# HERIOT WATT UNIVERSITY

# University Studies Committee Handbook

**October 2022**

# Contents

1. **Introduction to the University Studies Committee and its Handbook**

   The University Studies Committee is a standing sub-committee of the University Committee for Quality and Standards.

   The University Committee for Quality and Standards is responsible on behalf of the Senate for all aspects of academic quality assurance: progressing or engaging with institutional policy development; monitoring and review; oversight of the Quality Assurance Framework.

   With the approval of the Senate, the University Committee for Quality and Standards has established the Studies Committee as a standing sub-committee to undertake on its behalf consideration and approval of the academic conditions associated with the establishing, modifying, or withdrawing of undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses, programmes and disciplines.

   The Handbook will be updated as required but particularly where major changes have taken place in the remit or the operation of the Committee or in the University's programme approval process.

   The Handbook aims to provide a comprehensive overview of all aspects of the University Studies Committee and is intended to support members in executing their roles on the Committee. It is hoped that, in addition, the wider group of staff involved in the Studies Committee's activities, in both Schools and Professional Services, will find the Handbook useful.

2. **Operational Aspects of the University Studies Committee**

   2.1. **Terms of Reference**
   The Terms of Reference, setting out the remit and composition of the Committee are published on the University website.

   2.1.1. **Term of Office**
   Members of the Committee, other than ex officio, are appointed for three years, from 1 August to 31 July. Members are eligible for re-appointment but are not permitted to serve more than two consecutive terms of three years. Any extension of the number of consecutive terms of three years requires approval from the Senate.

   2.2. **Roles of Members of the Committee**
   2.2.1. **Chair**
   The responsibilities of the Chair with regard to the Committee are:
   - providing leadership to move forward the institutional priorities related to undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and ensure that the Committee achieves its overall objectives;
   - chairing meetings and ensuring that meetings run efficiently and effectively;
   - presenting the Committee's views to the University Committee for Quality and Standards as appropriate and to provide feedback from such to the Committee;
   - scheduling items across meetings so as to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to bring forward items for consideration and that items are not repeatedly dropped from the agenda;
   - being responsible for agreeing the Committee's agenda;
   - responsible for briefing new members of the Committee on its remit;

- ensuring that appropriate papers and information are provided to enable members to make an informed contribution to discussions.

### 2.2.2. Senate Appointees

Although the Senate appointees are members of academic staff in particular Schools, their role is not to represent their School, but rather to:
- ensure that the recommendations of the Senate are taken into consideration, as appropriate, by the Committee;
- provide verbal reports, if required, at meetings of the Senate in order to supplement the report given by the Chair.

### 2.2.3. School Representatives

The responsibilities of the School Representatives are to:
- consider, and report on to the Committee, programme proposals allocated by the Chair and the Clerk;
- provide advice on proposals specific to their School;
- discuss issues in Schools as appropriate and to bring to the Committee the considered views of Schools;
- bring items to the attention of the senior management of Schools;
- contribute towards discussions that lead to the Committee reaching an informed decision.

### 2.2.4. External Representative

The purpose of the External Member is to enhance the externality in the University's academic approval and assurance processes and to ensure that the University is compliant with the UK Quality Code.

### 2.2.5. Student Representatives

The purpose of the Student Member is to offer insight into representation, curriculum design and assessment practices which further helps embed the student voice across Heriot-Watt University. They should provide the student body's viewpoint and comment upon the implications on students in the approval of new, major modifications and withdrawing of undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes.

### 2.2.6. Clerk

The role of the Clerk is to:
- provide administrative support for the Committee and relevant sub-committees or working groups;
- provide specialist input to discussions;
- support Schools in submitting programme proposals for approval;
- ensure relevant individuals in the Professional Services are properly informed of the Committee's discussions and decisions;
- liaise directly with Committee members regarding information to be communicated more widely across the University;
- advise on the scheduling of agenda items within and across meetings;
- keep track of and report on progress of actions and matters arising from Committee business.

### 2.3. Contribution of Members
The success of the Committee in fulfilling its Terms of Reference and its responsibilities to the Senate and the University is dependent on the active engagement of its members both during and out with meetings.

#### 2.3.1. Preparation for Meetings
For the Committee's meetings to be efficient and effective, members must be well-prepared and informed regarding the issues to be discussed.

Programme proposals require consideration and approval by the entire Committee, but each proposal is specifically allocated to two named members for more detailed scrutiny and reporting back to the entire Committee.

