Learning and Teaching Policy

Return of Feedback on Assessment in 2021/22

There were no particular issues identified with feedback which required discussion by the Learning and Teaching Academic Year 2020/21 Group (LTAYG). However, there had been some lack of clarity earlier in 2020 regarding feedback turnaround times and feedback on exams submitted electronically; both matters were clarified by the LTAYG. The section below summarises the agreed position on both.

Feedback on Coursework in 2021/22: Restatement of Current Policy

The University’s Feedback on Coursework Policy was introduced in 2015/16, which states:

This document provides the policy framework for Schools, which should be used in the delivery of formative feedback on assessed coursework. The policy applies to students studying on all Heriot-Watt University programmes of study. This policy does not cover examinations.

The University is committed to providing identical academic standards for students and fostering a learning environment which delivers timely formative feedback to students. This is viewed as essential in supporting learning and improvement.

In order to realise this aim, a maximum 3-week turnaround for the return of formative feedback on assessed coursework will be in place by the start of the Academic Year 2015/2016. For some pieces of assessment, such as large-scale projects and dissertations, this policy may not apply. This is to ensure that the quality of feedback is not compromised.

It is the responsibility of each School to implement the policy.

At its meeting on 3 November 2021, the LTAYG agreed to retain the current policy of a 3-week turnaround for coursework in 2021/22. However, it was agreed that this should be interpreted and actioned at School level in a flexible way during 2021/22 in light of the impact of COVID-19, the pressures on staff and students and the increase in coursework elements (including as substitutes for in-person exams).

Feedback on Coursework in 2021/22: Final Summative Coursework

At its meeting on 3 November 2021, the LTAYG agreed, in response to requests from Schools, that, in addition to largescale assignments (projects and dissertations) being exempted in the current policy, the exemption from the 3-week turnaround should apply for 2021/22 to the final piece of summative coursework assessment (ie those which contribute to the overall mark/grade) in courses assessed entirely by coursework.

In such cases, feedback will be returned later with final coursework marks after the publication of course results by RAS. In this way, Course Assessment Boards can undertake any moderation prior to release of results, which would be problematic if coursework results and feedback had been released to students in advance of the Course Assessment Board. It was also noted that there was no immediate formative benefit in providing feedback for final pieces of coursework.

If this exemption from the 3-week turnaround time is being applied, it is critical that information on feedback return dates for final summative coursework assignments should be communicated to students.

It was agreed to revisit, prior to AY 2022/23, the 3-week turnaround policy as part of a review of the Feedback on Coursework Policy to be undertaken by the University Committee for Learning and Teaching.


At its meeting on 23 September 2020, the LTAYG approved a revised Guidance Note on Access to Exam Scripts and Feedback to Students on Exam Performance, which had been updated to include take-home open book exams, ie the provision of feedback on exams completed electronically. The key principle in relation to feedback is as follows:

Students should be given the opportunity to receive feedback on examination performance (except final year undergraduate or final diet postgraduate taught programme students); this applies to students across all locations and
modes of study. Each School can determine the most appropriate method of providing feedback on examination performance, depending on the discipline, cohort size, level and mode of study.

Examples of methods used to provide access to examination scripts and feedback, as provided in the above Guidance Note, include the following:

- Examination workshops timetabled in the next semester to go through examination performance and overall learning points; this is particularly relevant for core courses.
- Provision of feedback through generic commentary for all students, highlighting learning points, posted on the University’s VLE or other University-approved means of communicating with students, or where relevant members of academic staff have an opportunity to provide group feedback. In the case of electronic exams, as students will have their own copy of their submitted script, generic feedback could be a more practical approach.
- Individual student feedback sheets relating to examination scripts, detailing how a student performed; this could also be used to assist off-campus students.
- One-to-one feedback provided by Personal Tutors or members of the Course team.

Each School should inform students (e.g., handbook, statement on Course VLE site) of the methods used to provide exam performance feedback.

There is no University policy or guidance on return times for feedback on take-home open book exams. Although, with S1 Exam Boards being scheduled two weeks later and a consequent longer timeframe for release of results, the LTAYG agreed at its meeting on 15 December 2022 that, wherever possible, feedback should be provided to students in advance of release of results.

The LTA has produced a Watt Works Quick Guide on helping students to benefit from feedback on exams. Additionally, there are other LTA Watt Works Quick Guides on Feedback, including a guide for students on feedback.