

ACADEMIC QUALITY



Learning and Teaching Policy

Types of Assessment: Policy + Administrative Definitions

As the University has adapted its types of assessments in response to, and following the transition out of, the pandemic, there has been a need to clarify and define different types of assessment for administrative/management and central scheduling purposes, particularly as some pandemic-related assessment types have been removed. This guidance summarises the relevant sections within 2023/24 Assessment Guidance, as approved by the Learning and Teaching Academic Operations Committee (LTAOC) on 19 April 2023 and 17 May 2023.

The information below should be read in conjunction with the [Heriot-Watt Assessment Platforms: Staff Guide](#), as produced by the Learning and Teaching Academy, which outlines in full the University's approved coursework and exam platforms/approaches. A handy summary is provided in Appendix 1 of the Guide.

Assessment Types: Regulations and Policies

The University's policies and Regulations for taught programmes (eg [Regulation A4 Courses, Programmes and Assessment](#)) do not prohibit diversity in form and timing of assessment, and the constraints are only as follows:

- All programmes of study (including HW Online) shall contain a balance of various forms of assessment, unless specifically approved by the University Studies Committee;
- In-person, invigilated exams shall be of two hours (for 15 credit courses) or three hours in duration (for 30 credit courses), unless approved by the Global Director of Student Experience + Academic Registrar;
- Exams shall be held in a scheduled Exams and Assessment Diet;
- Coursework can be scheduled throughout teaching and exams/assessment periods.
- Course Leaders are responsible for ensuring that all required reasonable adjustments are made for students who require them.
- All courses shall provide opportunities for formative assessment (not credit-bearing) and formative feedback to support learning (particularly critical when courses are assessed by a single, end-of-course assessment for credit);
- Assessments contributing to the overall final mark/grade shall assess the specified learning outcomes;
- The forms of assessment and weighting shall be specified in the Course Descriptor and as recorded in GCM.

Therefore, there is scope for Schools to continue to offer a diverse array of assessment without being constrained by institutional regulations or policies. For example, coursework assignments can be scheduled for completion in an Exams Diet; there is no requirement that only coursework which has replaced an exam can be included in an Exam Diet.

Assessment Types: Policy and Administrative/Management Definitions

Policy Statement on the Administrative/Management Definitions of Assessment Types

For the purposes of clarity for students and for staff involved in the management of assessment, **assessment should be differentiated as one of two types: Coursework or Examination**. This terminology should be used consistently in all staff and student communications and publications.

The approved definitions and scheduling of assessment (ie the practical arrangements for organising and managing assessments, and not the pedagogical definitions) on taught programmes, are as follows:

Assessment Type	Timing	Responsibility
Coursework	a) Throughout the semester and during Exams and Assessment Diets, including timed assessments during Exams and Assessment Diets: terminology to be used: "Coursework"	a) Schools
	b) If Coursework is scheduled in the Exams/Assessment Diet and is less than 48 hours duration, this will be timetabled by RAS to avoid clashes with in-person exams. The scheduling of all other coursework is the responsibility of the Course Leader	b) RAS

	c) HW Online “Final Online Assessments” (this terminology is restricted to HW Online Courses only) during Exams and Assessment Diets	c) RAS
Examination	Exam and Assessment Diet	RAS

The type of coursework known as Timed Online Coursework (TOCs) and the type of exam known as “Take Home Exam”/“Take Home Open Book Exam” have been removed.