#### 2.3.2. At Meetings
Irrespective of their position, the contribution and views of all members are regarded as equally valid. To that end, the Chair will ensure that representatives from the different sections of the University have an opportunity, particularly during meetings, to contribute to issues under consideration. As the situation demands, the Chair will actively invite all members (or particular categories of members) to contribute in order to ensure that the views of each person in attendance are heard during meetings.

### 2.4. Webpage of the University Studies Committee
The Committee has a website at: https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/studies-committee.htm which features the Terms of Reference, membership and dates of meetings.

### 2.5. SharePoint workspace of the University Studies Committee
The Committee has a private SharePoint workspace at: https://heriotwatt.sharepoint.com/sites/registry-ws-universitystudiescommittee where the Committee papers are held and features the Terms of Reference, membership and dates of meetings

### 2.6. SharePoint page of the Programme Management Board (Business Approval Process)
The Board has a SharePoint page at: https://heriotwatt.sharepoint.com/sites/registry-qualityassurance/SitePages/approvals.aspx where the Programme Management Board papers are held and features the Terms of Reference, membership.

## 3. Operation of the University Studies Committee

### 3.1. Schedule of Meetings
The Committee usually meets seven times per academic session, although additional meetings may be scheduled for more detailed consideration of particular items or for the consideration of items that require immediate consideration.

The January, June and September meetings dates are set to consider programme proposals to be submitted to the Dubai accrediting authority (KHDA).

A schedule of meetings for each academic session is issued prior to the start of each session; each schedule lists the meetings for two academic sessions.

The start time is typically 9.15 am (UK time), with an expected duration of approximately two hours, which may be extended if more detailed discussion of particular items is required.

Cancellation, rescheduling or inclusion of additional meetings will be notified to members by the Clerk as soon as possible, and normally within not less than five working days.

### 3.2. Typical Meeting Structure
The order of business at each of the Committee's meetings typically proceeds as follows:
- Welcome and Apologies
- Minutes of Previous Meeting
- Matters Arising
- Chair's Business
- New, modifying and withdrawing of undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes for approval
- Any Other Competent Business
- Date of Next Meeting

### 3.3. Agenda and Papers
Agenda items considered by the Committee are primarily School-specific proposals.  In addition, the Committee may generate its own agenda items, identifying areas of policy or procedure related to Undergraduate and Postgraduate taught programmes and courses of study.

#### 3.3.1. Notifying agenda items
The agenda is typically set two weeks in advance of each meeting: possible items should be notified to the Clerk of the Committee by no later than 10 days before the meeting. Items notified to the Clerk after this date will be included on the agenda only with the prior agreement of the Chair otherwise, they will be held over until the next meeting. Tabled papers will not normally be considered, as there is insufficient time for consideration and informed discussion.

The Chair and the Clerk will determine whether notified items are matters for the Committee or for another of the University's Committees.

Members are requested to identify all matters to the Clerk in advance of the meeting, including any urgent, last minute issues, in preference to tabling papers or raising matters not previously notified to the Clerk under the 'Any Other Competent Business' item.

#### 3.3.2. Preparation of Papers
Documents are prepared by the Clerk, usually in conjunction with other individuals, such as:  the Chair and academic colleagues in Schools who are submitting proposals. All programme proposals are accessible via the Global Curriculum Management System.

#### 3.3.3. Circulation of agenda and papers
The agenda and papers are made available to members a week in advance of each meeting. These are available on the SharePoint site and proposal are available via the Global Curriculum Management system. Notification about the meeting will be emailed to members along with a summary of proposals to be scrutinised at the meeting, identifying reviewers for the programme proposals.

Unapproved minutes of the previous meeting are included in the main circulation; a version will have been already issued approximately two weeks after the relevant meeting.

Additional circulations, typically including 'to follow' papers, are kept to a minimum, but on some occasions are unavoidable. Every effort will be made to ensure that all such papers are issued electronically before the meeting, so that members have sufficient opportunity to consider them in advance.

3.4. **Scrutiny of Programme Approvals**

All Committee members are expected to read and comment on proposals for new, modifications and withdrawal of programmes.  However, to ensure thorough scrutiny and to make best use of the meeting time, each proposal is assigned to specific members of the Committee to review prior to the meeting.  Reviewers are chosen by the Clerk and in such way to ensure that the task is shared equally among Committee members over the course of the session.  Typically, two reviewers are assigned to each proposal, based on expertise where feasible and are not expected to review a proposal from the member's own School. Where a proposal is being re-submitted to the Committee, the original reviewers are generally re-assigned.

