The University has existing policies related to the scheduling and publishing of assessment deadlines to ensure a manageable workload for students.

However, as larger pieces of coursework have been introduced and many exams have been substituted by an increased number of shorter assignments as part of RBL, the issue of clashing deadlines and bunching of assessments has previously been highlighted by students. There have also previously been instances of timed coursework (ie where students have a specific period of time, eg 48 hours or 36 hours, to complete an assignment) being released at times in the day which are disadvantageous to some timezones (eg 11 pm). Additionally, it has emerged that not all students have received a clear schedule of assessment deadlines for the semester.

**Assessment 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 Vision (now Canvas) 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.

Therefore, there already exist policies on assessment scheduling and provision of this information to students.

**Assessment Scheduling in 2021/22: Restatement of Existing Policy**

At its meeting on 2 December 2020, the LTAYG agreed that a separate policy statement should be introduced as a means of supporting the management and communication of assessment scheduling during 2020/21. The following policy statement, which is a confirmation of existing policies, was reaffirmed by the LTAYG on 16 December 2020:

- As per the existing policy, coursework deadlines should be coordinated to ensure workloads are manageable for students;
- As per the existing policy, it is the responsibility of the student to work professionally and work towards submitting all assessed coursework by the submission deadline;
- 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 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.
Assessment Scheduling in 2021/22: 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\(^1\) (GCM replaced PAMS from September 2021). Other Schools may wish to contact EPS (via the Director of Learning and Teaching) regarding use of this assessment scheduling tool.

Schools can determine the most appropriate means of managing assessment scheduling across a semester 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 produce 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 any coursework assignments due for completion in an exam diet and minimise clashing or bunching around dates of take-home exams.

**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 2021/22**

Feedback from students and some External Examiners and 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). See separate summary on Assessment Scheduling 2021/22.

**Assessment Scheduling in 2021/22: 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 exams be held on consecutive days.

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.

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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.