

University Committee for Learning and Teaching

University Guidance: Access to Exam Scripts and Feedback to Students on Exam Performance

1. Background

- 1.1 This Guidance note was developed by the Learning and Teaching Board of Heriot-Watt University (HWU) in March 2008. It reflects a decision taken by the University Senate which stated that members of academic staff should be encouraged to permit students to view their own examination scripts after each diet where possible and to receive appropriate feedback on their performance. This Guidance was revised and updated in April 2014, extending it to all on-campus students on taught programmes at the Scottish, Dubai and Malaysia Campuses.
- 1.2 Further revisions were undertaken in September 2020, in collaboration with School Directors of Academic Quality, as part of a general update, which included a review of similar policies across the UK HE sector, and specifically to provide guidance on requests for accessing exam scripts completed online. These revisions were endorsed by the Learning and Teaching Academic Year 2020/21 Group at its meeting on 23 September 2020. This guidance is located in the [Learning and Teaching Policy Bank](#).

2. Access to Scripts

Students at all HWU campuses may be given the opportunity to view their examination scripts after each examination diet

- 2.1 This principle does not apply to final year undergraduate or final diet postgraduate taught programme students who will gain no benefit from viewing their examination scripts in terms of opportunities to improve performance on their study programme at HWU. At the present time, off-campus students cannot be given access to hard copy scripts, as this would be difficult to manage logistically; access can be provided, at the discretion of the School, to a scanned version or an electronic script.
- 2.2 It should be noted that, in accordance with the UK Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts, students have no legal right to see their examination scripts. However, the Acts do allow discretion to universities to provide access to examination scripts if they wish to do so. At HWU, this is at the discretion of each School.
- 2.3 Whilst students do not have a legal right to view their examination scripts, they do have the right to view any written comments made on their examination scripts. These may be comments on the script itself or on a separate proforma. All staff involved in marking examination scripts should be made aware that their comments can be viewed by students.
- 2.4 All examination scripts are owned by the University and must be returned to the University immediately after being viewed by students. If a School wishes to allow sight of examination scripts by students, the School should, in turn, implement a process to manage and control access to the scripts. Some examples are given below.
- 2.5 Even in cases where Schools would normally allow students to view their scripts, the University has the right to refuse access to a script (but not to any written comments made on the script) where this is considered to be appropriate, for example, where: there is evidence that a script may have been tampered with; there are other disciplinary issues that need to be considered; a professional body does not permit scripts to be viewed.

3. Viewing Scripts

Schools should make clear to students all arrangements and conditions for viewing scripts.

- 3.1 Schools should ensure students are given information on access to their scripts by providing a statement on the course VLE site and/or handbook. Suggested information includes details on:
- which exam scripts they will have access to, and those which they will not, with a brief rationale for the latter;
 - how to make a request for access scripts (eg to the School Office);
 - when and how they will be given access to their exam scripts;
 - why reviewing their scripts can provide them with useful feedback and how it fits with other feedback the school provides on exams;
 - their responsibilities for viewing their scripts;
 - who they can talk to if they want further feedback.
- 3.2 Access to examination papers is provided to students on request for the purpose of gaining feedback from the examination process and to understand their own strengths and areas for improvement. However, it should be clarified to students that this is not an opportunity to question the marking process or the allocation of marks, nor to debate the academic judgement of the markers in the award of marks, nor to ask about the identity of markers. If the student detects an irregularity in the marking (eg an arithmetical omission or error), then this will be reviewed after the viewing session and the outcome communicated to the student.
- 3.3 As part of the arrangements for providing access to scripts, Schools should organise for at least one member of staff to supervise during the viewing session. Supervisors are usually an academic staff member involved in the marking or a Personal Tutor. Supervision may, however, be provided by administrative or support staff or by staff not associated with the course; in such cases, it should be made clear to students that no explanation of comments written on the script will be given at the time of viewing and that other arrangements for feedback will be made.
- 3.4 At the start of each viewing session, supervisors should ask students for proof of identification, eg enrolment card. Supervisors should make clear that students must not remove, mark or modify an examination script. The provision to a script to a student is purely for their own educational use; students must not share, publish or otherwise disseminate their scripts, answers or the exam questions. Any breach of these conditions will be considered a disciplinary offence under the University's disciplinary procedures. These criteria apply to all formats of scripts (hard copy, scanned version of hard copy, script completed and marked electronically). Students are, however, permitted to take their own notes during the session, when viewing either hard copy exam scripts or electronic scripts.