Name	Definition
Coursework	<p>Definition as outlined in this <i>University Policy on Assessment Types</i>:</p> <p>a) Coursework undertaken and submitted throughout the Semester, during Teaching Weeks and during the Exam and Assessment Diets. This coursework can include timed limited coursework completed on Canvas or Gradescope during the Exam and Assessment Diets. All arrangements for, and scheduling of, coursework is the School’s responsibility, with the following exception: if coursework is scheduled in the Exams/Assessment Diet and is less than 48 hours duration, this will be timetabled by RAS to avoid clashes with in-person exams.</p> <p>b) HW Online Final Online Assessments scheduled and completed online during the Exam and Assessment Diet – this is RAS’ responsibility. This type of coursework is: not invigilated, time limited, online, open book. Response is submitted online on completion (via EBS Student Portal or Canvas). This type of final online assessment (replacing “Timed Online Coursework” used in 2022/23) is restricted to HW Online Courses/Programmes only.</p>
Examination	<p>There are two types:</p> <p>a) Invigilated, time limited [2 or 3 hours], in-person [at an approved exam venue], open or closed book, hand-written response submitted to invigilator on completion;</p> <p>b) Invigilated, time limited [2 or 3 hours], in-person [at an approved computer lab], open book¹, conducted and submitted online via Canvas.</p>
Exam and Assessment Diet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> September Semester: Weeks 13 and 14; January Semester: Weeks 13-15 (April break is not counted in number of weeks; from 2024/25, this will be Weeks 13 + 14*); May Semester/Reassessment Diet: Weeks 13 and 14 (from 2024/25, this will be Week 13*) <p>* reflecting the approved changes to the Structure of the Academic Year</p>

Assessment Types: Coursework

Coursework comprises assignments set during or at the end of a course (including assignments scheduled for submission or completion in the Exam and Assessment Diet) to assess one or more of the learning outcomes. Coursework includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- written assignment, including essay or report;
- dissertation (an extended piece of written work, often the write-up of a final-year project);
- portfolio (a collection of work that relates to a given topic or theme, which has been produced over a period of time);
- project output (output from project work, often of a practical nature, other than a dissertation or written report);
- set exercise (questions or tasks designed to assess how knowledge is applied, and analytical, problem-solving or evaluative skills);
- class tests/quizzes (written or computer-based) of knowledge or interpretation.

All coursework is managed exclusively by each School: coursework scheduled throughout the semester, including coursework due for submission in Exams and Assessment Diets; coursework scheduled for completion during Exams and Assessment Diet, including time-limited coursework. *The only exceptions are:*

- 1) *If Coursework is scheduled in the Exams/Assessment Diet and is less than 48 hours duration, this will be timetabled by RAS to avoid clashes with in-person exams;*
- 2) *the HW Online Final Online Assessments, which are restricted to HW Online Courses/Programmes and are managed by RAS (see Arrangements for [Off-Campus Assessment 2023/24](#)).*

All online coursework managed by Schools should be provided via Canvas or Gradescope. See the [Heriot-Watt Assessment Platforms: Staff Guide](#) for full details on coursework types and approved platforms.

¹ At present it is not possible to remove or limit access to the internet except in very limited circumstances; any online invigilated online exams must, therefore, be designed as open book exams.

Schools should ensure that, in their management and scheduling of assessment, that coursework throughout the semester is proportionate and balanced. See [Policy on Coursework Scheduling and Submission](#).

Assessment Types: Exams

As stated above, all forms “Take-Home Exams”/Take Home Open Book Exams” which were used during the pandemic have been withdrawn.

The term “exams” refers exclusively to the pre-pandemic format of a 2-3 hour, in person, invigilated assessment held in an approved exam venue. The key difference from pre-pandemic is that the exam need not be restricted to hand-written format, but can be conducted online (in an invigilated, University approved computer lab) and is open book, hosted on Canvas¹. Both types of exams will continue to be scheduled by RAS.

See the [Heriot-Watt Assessment Platforms: Staff Guide](#) for full details on exam types and approved platforms.

