Note of Guidance for Heads of School and Research Institutes: Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate External examiners

The external examiner system has operated in the University and the UK Higher Education sector for many years. The University's arrangements for external examiners conforms to the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education: Chapter B7: External Examining. The role of external examiner is considered as a very important part of quality enhancement and assurance to maintain academic standards at the appropriate level and to ensure that student performance is properly judged. The external examiner is a key member of the Board of Examiners and is consulted on, and may influence decisions on, course or programme structure and content. The external examiner moderates the examination process and submits an annual report, for which a fee is paid. External examiners are appointed for all taught programmes (undergraduate and postgraduate) and for research degree candidates. Specific criteria must be satisfied for appointment.

External examiners are appointed for a period of four years. The following information outlines the process of appointing a new external examiner and what action is required to be taken by the School.

Appointment of External Examiners

Replacement

- When an external examiner’s appointment is about to end, Senate Office will send the school/research institute a reminder that a new external examiner will need to be appointed. This is done nine months prior to the end of appointment date.

- Schools should approach possible candidates on an informal basis. Please ensure that all potential candidates meet the following criteria:
  - The proposed examiner should be a member of academic staff in a higher education institution and have undertaken a normal range of teaching and examining duties for the last seven years.
  - The nominee should not have been an external examiner for any undergraduate or taught postgraduate programme/course in the University of Glasgow at any time during the five years prior to the date of appointment.
  - The nominee should not have been a member of staff of the University of Glasgow within the five years prior to the date of appointment.
  - At the proposed date of appointment, the nominee should not hold an external examinership for undergraduate or taught postgraduate degrees in more than one other institution.
  - At the date of appointment no member of staff of the nominating School(s) should be an examiner for an undergraduate or taught postgraduate programme/course in the nominee’s department/school.

If a candidate does not meet all the criteria listed above, please contact Senate Office for further advice.
• If the Nominee agrees, the Head of School/Research Institute should complete the replacement nomination form **EE1** and submit it Senate Office for approval.

• Once Senate Office approves the nomination, a letter of appointment is sent to the external examiner along with the following information:
  
  o Note of Guidance for external examiners for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Courses (this sets out the appointment conditions, responsibilities and rights of the external examiner and indicates what information should be supplied by the Head of School. The external examiner is asked to report annually via the on-line external examiner form which seeks comment on performance of candidates, relationship between the examinations and other forms of assessment and the courses. Failure to report annually may lead to termination of an appointment. Fee payment is made on receipt of this report. Expenses are dealt with at school/research institute level.)
  
  o Code of Assessment
  o Guide to the Code of Assessment – Grading Student Performance
  o Schedule A
  o Registration Form

• The letter of appointment is copied to the school/research institute. This informs the school/research institute that the nominee had been formally appointed and the school/research institute should undertake the following responsibilities:

**School Responsibilities**

**On initial appointment**

The school should ensure that external examiners are sent full information on the courses which they examine including:

• course information documentation
• copies of examination papers and other assessment instruments of previous years
• details of the way in which the results of individual papers or other units of assessment are aggregated, averaged or profiled to produce an overall result; the dates of meetings of the Board(s) of Examiners
• statement on assessment procedures; and the external examiners report(s) for the previous session together with any relevant correspondence and the retiring external examiner’s general report (where provided). This information is updated as necessary during the period of the appointment
• any relevant benchmark statements as developed by the QAA

The QAA description of subject benchmark is as follows:

Subject benchmark statements set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject.

QAA has published subject benchmark statements for a range of disciplines to set out clearly the academic characteristics and standards of UK programmes. Some benchmark statements combine or make reference to professional standards required by external professional or regulatory bodies in the discipline.
Subject benchmark statements do not represent a national curriculum in a subject area rather they allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design, within an overall conceptual framework established by an academic subject community.

They are intended to assist those involved in programme design, delivery and review. They may also be of interest to prospective students and employers, seeking information about the nature and standards of awards in a subject area.

