

Appointment, role, and expectations of external examiners

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Cross reference/related documents:	1.5 Conflict of interest	

1.0 Rationale and principles which this policy seeks to uphold

- 1.1 The University wishes to ensure that the degrees it awards are comparable to the standards evident in UK University partners.
- 1.2 The University wishes to ensure equity in the assessment and grading of students.
- 1.3 The University wishes to make transparent its assessment and grading practices

2.0 Scope

- 2.1 This policy is applicable to all staff, students, and academic programmes of the University, and External Examiners appointed to serve at the University under the terms of this policy.
- 2.2 This policy does not concern academics appointed to serve as external examiners in a thesis examination committee.

3.0 Definitions

- 3.1 The principal role of the external examiner is to ensure that the standard of the award(s) is maintained and that students have been examined under due process and assessed with parity and probity.

- 3.2 External examiners, as full members of the relevant Board of Examiners, have the right to be present at all examiners' meetings pertaining to the programme they are concerned with, including the agreement of examinations of all kinds.
- 3.3 'Presence' includes participation via electronic means.
- 3.4 The views of the external examiner have significant weight in cases of disagreement, dispute, or alleged impropriety.
- 3.5 External examiners should act impartially as per the policy on conflict of interest.
- 3.6 External examiners should be in a position to compare the performance of students with that of students enrolled in comparable programmes within the British system.

4.0 Policy

Selection, qualifications, appointment and period of service of programme external examiners

- 4.1 The appointment of External Examiners is the responsibility of Senate. Deans of Faculty have responsibility for recommending External Examiners to the Senate for appointment. Scrutiny of External Examiner nominations by the Senate should have regard to the following:
 - 4.1.1 only persons of sufficient standing and experience should be appointed. S/he must be both competent and have the requisite experience to examine the programme at the level at which it is taught. It is particularly important that the External Examiner should have the experience necessary to be able to make authoritative comments on the general quality of the programme in relation to comparable UK programmes. In this regard it is helpful if the proposed External Examiner has experience of acting as External Examiner for the comparable UK Partner programme/s;
 - 4.1.2 no person who has held an appointment on the teaching or research staff of the University, or who has been granted honorary status in the University, is eligible to act as an External Examiner until a period of four years has elapsed since the termination of the appointment or the status;
 - 4.1.3 no External Examiner may hold office for a longer period than five consecutive years. An External Examiner is not eligible for re-appointment beyond a total of five consecutive years.
- 4.2 Subject to these conditions, External Examiners may be appointed either for a specified period of years or on a year-by-year basis.
- 4.3 The Head of Institutional Effectiveness dispatches letters appointing the External Examiners. The letters should make reference to the method of calculating the fees, or the precise fee payable, the date when the fees will be paid, and to the fact that receipt of the External Examiner's report is a prerequisite for payment.
- 4.4 On appointment, the Head of Institutional Effectiveness arranges for the External Examiners to be sent information about payment; a copy of this Code of Practice; and the relevant Assessment Regulations. The Faculty should arrange to send the objectives of the programme, modules, syllabuses and teaching methods.

- 4.5 External Examiners from outside the university system, for example, from industry or the professions, may be appropriate in certain circumstances. However, where an External Examiner who is not an academic is appointed for a particular programme, the Senate needs to ensure that a mechanism for assuring academic standards is maintained, for example, by having another External Examiner, who is an academic, on the Board of Examiners.

Procedures associated with the appointment

- 4.6 If an External Examiner seeks early termination of his/her contract, this must be negotiated with the Dean of Faculty, or his or her nominee. Where possible, a report should be obtained from the External Examiner on the reasons for termination. If, in exceptional circumstances, a Faculty wishes an early termination of an External Examiner's contract, this should be negotiated with the Vice-Chancellor, or his or her nominee. A report on the reasons for termination must be obtained from the Faculty and the External Examiner. Copies of all reports relating to the termination of an External Examiner's contract should be kept on file for a period of not less than 5 years from the date of termination. Such reports may be made available to the University Senate as appropriate.
- 4.7 If a potential conflict of interest arises because of a change in circumstances, e.g. the External Examiner changes job, the Faculty should seek advice from the Vice-Chancellor and Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer on how to resolve the matter.
- 4.8 Deans of Faculty make nominations to Senate after consultation with the staff members teaching on the programme and having ascertained that the External Examiner is willing to accept the appointment.
- 4.9 Appointments are confirmed in writing by the Vice Chancellor, in the form of a contract.
- 4.10 The term of office normally commences on the 1st October.
- 4.11 On appointment, External Examiners are sent a copy of this policy and the relevant policies on student assessment. The Dean of Faculty will ensure that the External Examiner is sent comprehensive detail of the programme to which they have been appointed, and other documents on request of the External Examiner.

Participation in assessment procedures

- 4.12 No University qualification may be awarded without participation in the assessment process by at least one examiner external to this University, who will be a full member of the relevant Board of Examiners.
- 4.13 Thus, External Examiners should:
- 4.13.1 be present at meetings that determine final awards, and are required to agree to significant changes to final grades awarded, including changes to grades they themselves may have recommended;
 - 4.13.2 approve the form and content of proposed examination papers, coursework and other assessments that count towards the award, including marking schemes where appropriate;

- 4.13.3 be consulted about and agree to any proposed changes to the approved assessment regulations which will directly affect students currently on the course;
- 4.13.4 have access to all assessed work;
- 4.13.5 see work recommended for the highest available category of the award and for failure, and samples of the work of students proposed for each category of the award;
- 4.13.6 have the right to moderate the marks awarded by internal examiners;
- 4.13.7 have the right to conduct a viva voce examination of any candidate;
- 4.13.8 ensure that the assessments are conducted in accordance with the approved programme regulations;
- 4.13.9 attend the meetings of the Board of Examiners at which decisions on recommendations for an award, or at which decisions are made on elements of assessment which contribute to an award;
- 4.13.10 ensure that those recommendations have been reached by means in accordance with the University's requirements and normal practice in British higher education;
- 4.13.11 participate as required in any reviews of decisions about individual students' awards taken during the examiner's period of office
- 4.13.12 have their remarks included within the question paper and records of moderation, and reported at the Board of Examiner's meeting.

