

Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 on Examinations and Assessment

Guidance for External Examiners

In February 2020, the University invoked *Regulation 31: Authority of Heads of School and Boards of Examiners in Exceptional Circumstances* (see p.3) in order to put in place arrangements to mitigate the impact on COVID-19 on examination and assessment. The engagement of our External Examiners in the operation of our Boards of Examiners is ever more critical, and Heriot-Watt University gratefully acknowledges your invaluable contribution.

This guidance note is designed to help you in undertaking your role as External Examiner in the context of Heriot-Watt University's arrangements to mitigate the impact on COVID-19 on examination and assessment.

Exams and Assessment-Related Decisions taken by Heriot-Watt University

In March 2020, the Senate Committee for Interim Business and Effectiveness (SCIBE) approved the following on behalf of the Senate:

1. All examinations for Year 1 and Year 2 students are cancelled and all students will be given a "P" pass grade for Semester 2 courses. If professional bodies require student to undertake an exam for accreditation or exemption purposes, this will be arranged a later date.
2. A number of examinations for Year 3, 4 and 5 continuing and graduating students have been cancelled because the School has determined that there is sufficient information to take a decision on progression or award.
3. If an examination has been arranged for Year 3, 4 and 5 continuing and graduating students, this will be in the form of a Take Home Exam, which will be based on the unseen exam which you, as External Examiner, should have already reviewed.
4. All examinations for Postgraduate Taught Students have been deferred till the next diet. Students have been permitted to proceed to the dissertation stage.

Full information on the various discussions can be found in the relevant Student Guides at <https://www.hw.ac.uk/students/studies/examinations.htm>

My Role as External Examiner

Please find below some information and guidance for you in your role as External Examiner, which includes extracts from *The Handbook on External Examining for Taught Programmes*:

Operation of Boards of Examiners

1. All Award Boards of Examiners will take place as planned, albeit virtually or by correspondence. The date of the originally scheduled Board may be changed. You will be advised by the relevant School of dates and other arrangements.
2. Boards of Examiners will assign a grade A-F for Semester 2 courses if there is sufficient assessment information or a P pass grade if there is insufficient information. Discretionary Award of Credits (DC) can be used for all results with the exception of Semester 2 2020.
3. Boards of Examiners will assign an award or progression decision as per standard processes.
4. As an External Examiner, you will be invited to contribute to Board of Examiners, virtually or by correspondence, as normal and as outlined in *The Handbook on External Examining for Taught Programmes* <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm>
5. Schools will provide the following information:
 - samples of marked exam scripts and other assessments, including internal moderation reports;
 - guidelines and procedures related to assessment processes, eg: School's moderation policy; discretionary award of credits; classification criteria;
 - spreadsheets of provisional results, awards and classifications (usually made available once the External Examiner has arrived at the University);
 - details of unusual results and proposed actions.
6. As External Examiner, you will have the opportunity during, or at the end of, the Board meeting to comment on such matters as: exam questions, student performance, the assessment process and schemes for marking and classification. In view of the current situation, you are encouraged in particular to comment on the Board's actions take to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.
7. It is still the case that no University degree can be awarded without participation in the examining process by at least one External Examiner. Therefore, an electronic signature on, or endorsement by email of, the final list of agreed award decisions will still be required as evidence that you have been involved in the process of recommending awards and associated classifications.

Reports from Examiners

1. The report deadline for UG reports has been moved from 30 June to 30 September. At present, the deadline for PGT reports remains at 31 October and 31 January for Chief External Examiner reports. We will keep you posted of any changes to these dates.
2. A standard report template will be issued as normal, although this has been adapted so that you can comment on how the Board has responded in terms of mitigating the impact of COVID-19.
3. The process for submitting and responding to reports remains unchanged, with full details on the External Examiner website, including report templates <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm>

REGULATION 31 Authority of Heads of Schools and Examiners in Exceptional Circumstances

Notes

1. This Regulation is made in pursuance of clause (b) of Statute XXII and of paragraph 2 of Ordinance 5.
2. The purpose of this Regulation is to clarify the authority of the Head of School and other Examiners in exceptional circumstances. 'Exceptional circumstances' shall be defined as those in which the full range of examination marks, results or coursework evaluation, normally taken into account in assessment, is not available, excluding mitigating circumstances applying to individual Students.
3. The Regulation shall not apply where the full range of information normally taken into account is available.
4. When the circumstances of paragraph 2 apply, it is the responsibility of the Senate Business Committee, acting with the delegated authority of the Senate, to bring into effect the arrangements and conditions set out in this Regulation, to determine the duration for which they should be applied, and to impose any additional conditions.
5. This Regulation shall apply equally to the assessment of a candidate for a higher degree that is based in whole or in part on the submission of a thesis.

Definition

6. For the purpose of this Regulation "the Examiners" shall mean, "the Head of School or his or her nominee/alternative supported by the relevant External Examiner(s) carrying out their normal duties and at the discretion of the Head of School or his or her nominee, suitably qualified members of Staff or Approved Teachers".

A nominee appointed to act in place of a Head of School shall be subject to approval by the Senate Business Committee.

For a Student who is not enrolled with a particular School, the Senate Business Committee will assign a Head of School.

Authority of Examiners

7. A Board of Examiners shall include the Examiners as defined in paragraph 6 and the Dean or his or her nominee/alternative.
8. The Examiners are authorised to make judgements and decisions on the basis of such information as is available to them at the time a judgement or decision is required to be made.
9. The Examiners shall have the authority:
 - a) to make recommendations to the Senate for the award of degrees and other awards
 - b) to make decisions about the progression of Students
 - c) to award credit for individual courses
 - d) to defer making a decision if it is agreed that there is insufficient information available to recommend an award or allow a Student to progress.

Appeals

10. A candidate who is dissatisfied with the decision of the Examiners shall be entitled to appeal to the Senior Dean under the terms of Regulation 36: Student Appeals.