

**Note of Guidance: External Examiners  
for Undergraduate  
and  
Taught Postgraduate Courses**

**General**

1. The conduct of examinations in the University is governed by the Code of Assessment, which is published as part of the University Regulations, and by other decisions taken from time to time by Senate. This statement sets out those matters relating to external examiners for undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses; it is intended primarily for their information.
2. The University concurs with 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.

**Appointment**

3. External examiners are appointed by the University Court on the recommendation of the Senate based on advice from the relevant school/research institute.
4. When a vacancy arises, the name of a suitable external examiner is put forward by the appropriate Head(s) of School/Research Institute after consultation with the subject area. The name is submitted on a pro forma together with information which allows the University to judge whether the person nominated has the necessary seniority and experience and meets the other requirements set out in 6, 7, 8 and 9 below. In exceptional circumstances, an examiner may be appointed who does not meet the criteria with respect to seniority and/or experience. In such cases, a 'mentor' (usually an existing member of the external examining team) will be appointed to work with the examiner to provide guidance and to ensure that the examiner fulfils the requirements of his/her role.
5. External examiners are normally appointed for a period of four years.
6. An external examiner will not normally be reappointed unless at least five years have elapsed since the end of his or her last term of office as an external examiner in the University.
7. No person who has been a member of staff of the University within the five years prior to the date of appointment shall normally be appointed as an external examiner of the University.
8. In view of the time commitment required to fulfil the duties of external examiners, including attendance at meetings of Boards of Examiners, a person appointed as an external examiner may not normally hold simultaneously more than two other external examinerships for undergraduate or taught postgraduate courses during the period of employment as an external examiner in the University.

9. In order to avoid conflicts of interest, the following appointments shall not normally be permitted:
  - An external examiner from a department of another institution where a member of staff of this University is serving as an external examiner for programmes or courses provided by that department/subject area.
  - The succession of an external examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home institution.
  - More than one external examiner from the same department of the same home institution.
10. External examiners shall: be appointed in accordance with the University's agreed procedures on the basis of their possession of substantial prior experience of internal marking at equivalent levels within institutions judged to be delivering courses and making awards of comparable standards; or, exceptionally, on the basis of involvement in a professional capacity at the appropriate level of seniority, in which case at least one external examiner with the proper experience noted above shall also be appointed for the course or module.
11. External examiners shall have no potential conflict of interest or other impediment to the impartial discharge of the functions of external examining.
12. Where a proposed appointee fails to meet the requirements in paragraphs 4, 6, 7, 8 or 9, a full case must be made as to why the candidate should be appointed.
13. External examiners are asked to declare any link and/or relationship which might lead to a conflict of interests, e.g., prior acquaintance with a student in a personal or professional capacity.
14. A list of external examiners is kept in the Senate Office.

### **Status**

15. External examiners are full members of the relevant Board(s) of Examiners.

### **School/Research Institute responsibilities**

16. On appointment, the school/research institute will ensure that external examiners are sent full information on the courses which they examine including: benchmark statements; 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; details of any exemption schemes; the dates of meetings of the Board(s) of Examiners; a statement of school assessment procedures; and the external examiner 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.

The Senate Office will send the following information:

- Note of Guidance for external examiners for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Courses
- Registration Form

- Links to Guide to the Code of Assessment - Grading Student Performance and Code of Assessment (including Schedules A and B)
17. Draft examination papers are sent to external examiners in sufficient time for them to be able to propose changes and for discussion of the proposed changes where this is necessary; these are checked for typographical errors, etc., before they are sent to the external examiner. Where appropriate, they are accompanied by solutions and a marking scheme for each question.
  18. Appropriate scripts and other work are sent to external examiners in advance of the meeting of the Board of Examiners. External examiners should agree in advance with schools/research institutes what constitutes appropriate scripts and other work on the basis of the guiding principle that 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 or as pass degree or fail.

### **External Examiners' role**

19. In respect of the design of the assessment scheme:
  - (a) comment on the syllabus, learning objectives and assessment scheme of the course and its delivery mechanism in the light of experiences of candidates' learning outcomes, comparable courses and awards elsewhere and developments within the discipline or field;
  - (b) be consulted regarding proposals for the introduction or modification of a course.
20. In respect of a given assessment diet:
  - a. comment on, in advance, all summative assessment instruments (or, in cases involving a high volume of continuous assessment, a sample may be provided for advance comment);
  - b. report on the overall standards achieved by candidates and in particular on the comparability of these standards with those of candidates on similar courses or programmes in other UK Higher Education institutions;
  - c. report on the relationship between these overall standards, programme specifications (where available) and published national subject benchmark statements;
  - d. assess the soundness and fairness of the implementation of the assessment process;
  - e. adjudicate where necessary, subject to the authority of Senate, over the grade or class to be awarded to any particular candidate;
  - f. certify contentment with the assessment outcomes prior to their publication;
  - g. provide an annual written report to the Principal as required by the University.
21. External examiners may be asked to submit questions for inclusion in examination papers but there should be no presumption that such questions will necessarily be included.
22. Where a school/research institute considers that an external examiner is not fulfilling his/her duties, a written case for replacement must be made to the Director of the Senate Office.

