The University’s Submission of Coursework Policy specifies the institutional policy related to the scheduling and publishing of assessment deadlines to ensure a manageable workload for students, and staff responsibilities are specified in the Academic Management Structures, specifically in relation to the role of the Year Co-ordinator.

However, as evidenced throughout the pandemic, larger pieces of coursework have been introduced and many traditional in-person exams have been substituted by an increased number of shorter assignments. Consequently, the issue of clashing deadlines and bunching of assessments has been regularly highlighted by students. There have also previously been instances of timed coursework (ie managed by Schools and not scheduled by RAS within the Exams and Assessment Diet) being released at times in the day which are disadvantageous to some timezones (eg with the equivalent time being 11 pm in Malaysia). Additionally, it has emerged that not all students have received a clear schedule of assessment deadlines for each semester.

Coursework Scheduling: Existing Policy

At the Student Learning Experience Committee in November 2017 (Minute 114), it was agreed, in response to a proposal submitted by the three Student Presidents on Coursework Deadline Mapping, that all coursework should be scheduled by Schools so as to minimise clashing deadlines or bunching of assessment in order to provide a more manageable workload for students. It was agreed that all Schools should undertake a coursework deadline mapping exercise and communicate this to students, and that this should be introduced with immediate effect in 2017/18. It was determined that a policy was not needed as most Schools were already doing this mapping.

However, as this practice hadn’t yet become embedded, in the introduction of the Submission of Coursework Policy in 2018/19, the following was stated:

It is the responsibility of the School to document, prior to the start of teaching, the following on the VLE Course Homepage: Date issued; Assessment submission deadline; When feedback will be issued.

Each School will ensure that coursework deadlines are coordinated to ensure workloads are manageable for students.

In light of this, it is therefore the responsibility of the student to work professionally and work towards submitting all assessed coursework by the submission deadline.

Additionally, in the Academic Management Structures, it is stated, in the remit of the Year Co-ordinator (approved for implementation with effect from 2018/19), that it is the responsibility of the Year Co-ordinator, working with the programme teaching team, to coordinate assignment submission dates across courses. For PGT programmes, this role should be undertaken by the Programme Director of Studies.

Coursework Scheduling in 2022/23: Restatement of Existing Policy

The LTAYG agreed on 13 July 2022 by correspondence that all existing policies relating to Coursework Scheduling (in place since 2017/18 and re-emphasised in 2018/19) should continue to be applied in 2022/23 and the following statement, which is a summary of existing policies and has been in place since 2020 due to the pandemic, should be added permanently to relevant policies (eg Submission of Coursework Policy and remit of Year Co-ordinator in the Academic Management Structures):

- As per the existing Submission of Coursework policy, Course and Programme teams should put in place an appropriate assessment schedule which avoids bunching of coursework within courses and across programmes;
- As per the existing Submission of Coursework policy, coursework deadlines should be coordinated to ensure workloads are manageable for students;
- As per the Academic Management Structures, it is the responsibility of the Year Co-ordinator, working with the programme teaching team, to coordinate assignment submission dates across courses;
- As per the existing Submission of Coursework policy, the following should be undertaken by Schools:
  - assessment schedules are presented on Canvas;
  - deadlines are presented as part of an overall schedule for the semester;
  - all students receive/have access to a published calendar of assessment deadlines for all their courses each semester.
In addition to the above existing policy, in accordance with the Assessment Types 2022/23 (see separate Summary Paper on Assessment Types 2022/23), the following responsibilities for scheduling apply:

- Coursework can be scheduled throughout Teaching Weeks (Schools’ responsibility) and for submission during the Exam and Assessment Diets (Schools’ responsibility)
- Timed, Online Coursework which is intended for completion during the Exam and Assessment Diets must be managed by RAS (RAS’ responsibility);

At its meeting on 13 July 2022, the LTAYG reaffirmed the following, which had been in place during the pandemic, with regard to time of day for submission of coursework in 2022/23 (see separate Summary Paper on Submission of Coursework):

All coursework deadlines should be set during local core hours at each campus or associated timezone (e.g., 0900-1700) and should be set during weekdays only. For multi-campus coursework, a deadline of midday was proposed. Submission timings should set up on Canvas were appropriate.