Reviewers are expected to leave their comments within the Global Curriculum Management system at least 48 hours prior to each meeting.

Once a proposal has been scrutinised at the meeting, a decision on approval is taken.  If not approved, the Committee is likely to request further information from the school, or particular actions, either to provide clarity or to strengthen the proposal.  The Committee may agree that Chair's action be taken to approve the programme once all of the points raised have been satisfactorily addressed, in which case the school submits amendments to the Chair via the Clerk.

In some cases, the requested amendments are more extensive and require re-submission of the proposal to a subsequent meeting of the Committee.

The most common approval decisions relating to programme proposals taken by the Studies Committee are as follows:

- Members approve the proposal
- Members do not approve the proposal and request that revised documentation and responses to the Committee's comments are submitted for consideration at the next meeting
- Members agree to approve the proposal in principle, subject to the Chair receiving via the Clerk, satisfactory revisions/responses addressing the Committee's comments.

3.5. **Decision Making and voting**

The Committee's remit allows it to make decisions on, and thereby approve, proposals related to new; modified and withdrawal of programmes.  All decisions are reported to the Senate (through minutes submitted to the University Committee for Quality and Standards).

3.6. **Non-Attendance**
www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/secretariat/attendance-policy-senate.pdf
In order to fulfil its responsibilities effectively the Committee is reliant on its membership maintaining a high level of attendance at meetings. If members are absent from three consecutive meetings without good reason, this may result in the recommendation that the membership is revoked and the Senate or the School appoints a replacement member.

Anyone unable to attend a meeting should notify the Clerk in advance. In the event that a member is unable to attend a meeting, the Chair may approve an alternate.

If a member is unable to attend a meeting where decisions are expected to be taken, then he or she is invited to submit views in writing prior to the meeting.

The Committee will maintain a record of attendance at each of its meetings and will include this within the final report of the session to the Senate.

In the absence of the Chair, and the Vice-Chair from any given meeting, those members present shall appoint one of their number as Chair for that particular meeting. In the absence of the Clerk, the Academic Registrar will provide a substitute Clerk.

3.7. **Minutes and Action Points**
The minutes of each meeting are produced by the Clerk and signed off by the Chair. Minutes are circulated electronically to Committee members usually within two weeks of the meeting. Members are invited to notify any factual errors in the minutes to the Clerk before the next meeting; these will be announced by the Chair at the next meeting prior to the Committee being invited to accept the minutes as an accurate record.

3.8. **Reporting to Schools and Professional Services**
As part of its ethos of engagement across the institution, discussions and decisions related to the Committee must be reported to Schools and Professional Services. Such reporting is the responsibility of the representative on the Committee. All Studies Committee decisions and discussions should be communicated widely; paperwork and outcomes of debates are very rarely identified as confidential.

3.9. **Transacting Committee Business**
3.9.1. **Papers for the Committee**
Individuals, who would like to present a paper to the Committee for consideration should contact the Clerk in the first instance. Such papers are primarily programme proposals. The Clerk will advise the sponsor of details, such as the meeting at which the paper will be considered and of the format of the paper. In the case of programme proposals these must be entered into the programme approval system.

Non-members should communicate with the Committee via the Clerk, rather than emailing the Committee directly. In this way, there is a consistent line of communication and a means of ensuring that only matters of relevance are circulated to the Committee.

3.9.2. **Business by Correspondence**
At times it is necessary to complete some of the Committee's business by correspondence, for example if there is urgency to have a certain programme

considered and approved within a set time period, it may be necessary for this to take place by correspondence rather than at a scheduled Committee meeting.

4. **Regulations, Codes of Practice, Policies and Procedures**

The University Regulations are available on the website (https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/about/profile/governance/ordinances-regulations.htm).  An extensive series of policies, procedures, guidelines and codes of practice are available on the website (https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/learning-teaching/policy-bank.htm).

5. **Process of Approval for the University Studies Committee**

5.1. **Quality Assurance Framework**

Although the University is an independent institution, it receives public funding from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and must, therefore, abide by the conditions of grant as set out by the SFC.

The SFC requires the University to have formal processes to ensure that academic standards are secure and the quality of the student learning is maintained.  In common with the rest to the UK HE sector, the University has three major activities (collectively referred to as the "Quality Assurance Framework") designed to assure quality:

- Design and approval of courses and programmes
- Annual Monitoring of delivery of programmes
- Periodic review by external peers

Courses and programmes are designed by subject specialists in Schools.  The approval of programmes is the responsibility of the Senate.