Timing and Duration of Exams; Submission of Exams Papers

- 1) The standard approach for both types of exams (hand-written or completed online) is 2 hours’ duration for a 15-credit course or 3 hours for a 30-credit or larger course. Exceptions to these standard durations may be considered for courses with non-standard credit-ratings or if a case is accepted for pedagogical reasons. However, there will be no duration greater than 3 hours. As per the University Regulations, requests for different durations of exams should be made to the Global Director of Student Experience and Academic Registrar.
- 2) For students with a learning profile, arrangements will be made in conjunction with the [Disability Service](#) for additional time and/or specific venues. Student-related information on [Exams \(and Coursework\) Adjustments](#) is available on the Disability Service’s webpages.
- 3) Following a temporary suspension during the pandemic, the University’s [Policies and Procedures for Examinations in Different Timezones](#) were re-introduced from 2022/23. As a consequence, exams will be aligned to one of two time zones. For scheduling reasons (such as limited venue capacity), the timezone alignment could be formed as follows (provided here as an example): 1) *UK/Dubai (TZ1) and Malaysia (TZ2)*; 2) *UK (TZ1), Dubai/Malaysia (TZ2)*; 3) *UK/Malaysia (TZ1), Dubai (TZ2)*.
- 4) A separate exam paper will normally be required for each timezone in order to mitigate risks related to academic misconduct. This requirement applies to all courses in all years, including qualifying years. If an identical exam paper is to be used (for example, if required by a PSRB), then there must be an identical start time for the exam across all locations will be 09.00 UK time and 17.00 Malaysia (16.00 BST).
- 5) Arrangements and dates for submission of exams papers will be specified by the Exams Team within Academic Operations. Reassessment papers must be submitted at the same time as the December or April Diet exam paper.
- 6) Arrangements for the collection and marking of exam papers and the processing of results will be specified by Academic Operations.

Assessment Types: Guidance on Communicating Assessment Types to Students

As is standard practice, Schools should clearly communicate all assessment types to students (eg via overviews on Canvas or the Programme Handbook or Course Descriptors on School sites), but should pay particular attention to any changed arrangements, particularly as Schools are likely to be engaged in assessment review and redesign, due to the institutional [Transforming Assessment/Embedding Assessment for Learning](#) activity and the transition to shorter assessment diets as part of the revised [Structure of the Academic Year](#). Schools should also ensure that students are aware of all assessment deadlines, including their own responsibilities and any penalties for late submission.

Students might reasonably expect the Exam and Assessment Diet to be kept free of coursework assignment deadlines or coursework being set for completion in this period; however, with a move towards fewer in-person exams, it is more practical for Schools to use the full semester (including exam and assessment diets) for spacing out assessment deadlines. However, Schools should take steps to ensure that coursework is scheduled in such a way as to minimise clashing and bunching of assessment deadlines, taking into account the full range of coursework and exams across the programme. (see [Policy on Coursework Scheduling and Submission](#)).

Further Information

- The [Student Exams and Assessment Website](#) provide comprehensive information for staff and students on examinations, including timetables.
- The LTA has produced a number of student-focused guides as part of its [Assessment and Feedback Resources](#), eg:
 - [Helping students prepare for exams](#);
 - [Supporting international students in assessment](#);
 - [Helping students appreciate what's expected of them in assessment](#).
- The Skills Hub provides extensive [assessment-related advice for students](#).

Volume of Assessment and Assessment Review/Redesign

Feedback from students and from some External Examiners as well as anecdotal evidence at various committees have highlighted that overassessment 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).

Volume of assessment could become an even more critical matter: in 2023/24, the University will move to a 3-week Exam and Assessment Diet in April (currently 4 weeks), and then transition to a 2-week Diet in April and a 5-day Diet in August from 2024/25 (as part of the revised [Structure of the Academic Year](#)). In an effort to reduce, the number of in-person exams in these two periods, there could be an unintended consequential increase in the volume of other forms of assessment.

The University's strategic [Transforming Assessment/Embedding Assessment for Learning](#) initiative is designed to assist Schools in redesigning assessment, including addressing issues related to overassessment. The Learning and Teaching Academy provides a wide range of support for Schools in planning for and designing assessment, including designing an appropriate balance of assessment. Teaching teams refreshing course and assessment design are encouraged to make use of these resources:

- [Curriculum and Assessment Design Toolkit: Assessment](#)
- [Assessment and Feedback](#)
- [LTA Support for Schools](#)

The LTA updates this information each academic year, providing a suite of resources and support for teaching teams in preparation of the start of the session. Check out the LTA SharePoint Hub for [current information](#). Further support and guidance are available from the LTA: LTAcademy@hw.ac.uk