Hard Copy Exam Scripts

- 3.5 Where a hard copy of a script has been provided for viewing (either original or copy), it is supervisor's function is to ensure that the student does not alter the examination script in any way and that the student does not copy or take a photograph or remove the examination script from the supervised area. The key function of the supervision is to ensure that all scripts issued are returned intact.

Electronic Exam Scripts

- 3.6 Students can also be granted access to view examination scripts which have been completed and marked electronically. Students will, of course, have their own copy of their completed e-script, and so any viewing will be for the purpose of enabling students to see comments written on their e-scripts. Viewings can be arranged as in-person sessions or as remote sessions (eg via MS Teams). In the case of in-person sessions for e-scripts, devices should be available for students to view the script on. If a remote viewing session has been arranged, the script should be displayed by the supervisor as a shared screen. Irrespective of the format of viewing session, the e-script should not be shared as a copy with the student by email or any other means (eg posting on MS Teams).
- 3.7 Where a script with comments, or the comments themselves if not written on the e-script, is provided electronically for viewing, the supervisor's function is to ensure that the student does not photograph or take a screenshot of the e-script. It will be more challenging to prevent screenshots being taken in the case of a remote viewing session, and in such cases, additional reminders should be provided of the disciplinary procedures.

Arranging Access

- 3.8 Access to scripts can be made available through a range of means, and Schools can manage this through their own arrangements. Some examples are given below:

- Schools may offer open access sessions at a specified where students can turn up without prior notification;
- Schools may offer appointments for students to view scripts on a scheduled day;
- Students may request independent access, giving prior notice to the School to enable supervision to be arranged at a mutually agreeable time and place.

3.9 Schools may wish to monitor the uptake of access to scripts (hard copy and electronic) to keep under review the usefulness and efficiency of their own process, and also to determine if the volume of requests is manageable or not.

4. Feedback on Examination Performance

Students should be given the opportunity to receive feedback on examination performance

4.1 Irrespective of whether or not access has been requested to marked examination scripts, all students should be provided with feedback on their examination performance as part of the School's overall approach to providing feedback. This principle does not apply to final year undergraduate or final diet postgraduate taught programme students for whom feedback at this stage would not have the purpose of helping to improve performance.

4.2 Each School can determine the most appropriate method of providing feedback on examination performance, depending on the discipline, cohort size and level of study. Examples of methods used to provide access to examination scripts and feedback 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 (eg handbook, statement on Course VLE site) of the methods used to provide exam performance feedback.

5. Review of Guidance

5.1 As electronic exams were introduced institution-wide from April 2020 and the scale of requests by students to view marked e-scripts was not known at the time of approving this revised guidance on 23 September 2020, the Learning and Teaching AY2020/21 Group agreed that this guidance should be kept under review and amendments to be brought forward should Schools report during 2020/21 that the volume of requests was becoming unmanageable.

6. Storage of E-Scripts

6.1 As part of the approval of this revised guidance on 23 September 2020, the Learning and Teaching AY2020/21 Group agreed that Registry and Academic Support Directorate should develop a systems solution for secure storage of marked e-scripts.

Approved Learning and Teaching Board, April 2008; minor updates November 2011 and April 2014

Revised version approved by the Learning and Teaching AY2020/21 Group, September 2020