5.2. **External Reference Points**

When academic judgements are being made, a wide range of external reference points are used to ensure that the quality and standards of the University are in line with the rest of the UK.  This is important to ensure that the UK retains its global position as an attractive place for students to study.

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), working with the Higher Education Sector, has developed a set of key reference documents:

- Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework
- Subject Benchmark Statements
- Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in UK HE

There are similar reference guides from the governments of the non-UK countries in which the University delivers programmes, requirements of professional institutions (both UK and non-UK) as well as other good practice guides published by student bodies, the QAA, Funding Councils etc.

5.3. **Management of Academic Standards**

Academic Standards are assured and managed by a number of processes.

> **Academic standards** refer to the academic level and the amount of the knowledge that a student must have learned before he or she can receive a degree (or credit).  These standards should be broadly comparable across subjects and institutions.

The Studies Committee is responsible for ensuring that the assessment policy for a programme is of appropriate standard.

5.4. **Management of Academic Quality**
The quality of taught programmes delivered to students is assured by a number of different processes. The first process is approval which is the responsibility of the Studies Committee and which ensures that there is a clear intention to offer a programme that meets the University expectations.

There is then a series of regular monitoring processes to ensure that what is being delivered is what was approved. These include monitoring of performance metrics such as student performance, student satisfaction, School self-assessment reported through annual monitoring as well as reviews of professional services such as the Library and IT.

The third process comprise periodic review, which are undertaken by peers from outside the School and the institution. Periodic review includes both the academic and non-academic functions. Such reviews provide an external validation of the quality.

The quality assurance processes are designed for the specific types of programme and methods of delivery adopted by the University. Therefore, the Senate (and its Committees) should not approve a new type of activity just because a School has put forward a comprehensive proposal, without first ensuring that the monitoring and evaluation processes are in place to ensure the quality of the programme. This restriction is most apparent with the types of partnership that the University is permitted to enter into.

5.5. **Academic Approval of Disciplines, Programmes and Courses**
Academic approval is the responsibility of the Senate. The Senate retains authority for approval of new disciplines. The Studies Committee a standing sub-committee of the UCQS, has delegate approval of new/modified/withdrawal of programmes. The schools approve most types of new/modified/withdrawal of courses and minor modifications to programmes. The purpose of approval by Senate and SC is to ensure that:
- Disciplines/Programmes meet the expectations of the external reference points (typically credit level, degree title, broad curriculum)
- Disciplines/Programmes meet the requirements of the University – specific curriculum content, methods of assessment, development of HWU Graduate Attributes (including employability skills), alignment across all locations and modes of study

Consideration of a programme for approval requires SC to scrutinise the following aspects in particular:
- Coherence, currency and completeness of the academic content
- Consistency of programmes with the University's requirements, as articulated through the key principles of Restructuring the Academic Year (RAY)
- Assurance of academic standards
- Compliance with the University's Code of Practice for the Management of Multi-Location, Multi-Mode Programmes
- Study in a language other than English (except for languages programmes)

Although responsibility for approving the majority of new and modified courses rests with Schools, Academic Quality must be notified (this is done via the Global Curriculum Management System).

5.6. **Academic and Business Approval**

In addition to academic approval through the Studies Committee, new programmes (and sometimes modifications to programmes) require business approval. The University has developed a [Business Approval Process](#), which will be overseen by the Programme Management Board, a Board of the University Executive. It is intended that business approval of new and withdrawn programmes will precede, but be aligned with, the academic approval process, which is overseen by the University Studies Committee on behalf of the University Committee for Quality and Standards Committee and the Senate.

UE approval is to ensure that the University has sufficient resources to deliver the programme and that any partner meets the University requirements to share in the delivery of the programme. UE approval also ensures that the risks have been properly assessed and there is sufficient demand from students for the programme to be sustainable. Resources includes space, staff, learning materials, IT facilities, laboratories.

Some aspects of business approval are delegated to Executive Deans, while others are delegated to specific Senior Officers. Exceptionally, business approval may require the approval of the Court, e.g. a new campus.

5.7. **Scrutiny by the Academic Quality**

There is a formal role for Academic Quality staff (Curriculum Management Approval Team) to ensure that the programme management system is properly completed and that matters such as levels and credits have been properly accounted for.

