Learning and Teaching Policy

What happens after Exams?
Guide for Students

Step 1: The Course Leader/Team marks your script
The Professional Services teams collate all exam scripts and make sure they are passed to the Course Leader/Team for marking. Your exam script is marked according to pre-prepared marking criteria.

Assuring the integrity of the exams process
Your exam scripts are marked against learning outcomes that map to professional accreditation requirements (if relevant) and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. A sample of exam scripts is checked and approved by External Examiners from other universities. All these processes ensure that marking aligns to HWU and UK-wide academic standards.

Step 2: Students’ work is checked and verified
Course Teams review students’ work once marked, a mark sheet for each course is completed, differences in cohort performance are reviewed, and External Examiners provide further scrutiny of work contributing to award.

Assuring the integrity of marking and verification
After marking has been carried out, Course leaders (and teams where applicable) review students’ work to ensure an ‘A’ in Edinburgh is equivalent to an ‘A’ grade in Dubai etc. A Course Marks List (CML) for each course is completed and further quality checks undertaken to verify marks have been transferred and presented accurately. Differences in cohort performance are reviewed and may be moderated for specific circumstances eg impact of pandemic. This is recorded on the CML for presentation at the Course Assessment Board. For Years 3, 4 + 5 and PGT, External Examiners view a sample of students’ work (coursework and exams), drawn from across grades levels and locations of study, to ensure consistency in marking standards.

Step 3: Mitigating Circumstances are formally considered
Assuring mitigation has been applied for personal circumstance
At the same time as your exams are being marked, School-level Mitigating Circumstances Boards are convened to review the Mitigating Circumstances requests that have been received and that have been approved for mitigation to be considered. Consistency of decision-making is checked across disciplines.

Step 4: A Course Assessment Board is held
Each Discipline holds a Course Assessment Board. The Senior Programme Director of Studies, Year Coordinators and Course Leaders attend these Boards. Each course is considered individually to compare the performance with that of previous years.

Assuring Course-level performance and outcomes
Additional levels of scrutiny continue to be included to take account of Covid-19 circumstances. The academic performance in Semester 1 and 2 courses of the 21/22 cohorts will be evaluated against those of previous cohorts that were not affected by the pandemic.

This will provide a benchmark against which this year’s student attainment can be considered and will enable the Course Assessment Board to confirm that overall outcomes are in keeping with previous years, or that they require moderation. Moderation may include, for example, altering the grades for Covid-19 affected courses, while ensuring overall quality and standards are maintained.

Step 5: A Progression or Award Board is held
Each Discipline holds a Progression Board and an Award Board attended by Senior Programme Directors of Studies, Discipline academics, School Director of Learning and Teaching, School Director of Academic Quality, and the University Dean (or their Representative). Additionally, an External Examiner attends Award Boards. Each individual student profile is considered in turn.

Ensuring individual performance is reflected in Progression and Award decisions
Attention is given to each student’s overall grade profile over 8 taught final year courses, previous year’s qualifying courses, the overall average, and the number of credits achieved. If there are mitigating circumstances to consider, these are also taken into account and appropriate mitigation applied. Results of students from before the pandemic will also inform the discussion and the decisions that will be made. The results of students who are close to grade or classification boundaries are fully deliberated, taking account of several factors, including whether courses are core or not. There are different processes that allow the Board to recognise academic achievement when making their decisions. All these processes are used by Boards to ensure fairness and no academic disadvantage. Feedback is received from the Dean (or Representative) and from External Examiners on the conduct, parity of decisions made and performance of the students.

Step 6: Results are released
Results are released online by Registry to all graduating and continuing undergraduate and postgraduate taught students. These are results for individual courses (including dissertations) and also overall decisions on progression and award. Information on accessing results can be found here.

ACADEMIC SAFETY NET APPROACH
Steps 1 – 5 ensure all individual student results undergo close academic scrutiny. It is not a simple spreadsheet exercise based on averages. Academic staff teams have authority to use their academic judgement – within a strict quality assurance framework – to make sure every student receives grades and degree classifications which accurately reflect their capabilities. The process is very robust.

With additional checks and safeguards, this ensures students receive the results they would have gained if it had not been for Covid-19. The academic safety net means that no student will get a lower grade than they deserve (which is unfair), but also will not get a higher grade (which devalues qualifications).

These five-steps also mean that Heriot-Watt does not need to implement a formula-based ‘no detriment rule’: we have a long-standing, much more robust and fair approach. This is summarised in our Academic Safety Net policy: Full Policy here; Student Summary here.

The University’s appeals process is available to all students here. As in previous years, due our robust quality and standards process, students are not able to appeal against academic judgements.