In light of this report the appointment may be terminated.

### **Oral, practical and clinical examinations**

23. External examiners have access to the necessary information and assessment material required to assist him or her in reaching a reasonable conclusion on assessment performance, and has the opportunity to attend oral examinations and presentations where practicable.
24. External examiners should, where possible, have the same degree of involvement in both the content and the marking of practical examinations and other forms of summative assessment as they have for written papers.
25. External examiners should take an active part in clinical examinations.

### **Meetings of Boards of Examiners and the final assessment**

26. External examiners are invited to all meetings of the Board(s) of Examiners for the courses which they examine. External examiners should attend in person at least one meeting of the Board per academic session.
27. In the case of meetings of Boards of Examiners for subjects at Level 1, Level 2 or Level 3 or equivalent, no final assessment may take place unless an external examiner is present or unless the external examiner has provided a written report on the examination prior to the meeting of the Board.
28. In the case of Honours, no meeting of the Board of Examiners may be held and no final assessment may take place unless an external examiner is present. In the case of the external examiner being unable to attend due to ill health, exceptional or unforeseen circumstances, the School should seek immediate guidance from the Senate Office.
29. For the degrees of MBChB, BDS, BN, MEng/BEng and BVMS where each subject has been assessed by a Board comprising internal and external examiners, the final assessment may be made at a meeting of the Board of Examiners at which external examiners are not present.
30. External examiners shall adjudicate where necessary, subject to the authority of Senate, over the grade or class to be awarded to any particular candidate.

### **External examiners reports**

31. External examiners are required to report annually by 31 July using the University's on-line report system, following the main diet of examinations, or at the end of October for taught postgraduate courses, if more appropriate. It is essential that the University receives these reports in order to meet quality assurance and enhancement requirements. The report follows the guidelines published by the QAA and includes questions on:
  - the adequacy of information supplied on the course structure and content;
  - whether the course structure and content meet the needs of the students;
  - whether the stated aims and learning objectives for the course are appropriate to the subject matter, the level of the course, and the students;

- whether the examination together with any other assessment instruments used, adequately covered the content of the course and the learning objectives;
  - the quality of teaching, together with any other forms of assessment used, as evidenced by the students' work;
  - the appropriateness of learning and teaching methods;
  - the method(s) of assessment;
  - the assessment process;
  - the administration of assessment;
  - the marking standards applied by internal examiners;
  - whether the standards set are appropriate to published national subject benchmarks, the national qualifications framework, institutional programme specifications and other relevant information, where available;
  - the general quality of students' work;
  - the relationship of the quality of work to the various degree classifications and/or grades;
  - the procedures followed at the Board of Examiners;
  - consultation on proposed changes to courses or the introduction of new courses.
32. Payment of the external examiner's fee is authorised on receipt of the report. All reports are acknowledged.
33. The reports are reviewed by the Senate Office. Where deemed necessary, a School/Research Institute will be request to provide a response to an issue raised. Responses should be submitted within three months of the request.
34. At the end of a term of office an external examiner is invited to submit additional comments.
35. External examiners' reports and related correspondence are used by the University in reviews as well as in the external process of institutional review.
36. Under the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education: External Examining, Institutions are now required to include the names, position and institution of their external examiners in module or programme information provided to students. In addition, external examiner reports are now required to be made available in full to students, with the sole exception of any confidential report made directly, and separately, to the Principal.
37. **Data Protection**
- You consent to the University holding and processing, both electronically and manually, the data that it collects about you, in the course of your working relationship with the University, for the purposes of the administration and management of its staff and for compliance with applicable laws, procedures and regulations. There is further detail on this within the External Examiner Terms of Appointment.

38. External examiners may submit confidential reports to the Principal on any aspect of their responsibilities as they see it. In the event that an external examiner has a serious concern relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme or programmes and when all published applicable internal procedures have been exhausted, including the submission of a confidential report to the Principal, s/he may invoke the QAA's concerns scheme or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.
39. The Senate has agreed that external examiners who fail to submit annual reports on two consecutive occasions without good cause will have their appointment terminated.

#### **Consultation of external examiners on other matters**

40. External examiners are formally consulted on proposals for the introduction of a new course in their area of expertise and on changes to the course(s) for which they are an examiner. Boards of Studies (or their equivalent) will not usually endorse proposals for new courses or changes to existing courses without having the views of all relevant external examiners.
41. External examiners will receive relevant annual course monitoring reports from the school/research institute's with which they act as examiner. These reports include statements of the school/research institute's responses to feedback from external examiners.