, and will be forwarded to the relevant Dean of the University to ensure that appropriate action has been taken. The remaining part of the response process is as outlined in section 13.3.