Assessment Scheduling in 2022/23: Guidance for Schools

As a means of facilitating the mapping out of assessment deadlines, the School of Engineering and Physical Sciences has introduced a School-wide assessment scheduling tool. This tool, or variants of it, was subsequently adopted by other Schools, as a temporary measure prior to the implementation of the assessment scheduling function within the Global Curriculum Management system (GCM replaced PAMS from September 2021). Other Schools may wish to contact EPS (via the Director of Academic Quality) regarding use of this assessment scheduling tool.

Schools can determine the most appropriate means of managing assessment scheduling across a semester, a course or programme. The only University requirement is that the Year Co-ordinator is responsible for the co-ordination of assessment deadlines across a particular year group/stage of study. The LTA has produced a Watt Works Quick Guide on taking a programme-level approach to assessment and feedback.

In scheduling assessment deadlines, Schools should pay particular attention to the Exam and Assessment Diets where there is a significant potential for clashing or bunching, due to, for example, any coursework assignments due for submission in that time period or any timed online coursework scheduled in the same timeframe as well as in-person, invigilated exams (see Separate Summary Paper on Types of Assessment in 2022/23 for definitions).

The following guidance has been produced by the Student Representative Bodies:
Well-planned assessment scheduling allows both staff and students to undertake their work and studies more effectively. When assessments are spread out across the full semester, key pinch points are removed and student effort can be distributed more evenly across all important topics. Concentration of student effort around bunched assessment deadlines impacts overall learning, as students prioritise some work, and therefore some learning outcomes, over others. Assessment throughout the entire semester enables students to reinforce their understanding of a greater range of topics rather than a small selection.

Conversely, “assessment bunching” can have a detrimental effect on student attainment: with too many assignments to complete simultaneously, students cannot concentrate sufficient effort on each one in addition to continuing their studies.

Volume of Assessment in 2022/23

Feedback from students and from some External Examiners as well as anecdotal evidence at the LTAYG have highlighted that over-assessment continues to be an area of concern across Heriot-Watt generally. This is a long-standing issue for the University and so Schools should be mindful of the impact on both students and staff (the latter particularly in relation to workload and wellbeing given the volume of marking, Exam Boards etc), particularly since, in 2022/23, there will be the option to repurpose take-home exams as timed, online coursework and to return to in-person, invigilated exams.

The Learning and Teaching Academy provides a wide range of support for Schools in planning for and designing assessment, including designing an appropriate balance of assessment. Teaching teams refreshing course and assessment design are encouraged to make use of these resources:
- Course and Assessment Design Top Tips
- Assessment and Feedback FAQs and Resources

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1 It is envisaged that the assessment scheduling function within GCM will be recommended for use once the assessment information is updated following the two-year exemption from recording assessment changes on the central system due to the major and temporary changes to assessment introduced in response to the pandemic. As at August/September 2022, this updating is in progress.
Additionally, there is a suite of [Watt Works Quick Guides on Assessment and Feedback](#). Further support and guidance are available from the LTA: [LTAcademy@hw.ac.uk](mailto:LTAcademy@hw.ac.uk)

As part of the institutional action plan on addressing NSS2022 issues related to Assessment and Feedback and as part of the Transforming Assessment initiative (a key strand within the Learning and Teaching Strategy), there will be a further suite of resources and support provided by the LTA, including in undertaking assessment redesign in preparation to the shift to a 2-week April diet of assessments and a 5-day August diet of assessments from 2023/24.

### Assessment Scheduling in 2022/23: Guidance on Communicating to Students

As is standard practice, Schools should continue to communicate assessment deadlines to students and, in line with the existing policies above, should ensure that: this information is presented on Canvas; deadlines are presented as part of an overall schedule for the semester; all students receive/have access to a published calendar of assessment deadlines for all their courses each semester.

In communicating assessment schedules to students, Schools should make students aware that, although assessment schedules will have been carefully planned, there will be occasions when deadlines might conflict or be close together and that in-person exams might be held on consecutive days, as might timed, online coursework which also takes place in the Exam and Assessment Diets.

It should be highlighted to students that it is part of their professional and personal development, and a key time management skill, to be able to manage conflicting deadlines, and that they should accordingly plan and prioritise their time and workload.

Schools should also bring to students’ attention the resources and support available to them (from Student Wellbeing Services, the [Effective Learning Service](#) and the Student Union Advice Hub) in areas such as assessment, time management and dealing with exam anxiety. See also [Supporting Our Students SharePoint site](#).