

ACADEMIC QUALITY



Student Guides

External Examiner Reports and SSLCs

Summary

Following an external review by the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland in April 2024, Heriot-Watt has been asked to improve student awareness of, and access to, External Examiner Reports. Student representatives have a formal opportunity to consider External Examiner Reports and School responses through the School Studies Committee. This Guide for Students provides some suggestions for Student-Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) in relation to External Examiner Reports.

External Influences on Programmes and Courses

In design, approval and review, HWU programmes and courses are shaped by a **wide range of external influences**, as shown. A **short overview** of each of these external influences can be found in the visual below.

External influences demonstrate how the University ensures that programmes are current and skills are relevant, relating to real-world contexts. It's very useful for students to be aware of all these external influences.

In this Student Guide, the focus is on **External Examiners**.



EXTERNALITY IN COURSES AND PROGRAMMES

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|  | EMPLOYERS | Employer engagement is central to the design and delivery of programmes at HWU, ensuring curriculum currency and relevance of student skills. Employers may be engaged as Industry Advisors, Guest Speakers or Alumni. Some programmes provide work-based learning through, for example, placements or internships. Graduate Apprenticeship programmes enable employees to gain a degree while working. |
|  | ALUMNI | Alumni (ie HWU graduates) can continue their engagement with HWU by bringing real world context to the curriculum, providing positive role models and opening up access to networks. Some programmes provide career mentoring opportunities, partnering students with alumni, to develop skills and opportunities. |
|  | PSRBs | Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) are organisations involved in the approval, monitoring and review of programmes leading to a professional qualification. Through formal visits, they ensure that HWU programmes meet national standards in the profession. PSRB accreditation can lead to membership or exemption from professional exams. More than 250 HWU programmes are accredited by PSRBs. |
|  | INDUSTRY ADVISORS | Many HWU programmes have an Industrial Advisory Board (IAB), where academic staff and experienced professionals come together to discuss the curriculum, teaching, skills and research. IABs provide access to up-to-date practice, advise on current trends and help ensure that the curriculum and employability activities are relevant. IABs can also support career mentoring programmes, guest speakers and preparations for accreditation. |
|  | GUEST SPEAKERS | High-profile industry/business speakers give valuable insights into current trends and topical issues, provide models for leadership and can inspire students in career preparations. Guest speakers enable students to connect classroom learning with real-world experience. |
|  | EXTERNAL REVIEWS | HWU is reviewed as an entire institution every five years by an external team appointed by in-country government bodies (in Scotland, Dubai and Malaysia). These reviews, which involve meetings with students and staff, assure the quality and standards of the University's provision, and decide on how effectively HWU is enhancing learning, teaching and the student learning experience. |
|  | EXTERNAL SUBJECT SPECIALISTS ON INTERNAL REVIEWS | All disciplines at HWU are reviewed internally every six years by a team of staff (from another School), students and external subject specialists. External team members ensure that the discipline is comparable with other universities and, through ideas and experience from their own institution, they contribute to enhancing the discipline. |
|  | EXTERNAL EXAMINERS | Every programme leading to an award at HWU has an External Examiner. These are subject specialists from other universities or from industry who provide an independent view on quality and academic standards and on student performance in comparison with similar programmes offered elsewhere. External Examiner reports are available on Discipline Sites on Canvas. |

The Role of External Examiners

Similar to all UK universities, every programme leading to an award at HWU has an **External Examiner**.

- These are subject specialists from other universities or from industry who provide an independent view on quality and academic standards and on student performance in comparison with similar programmes offered elsewhere.
- At HWU, they have an additional role: **comparing the performance of programmes offered on more than one campus or online or through a partnership.**

At the end of each academic year, each External Examiner submits a written report. Schools and the University use these reports to highlight positive practice and to identify areas for enhancement.

Students and External Examiners

Details of the External Examiner for each Programme are published each year, as part of the University's public information set.

Who are the External Examiners on each Programme?

Students can find out who the External Examiner for each programme is:

- via related documents at the end of the [Exams and Assessment](#) site;
- by accessing [the list](#) directly

External Examiners often arrange to **meet with students** (usually Final Year Undergraduates and Taught Postgraduates) virtually or in person to help inform their views about the student learning experience on programmes.

For all students, having **access to External Examiner Reports** and **being aware of key points made by External Examiners** can provide:

- reassurance about the quality, standards and currency of programmes;
- insight into how programme compares to similar programmes at other universities.

Additionally, meeting with External Examiners provides students with an opportunity to comment on their own experiences of the programme.

Student Access to External Examiner Reports

Students can access External Examiner Reports:

- through Canvas Discipline Sites;
- by emailing externalexaminerstaught@hw.ac.uk

External Examiner Reports and Student Representatives

Student Representatives, both those with University-level roles and those with School-level roles, are involved in considering External Examiner Reports to help identify positive practice to be shared and areas for action to be take forward.

Student Representatives and External Examiner Reports

Students Representatives engage with External Examiner Reports:

- as School/Departmental Officers/Class Reps at School Studies Committees and Student-Staff Liaison Committees (*programme-level reports*);
- as Presidents and Vice-Presidents (Academic) at University Committees for Learning & Teaching and for Quality & Standards (*Annual Summary of all External Examiner Reports*)

Student Representatives can use the reports to respond to, and reassure, their peers if there are any questions about quality, academic standards or comparability with other universities. They also provide a useful cross-reference point for action if similar examples of good practice or similar issues are being highlighted through, for example, feedback from students.

External Examiner Reports and Student-Staff Liaison Committees

The Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) provides a forum for student representatives, academic staff and professional services staff to come together to discuss any matters related to programmes, courses and the student learning experience. The University has [a framework in place for SSLCs](#).

Agendas for SSLCs will vary from School to School, but typically include matters related to:

- Curriculum; • Resources, Environment & Technologies; • Learning & Teaching Delivery; • Progression & Achievement; • Assessment & Feedback; • Community & Belonging; • Student Partnership; • Support & Guidance; • Organisation & Management.

The University is keen to raise student awareness of External Examiner Reports and how they are used. Therefore, **External Examiner Reports will form part of the updates (either verbal or written) from academic staff** at relevant SSLC meetings, focusing on:

- explaining the role of External Examiners;
- highlighting that reports can be accessed on Canvas discipline sites;
- summarising key points made by External Examiners;
- providing an overview of School's response to External Examiners;
- discussing any matters emerging from the above if relevant to the SSLC.

(note: responses to External Examiner Reports do not require to be considered by SSLCs before going to the School Studies Committee; rather, the SSLC provides an opportunity to raise awareness of issues highlighted by External Examiners and to summarise the School's response, and then to have a discussion if there any matters relevant for the SSLC).



SSLC and External Examiner Reports

Students Representatives at SSLCs can engage with External Examiner Reports by:

- reviewing reports on Canvas in advance of the meeting;
- contributing to the discussion on any emerging actions;
- reporting back to peers on relevant points related to programmes, courses and the student learning experience.