

FAQs and Useful Tips

for Undergraduates and Postgraduate Taught Students Starting in the Department of Actuarial Mathematics and Statistics

Tip 1:

Please take some time to visit

<https://www.macs.hw.ac.uk/students/ams/>,

where you can find a list of all programmes (both undergraduate and postgraduate) in our department.

It is very necessary to go to the webpage of your programme and have a careful look at the programme handbook, which contain most information you need to know about your programme.

On that webpage, you can also find the programme director (post graduates) and year co-ordinators (under graduates) who are in charge of the administration work in your programme.

Below the programme director, you may find a list of courses (both mandatory and optional) that are available in your programme. Click on one of the courses, you will have a webpage of a full description of this course. It is very important that you read this description before you enrol on this course formally, as well as the handbook of your programme. More information should also be available on VISION.

Moreover, there are some other useful links on the right-hand side of the webpage “Personal Tutor Information” and “The famous AMS formula sheet” etc.

All MSc programmes, including programme handbooks, can be found via

<https://www.macs.hw.ac.uk/students/ams/pg-programmes/>

All BSc programmes, including programme handbooks, can be found via

<https://www.macs.hw.ac.uk/students/ams/ug-programmes/>

The link for “MSc Project & Dissertation Guidelines” from the School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences

<http://www.macs.hw.ac.uk/~yjc32/project/student-notes/MSc-thesis/MSc-thesis-Guidelines/MScProjectDissertationGuidelines.pdf>

Please note that, these links above might be renewed in future.

Tip 2.

Each student has his/her personal tutor, who is supposed to be your first contact when you have general questions on your study or need advice. You should be able to find who your tutor is on “Student Portal”. If this information is not there, please contact MACS School Office. Starting from 2020, the tutor will set up groups for his/her tutees via Teams. You can also login to Teams using your HWU account to see this.

You can also contact the director of your programme for questions on studying such as choosing and changing courses. For undergraduate students, there are year coordinators who can also help you regarding the study in a specific academic year in your programme.

For specific questions on courses, you can always contact the course lecturer directly.

Questions on courses/studying.

Q1. I have submitted the form for changing course, but I still have no access to this course on Vision; so I do not have the slides and other materials. What I should do?

It could take a few days for school office to collect all application forms and make changes in the system. You can directly contact the course lecturer to have the slides and other teaching materials used in the class. Also, the lecturer can add you as a user to the course on Vision manually.

Q2. Sometimes, the lecturer will update the files or add new ones on Vision without notifying us. I do not always know which one is the most-updated. Can the lecturer show the time when making the updates?

Usually, lecturers will make an announcement on Vision to notify the updates. They may also tell you they are going to make updates at class.

Q3. I heard that, at The University of Edinburgh (UoE), there are so-called "extra work hours" for each course, which indicates how long you have to spend on studying this course in addition to the class time. Do we have this at HWU?

Yes, if you check on the information of the course, you can see each course has a SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) level, which indicates the level of difficulty, and the number of credit points indicates the length of time it takes to complete. On average, one SCQF credit point represents 10 hours of learning time. However, you may have different views on the difficulty of courses due to the relevant background on the courses you have already built up in your previous study career.

Q4. Some reference books/literature given by the lecturer are too general (e.g. very long, diversified topics, hard to read etc.) for studying this course. Is it possible that the lecturer gives more details and guides on how to read these books?

Some courses are taught from the School of Social Sciences (SoSS), and the teaching style is different from courses taught by MACS. For instance, in the courses of the AMS department, lecture notes are usually complete, and define the course, and recommended books are supplementary. Often students would have no need to look at a recommended text. By contrast, in the social sciences it is normal for a course to be defined by a recommended text, and the book defines the course. The lectures notes might not be not complete, and consist of guidance about important points and insights. It is absolutely necessary to read the book and to realise that all of its content (or all the content in specified chapters) is examinable.

Q5. Can the lecturer provide some suggestions on how to make a study plan for the course? We would like to have more detailed and practical guides for studying.

You can also consult your personal tutor for advice on how to set up a study plan. For a specific course, you can ask the lecturer for such advice. You can also contact them if you have any difficulty or problem during the study.

Q6. *I heard that the dissertation can be replaced by an internship in an industry company. Please tell me how to apply and what is the requirement of the application?*

Please have a look at “MSc Project & Dissertation Guidelines” from the School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences website which clearly states how you could do a project or dissertation.