Procedures associated with assessment

- 4.14 **Curriculum.** External Examiners should have made available to them the full details of each module on which the assessments and/or examinations are set.
- 4.15 **Examination Papers.** In appropriate cases, External Examiners may be expected to set some questions or complete papers. In some subjects it may be essential for model answers to be prepared and scrutinised. All draft degree examination papers should be seen by the External Examiner(s) for comment.
- 4.16 **Examination Scripts.** The guiding principle for any selection of scripts is that External Examiners must have enough evidence to determine that internal marking is of an appropriate standard and is consistent. An External Examiner has the right to see all degree examination scripts and any other coursework including other assignment scripts contributing to the assessment. External Examiners should see samples of scripts from all grade bands. Where it is agreed that an External Examiner will see only a selection of scripts or other written work, the principles governing the selection must be agreed by the Board of Examiners. The External Examiner must consider borderline cases. Borderline cases are those which relate to the decisions of the Board of examiners on pass/fail boundaries, progression, or in the award of a degree.
- 4.17 **Assessed Coursework.** An External Examiner has the right to see any work that contributes to the assessment and the degree classification, or the documentation which relates to the work. Where it is agreed that the External Examiner will see assessed coursework, the principles governing the selection must be agreed in advance.
- 4.18 **Placements.** An External Examiner has the right to observe students on placement, the principles and arrangements for such observation being agreed in advance.

- 4.19 **Conflict of Interest.** In cases where he or she may reasonably be regarded as having a strong personal interest because of a current or previous relationship to or friendship with a candidate whom she or he would otherwise be expected to examine, s/he shall decline to act as examiner. If in doubt as to what professional integrity requires, s/he shall consult the Vice-Chancellor and Registrar who may bring the case to the attention of the Senate.
- 4.20 **Organisation.** The work of the External Examiner is much helped by efficient and systematic organisation of all of the assessment material, including clear tabulations of the marks as agreed internally, these being the recommendations of the internal markers. A list in rank order, with suggested boundaries between classes, may be a helpful way of presenting the data.

Visits to the University

- 4.21 It is expected that External Examiners will visit the University up to two times during their period of office.
- 4.22 Procedures associated with visits:
- 4.22.1 such visits will normally last between 2 -3 working days;
 - 4.22.2 Faculties must make the best use of External Examiners during these visits. As well as providing an opportunity for External Examiners to meet with staff and students on the programme, Faculties should use the opportunity afforded by the visits of External Examiners to discuss the assessment process and schemes for marking and classification. Faculties may also choose to discuss with External Examiners the structure and content of the programme, the curriculum, reports and feedback related to curriculum review and the quality of the educational provision;
 - 4.22.3 The External Examiner is encouraged to make use of opportunities to communicate with the Faculty informally about the teaching of the modules, assessment issues and the overall performance of the students;
 - 4.22.4 Any comments or suggestions made by the External Examiners should be discussed by the staff of the Faculty and an explicit decision made about whether or not to introduce changes.

Reporting

- 4.23 External Examiners are required to:
- 4.23.1 report to the University on the effectiveness of the assessments and any lessons to be drawn from them, using the form provided;
 - 4.23.2 report to the Vice-Chancellor of the University on any matters of serious concern arising from the assessments, or application of policy and procedures, which put at risk the standard of the award.
 - 4.23.3 The Senate has the right to see the original External Examiner reports and any information on actions taken as a result.

4.24 Procedures associated with reporting:

- 4.24.1 The Dean of Faculty officially requests a signed report from each External Examiner at the end of each academic year, as well as at the end of the Examiner's period of office. Examiners are free to make any comment they wish in their reports, including observations on teaching, programme and module structure and content. In particular, External Examiners are invited to comment on the comparability of standards with other UK institutions and the extent to which the degree programmes and modules met their stated aims and objectives. It is appropriate for comments on the report form to be normally at least several hundred words in length. These reports are copied to the Head of Institutional Effectiveness;
- 4.24.2 Faculties have the responsibility of discussing any specific issues raised and for taking forward any appropriate actions. The Annual Programme Review process has a specific role to play in ensuring that Faculties are taking due account of External Examiner reports;
- 4.24.3 The External Examiner may make use of an invitation to communicate in confidence to the Vice-Chancellor on sensitive matters requiring confidential consideration. The Vice-Chancellor will decide what action should be taken on such a report. Any reports which the Dean of Faculty judges to be particularly serious or important, or which raise issues of wider significance for the University, are copied directly to the Vice-Chancellor. This is only likely to occur in exceptional cases and such reports will be ones where institutional action is necessary or where serious quality assurance issues, which affect more than one degree programme or Faculty, have been identified.

Expenses and fees

- 4.25 Arrangements for the payment of External Examiners' expenses and fees are handled centrally. Payment follows receipt of a completed report from the External Examiner.