6. **General Requirements of Programmes**
   6.1. **UK Higher Education Sector**

   The Scottish Funding Council and the Quality Assurance Agency require that:

   - All awards and their titles will be located in the SCQF framework
   - The academic level of study will be recorded using the SCQF level criteria
   - Credits will be based on a notional 10 hours of learning for 1 credit
   - Student workload will be based on a notional 40 hours per week
   - Postgraduate programmes will be based on 30 weeks of study at 40 hours per week giving 1200 student effort hours (SEH) or 120 SCQF credits
   - Postgraduate Masters programmes are based on a 45 week year corresponding to 1800 SHE or 180 SCQF credits
   - Graduate Apprentice programmes will be designed, development and delivered in accordance with SFC Guidance for University Graduate Apprenticeship places
   - The content of all named awards will be consistent with the expectations of the national Subject Benchmark Statements
   - The University will undertake its business in a way that is consistent with the QAA Code of Practice

   The University complies with all these requirements, except in on case: the location and mode of study are not specified on the transcript and/or degree certificate issued by HWU. The

University's rationale for this divergence from the QAA Code of Practice is based on the fundamental principle that HWU degrees are equivalent irrespective of mode or location of study.

6.2. **Non-UK Governments**

The Committee should be aware that proposals need to be approved by KHDA and MQA before being delivered in Dubai and Malaysia.

In any proposal, this set of requirements should be made explicit in the paperwork being considered by the Studies Committee, as well as what in-country accreditation will need to be sought.

6.3. **Professional Institutions**

In addition to in-country recognition, the University seeks accreditation by the relevant UK or internal professional bodies in accordance with their standard procedures (in line with the University's normal practice. Such organisations are referred to collectively as Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs).

Programmes to be offered overseas, either at a campus or through a partner, should also be accredited by relevant PSRB; the UK accreditation does not automatically extend to delivery in other locations. All approval paperwork should include details of the PSRB as well as confirmation that accreditation is being sought for all locations of delivery. In some cases, this accreditation may impose requirements on the curriculum, award criteria, assessment or method of teaching. In such proposals, this set of requirements should be made explicit in the paperwork being considered by SC.

In many cases, there will be accreditation both by a UK and overseas institution. In addition, overseas authorities may require particular programmes to be accredited by the relevant in-country PSRB.

Academic Quality maintains a formal record of accreditation by PSRBs, and PSRB reports are considered annually by UCQS.

7. **Guidance for the Approval of Programmes**

7.1. **Introduction**

This section provides advice to SC members on the criteria to be used when making judgements about approval of programmes.

7.2. **Consistency of the Programme with the University's Portfolio**

All proposals should make clear that the programme (whether new or modified) is consistent with the overall portfolio of the University. This is confirmed at Programme Management Board.

SC should have a view on whether the award title is appropriate, particularly if similar, but slightly different, titles have been introduced for various versions of a programme, although the content, assessment etc are almost identical. The Committee should operate on the agreed principle that the same title should be used; different locations or different option choice are not sufficient justification. Professional institutions may, however, require different titles as part of their accreditation criteria.

7.3. **Implementation of University Expectations for Programme Content**
Besides considering the Structure Content of a programme there are certain criteria which all non-research programmes are required to incorporate and specific skills which all students must be given the opportunity to acquire and develop.

In addition, the University expects the content of all programmes to have been informed by national Subject Benchmark Statements and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional institutions (PSRBs) and overseas government authorities.

8. **External Information:**
A range of useful information on sector-wide developments related to undergraduate provision, particularly learning and teaching, can be found on the following websites:

- **Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF):** https://scqf.org.uk/

- **Competition and Markets Authority (CMA):** https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/competition-and-markets-authority

- **Scottish Funding Council (SFC):** https://www.sfc.ac.uk/**;** for sections related to learning and teaching, see tabs on the SFC home page

- **Scottish Funding Council (SFC)** Guidance for University Graduate Apprenticeship places. University Graduate Apprenticeship places 2021-22 (sfc.ac.uk)

- **Quality Assurance Agency (QAA):**https://www.qaa.ac.uk/; for the Scottish section of the website, see https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/about-us

9. **Academic Management Structures at Multiple Campuses**
https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/academic-registry/quality/learning-teaching/learning-and-teaching-briefing-papers.htm

The AMS comprise Terms of Reference and Remits for the following:
• School Studies Committee: Terms of Reference
• School Learning and Teaching Committee: Terms of Reference
• Programme Board of Studies: Terms of Reference
• Director of Learning and Teaching: Remit
• Director of Academic Quality: Remit
• Senior Programme Director of Studies/School Programme Director of Studies: Remit
• Year Co-ordinator: Remit
• Senior Course Leader/Course Leader: Remit