Q7. *How can I get a degree certificate if I cannot attend the graduation ceremony?*

You can apply to graduate in absentia. Please allow 4-6 weeks after the graduation date for delivery. For more information, see

<https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/students/studies/graduation/attendance-options.htm>.

Questions on fees and scholarship.

Q8. *Are any prizes or scholarships awarded for exceptional performance?*

In terms of actuarial students, a number of annual prizes, sponsored by employers, for overall student performance in each year, are available to our Actuarial Mathematics and Statistics students. These include Standard Life Prize, Worshipful Company of Actuaries Prize, Scottish Widows Prize, Longevitas Prize for Survival Models, IMA Prize.

At the university level, there is a Deputy Principal’s Award, a student award for academic excellence, which is an annual award made to individual students who meet some criteria. For more detail, see

<https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/academic-registry/quality/learning-teaching/deputy-principal-s-award-2018-19.htm>.

The University issues up to 300 prizes and medals in each academic session. Many of these are awarded by individual schools to both undergraduate and postgraduate students based on a selection of key criteria. If you would like to enquire about any of these prizes and medals, please contact your school office. The Academic Registry is responsible for University-wide prizes and medals, including the Allen McTernan Memorial Fund, the Watt Club Medals. For more information, see

<https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/students/studies/record/prizes-medals.htm>.

For international students, International Undergraduate and Postgraduate Merit Awards are available for self-funded students from a specific range of countries. There are also a variety of scholarships and bursaries provided by the university and other sources. Please check the university website for more information

<https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/scholarships/uk.htm>.

Please note that, these links above might be renewed in future.

Q9. *I missed the deadline of tuition fee submission. Can I submit it later?*

Heriot-Watt University’s standard payment terms require all self-financed student tuition fees to be paid in full no later than 30 days after the start of a programme. If you

have any problems with payment of your fees please e-mail the Student Service Centre immediately: studentcentre@hw.ac.uk.

Q10. Can pay the tuition fee by instalment?

You can pay tuition fees and accommodation fees in instalments by setting up a recurring card payment plan, which allows staged payments to be made from your debit or credit card. To set up a recurring card payment plan, you must:

1. fully complete online enrolment (you must also wait 24 hours after completing enrolment before trying to set up a payment)
2. activate your central Heriot-Watt University email account

You do not need to have a UK bank account to make recurring card payments.

The recurring card payment plan is the only extended payment method we offer for tuition and accommodation fees. You can set up a recurring card payment plan up to and including 14 October. After this date, you must pay by another method. For more information about instalment, see

<https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/payment/instalments.htm>.

Q11. Are there any printing credits for students?

Our Campus libraries and student PC labs have various print, copy and scanning devices. Students (UG and PG) are allocated a limited free print quota at the start of their course. Undergraduate students at Heriot-Watt are allocated £15 free printing credit while postgraduates are allocated £30. Free print quota is allocated at the beginning of each academic year of your course. We encourage students to save paper by not printing off materials whenever possible.

Q12. Apart from prizes for academic excellence, are there any other awards relating to sports or voluntary activities?

There is a Talent Development Programme (TDP), working to provide support to students who are UK residents who choose to study at our Edinburgh campus. For more information, see

<https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/edinburgh/sports/sports-scholarships.htm>.

Questions on plans for the future.

Q13. I want to apply for another Master degree after I complete my degree here. Because the application starts in May or June, can I have some certificate/proofs/transcripts from our department to support my application before I finish the dissertation and get the degree?

If you wish to request an academic transcript, please complete the Academic Transcript Request Form.

<https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/students/doc/ConfirmationTranscriptFormv10.2.pdf>.

Q14. Can the department provide some training in job hunting in the UK or provide some introduction to the general procedures in finding a job in the UK?

There is a variety of help at the university level. The Careers and Graduate Futures Service aims to assist Heriot-Watt University students and graduates to make informed

career choices by providing a professional, high quality careers guidance and information service for students and recent graduates of Heriot-Watt. It works closely with employers and academic Schools to support students by developing the skills they need to maximise their employability. The Careers and Graduate Futures Service is here to support your career planning in a number of ways including:

- Developing your employability skills
- Identifying potential career options
- Help to find work experience
- Marketing yourself to employers

Q15. I would like to do some research project under supervision. How could I achieve that?