For further information please refer to Subject benchmark statements

Procedures

- Under the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B7: External Examining schools and institutes are required to include the names, position and institution of their external examiners in module or programme information provided to students. External Examiners are advised of this in their letter of appointment; however, schools/institutes should advise external examiners of where this information will be included. School/institutes should ensure that all students are made aware that it would be unacceptable to contact an external examiner directly. Similarly, schools/institutes should advise all their external examiners that any direct contact from students should be referred back to the school/institute.

- Maintain regular contact with external examiners – let them know what is expected of them and what they should expect to receive from the school/research institute and notification of key dates.

- Send draft examination papers to external examiners in sufficient time for them to be able to propose any changes and/or time for discussion of proposed changes where necessary. Please check for typographical errors, etc., before sending to the external examiner. Where appropriate, solutions and a marking scheme for each question should accompany exam papers.

- Advise externals as soon as possible of date for Board of Examiners. Please note that, in accordance with the University Calendar 16.66, all examiners shall be members of the Board of Examiners and shall be invited to all meetings of the Board. Please also see 16.66 for guidance on Exam Board procedures where, exceptionally, the external cannot be present.

- Consult on timetable for scrutiny of work – send sample scripts and other work to external examiners in advance of the Board of Examiners. External examiners should agree, in advance, with school/research institutes what constitutes appropriate scripts. They should receive sufficient evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and are consistent. This will normally require external examiners to be sent scripts and other work from the top, middle and bottom of the range, and, for Honours, all scripts of candidates assessed internally as First Class, borderline or fail.

- Send proof of marking and double-marking and all relevant information.

- Consider pro-forma identifying information being sent, including proof of marking/double-marking and commentary on how marks were reached (e.g. signatures of markers and commentary sheet).

- Seek approval of any changes to courses.
• Respond quickly to any queries and/or comments

• If the school/research institute is experiencing difficulty in contacting the external examiner or there is a lack of response from the appointee, they should contact the Senate Office for advice

Induction

External Examiners can access information pertinent to their role via the Senate Office webpages. Additionally, schools/institutes should ensure that new external examiners are invited to attend an induction session with the subject area on the day of the Board of Examiners meeting to discuss relevant information/issue related to the subject.

Extension of Existing Remit

• If an external examiner is required to examiner further courses/programmes, complete extension to remit form EE2

Additional External Examiners/New Programmes

• If a new programme is developed and an additional external examiner is required, complete Additional External examiner form EE3

Extension of Tenure

• If there is strong academic rationale, an appointment can be extended by a further year. Only in exceptional circumstances will an extension of this period be considered. If you wish to extend an appointment by one year, complete Extension to Tenure form EE5

External Examiner Reports

• External examiners are required to provide an annual report each Session for the courses/programmes that have run (Please advise Senate Office if courses/programmes are not running). External examiner Reports should be submitted using the University’s on-line report submission system. Further details on this process are outlined in the letter of appointment.

When reports are submitted via the on-line system, copies are automatically sent to the school/institute administrator for forwarding to relevant members of staff within the school/institute.

• Senate Office will then scrutinize report and will contact the school/research institute by email if a school/research institute response is required to any concerns/issues that are raised. Reports are categorised as follows:

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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Very satisfactory</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Satisfactory but some general comments made will prove helpful to course development. The school/research institute would wish to respond as part of the annual course monitoring process. Towards the end of the year the</td>
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examiner should receive, for information, a copy of the annual course monitoring report.

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>D</td>
<td>Concerns have been raised that require attention. The school/research institute is asked to discuss the issue at the School Learning and Teaching Committee and report to the Senate Office within three months (8 wks in Semester 2) any action taken or the reasons for not taking action. The school/research institute’s response is copied to the external examiner. The report and the related correspondence are copied to the appropriate Head of College(s). There is a Pro Forma for responses from schools/research institutes, but it is not compulsory to use this.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spcl</td>
<td>There is one further category, “spcl”, which accompanies the main categories if a specific issue has arisen that applies at University or College level and generally lies outwith the school/research institute’s responsibility.</td>
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- School to send response to Senate Office who will forward response to the external examiner, if response is considered appropriate

We hope the above guidance will be helpful, but if you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact Lesley Fielding (lesley.fielding@glasgow.ac.uk) in the Senate Office.