In MACS, a research project usually involves Ph.D. candidates, postdoc researchers and their supervisors. If you are interested in certain research project, you can contact the supervisor directly to see if they have any suitable research work for you to do. For research projects in MACS, you can find a list on the website of the [Maxwell Institute Graduate School](#) (MIGS). Please also note that the situation can be different for other schools, but you can always make attempts to contact the academic staff who are in charge of the research projects.

Questions from students who need resit exams.

Q16. I chose a course but found it too difficult for me. I failed the exam but I need the credit to complete my degree. Can I choose another course to do the re-sitting instead of this difficult one?

No, you cannot. However, if it is an optional course, it may not have an impact on your progression if you earn enough credits from other optional courses.

Q17. I failed the exams and did not get the degree last year. I need to come back to resit exams. Can I still attend the course this year if I come to the UK? Can I have access to the course materials of this year on VISION?

Resitting students should have access to course on Vision, but normally they have no right to attend classes for a second time unless they e.g. had suspended studies or a medical condition. Resitting students can also contact the course lecturer for updated teaching materials and questions.

Questions relating to IFoA exemptions

Take a look at the degree handbooks which clearly states most of the questions about IFoA exemptions.

Q18. How can I claim IFoA exemptions?

The department recommends exceptions to the IFoA. This means that if you haven't been recommended then there is no point in applying to the IFoA for exemption after

joining. So, to claim your exemptions, you must join the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries as a student member. You must then submit the Application for Exemptions form. This may need to be accompanied by an academic transcript and a certified copy of your degree certificate, depending on your programme. Further details are here: <https://www.actuaries.org.uk/studying/exam-exemptions/university-courses-exemptions-route>

The Profession will match your application with the information provided by the Department and then confirm your exemptions. You should note that fees are payable to the IFoA to become a student member and to claim your exemptions.

Q19. I am a student in the program of Bachelor's degree in Actuarial Science and intend to pursue Master's degrees for more IFoA exemptions. Should I apply for exemptions after graduation of Bachelor degree or Master's degree?

Answer:

We generally recommend that you wait until after you have completed the Master's programme to join the profession. Applications for exemption will not be accepted by the Profession until they have officially accepted the Department's recommendations. At this time you will be provided with a letter from the Department confirming the exemptions for which you have been recommended. We usually anticipate sending these letters to graduates by the end of November of their year of graduation.

Q20. Some exemptions are based on two or more courses. What happens if I only passed one and failed the other?

You must attempt all the courses that contribute to the relevant exemption. You do not need to pass them all to be eligible for individual exemption, so long as you achieve the necessary average overall. Fails in individual courses may mean that you are not eligible for the "block" exemption.

Q21. Motivated by the exemption from IFoA exams, we often choose all optional courses that are eligible for the exemption. However, we find that it may be difficult to follow many courses simultaneously. Could you please give some suggestions with details about what we should do to achieve as many exemptions as possible?

You need to check your degree handbook and identify which courses are related to IFoA subjects and corresponding exemption criteria, and then decide what courses to take. The degree handbook can be found at <https://www.macs.hw.ac.uk/students/ams/>. You can also discuss with your personal tutor on this.

Q22. What happens if I fail in a subject which relates to exemptions?

The actuarial profession has a policy on resits for exemption. The general principle is that an exam or other form of assessment may be considered for exemption only if the student is required to take it for progression or graduation. That is, there are no exams or other assessments taken for exemption purposes alone. For exemption purposes, the mark in any resit exam or other assessment will be capped at the normal pass mark,

which is 40% for some programmes and 50% for others. This means that it will not usually be possible to gain an exemption based on resits. Any resits taken in accordance with this policy are for the purpose of subject-by-subject exemption only. Results from these examinations will not be included in calculating your coursework average, and therefore will not affect your entitlement to exemptions under the accreditation agreement.

Q23. I am in the programme of cooperation of Heriot-Watt and South-West Finance University. Are the exemptions for IFoA achieved from South-West Finance University valid in Heriot-Watt?

First, neither Heriot-Watt nor South-West Finance University can award exemptions to students. Accredited Universities, such Heriot-Watt, can only make recommendations for exemption eligibility. The decision is made by the IFoA taking into account universities' recommendations. Hence, if you have got recommendations for some subjects from South-West Finance University, IFoA would award you exemptions for those subjects based on recommendations from South-West Finance University. Furthermore, IFoA would also award you exemptions for subjects based on recommendations from Heriot-Watt University if you got any.