

# External Examiner System for Awards

## Policy and Process

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# External Examiner System for Awards

## 1 Purposes and Functions

1.1 The purposes of the external examiner system are to ensure that:

- the academic standards for each award are at the appropriate level and that student performance is judged against this;
- assessment processes measure student achievement against intended learning outcomes and are fair and fairly operated;
- standards are comparable with those of other higher education institutions.

1.2 In order to achieve these purposes external examiners are expected:

- to participate in assessment processes for University awards (taught programmes) as described below, including viva voce examinations and the deliberations of Boards of Examiners considering academic performance, including reassessment and the outcome of academic appeals;
- to arbitrate or adjudicate on problem cases;
- to contribute to the evaluation and consideration of the impact of extenuating circumstances upon students' performance;
- to evaluate assessment policies and procedures, including those with regard to professional practice, where relevant;
- to comment and give advice on the design of courses, on module content, balance and structure, on the appropriateness of learning outcomes, on standards of achievement and on professional practice placements, where relevant.

## 2 Selection, Appointment and Period of Service

2.1 Partner institutions recommend to the Joint Board of Study the appointment and membership of Boards of Examiners, including external examiners.

2.2 External examiners are appointed by UEA Academic Partnerships following approval from the UEA Academic Director of Partnerships on an annual basis. An external examiner will normally be appointed in four successive years, with an extension of one year to ensure continuity in exceptional circumstances, approved by the UEA Academic Director of Partnerships.

2.4 Appointment is for an academic year (or its equivalent) and covers all assessed and reassessed work completed by the cohort of students in an academic year (or its equivalent).

2.5 Where an external examiner is recommended for appointment for the first time, they will be asked to provide a copy of their curriculum vitae and a completed form to assist the University in confirming their suitability with reference to the criteria set out below.

2.6 Each external examiner will be sent a letter of appointment by UEA Academic Partnerships covering each year of their appointment.

2.7 The University will not approve external examiners for four years in the first instance and will consider reappointment for a second, third or fourth year. The University may decline to reappoint an external examiner for a second, third or fourth year where there has not been satisfactory fulfilment of responsibilities in preceding years, such as attendance at Boards and completion of reports.

2.8 In liaison with partner institutions, UEA Academic Partnerships will ensure that the number and subject expertise of the external examiners is sufficient to cover the volume and range of the courses being examined and the associated assessments

2.9 On behalf of Senate, and the Learning and Teaching Committee, the designated officer shall scrutinise the recommendations for appointment in order to ensure that the following criteria are met:

- (a) only persons with sufficient standing, creditability and experience within the discipline to command the respect of academic and professional peers, and who can show appropriate competence in the fields covered by the programme of study or parts thereof will be appointed;
- (b) only external examiners who can evidence knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality will be appointed;
- (c) only external examiners who can show evidence that they are familiar with the standard expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed will be appointed;
- (d) only external examiners who can evidence relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined will be appointed;
- (e) external examiners must be able to evidence awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula, including competence and experience relating to

designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks and procedures appropriate to the subject;

- (f) external examiners must be able to show competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience;
- (g) external examiners must have fluency in English;
- (h) external examiners must be able to demonstrate that they are able to meet any criteria applicable by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies;
- (i) in order to have sufficient time for the proper performance of their duties, external examiners will normally be expected to hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any one time;
- (j) retired academics will not normally be appointed, particularly if the retirement took place more than three years previously. If it is proposed to nominate a retired academic, evidence must be submitted that the nominee has kept up not only with the subject of study but also with University standards, for example by examining elsewhere, regular undergraduate/postgraduate teaching etc;
- (k) external examiners who can evidence extensive practitioner experience from outside the university system, for example from industry or the professions, may be appointed in certain circumstances

2.10 On behalf of Senate, and the Learning and Teaching Committee, the designated officer shall scrutinise the recommendations for appointment in order to ensure that there is no conflict of interest arising from the following:

- (a) an external examiner must not be a member of a governing body or committee or be a current employee of the appointment institution or one of its collaborative partners;
- (b) an external examiner will not be appointed from a department in a university where a member of the inviting partner institution is serving as an examiner, or where this would result in a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution;
- (c) a Board of Examiners may not include more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution, nor will an external examiner be appointed from the same institution as the previous external examiner for the same course(s). Exceptions may, however, occasionally be unavoidable in the case of subjects or specialisms taught in only a very small number of institutions;
- (d) external examiners must not share a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study they are required to examine, nor must they be required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study;
- (e) external examiners must not be in a position to influence the future of students on the programme of study, or who is or has been involved in recent or current collaborative research

activities with any member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme of modules;

(f) former staff or students of the institution will not be appointed as external examiners unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme;

(g) an external examiner may hold a simultaneous appointment in respect of undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes;

(h) an external examiner shall not be appointed sequentially in respect of undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes where the total period of appointment would exceed four years. Therefore, it is not permissible for an external examiner to be appointed for four years in respect of an undergraduate programme and then be reappointed to a taught postgraduate Board for a further period;

(i) an external examiner may be reappointed only in exceptional circumstances and only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.

### **3 Provision of Information**

3.1 On appointment, and in addition to the letter of appointment, UEA Academic Partnerships will send the external examiner the Degree Regulations and External Examiner System for Awards Policy. Partner institutions will also send the external examiner an information pack which will include the documents set out in Appendix 1.

3.2 New external examiners will be offered an opportunity to visit the partner institution for a briefing to discuss the role, responsibilities of the external examiner and to map out a plan for the moderating cycle. It is recognised that work demands may make such an arrangement difficult. All external examiners, but particularly new ones, are therefore strongly encouraged to contact the partner institution by other means if they have any queries or need further information.

3.3 External examiners may request copies of the reports of previous external examiners in respect of the programmes for which they are responsible.

3.4 External examiners will find it helpful to refer to national subject benchmarks, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications published by the Quality Assurance Agency, and relevant professional and statutory bodies.

3.5 On appointment external examiners will agree with the partner institution the sample of students' assessed work, covering coursework, projects/dissertations and examinations, to which they will have access for moderation, with reference to the minimum requirements set out in 3.5.1 below and any requirements set out by a PSRB.

### 3.5.1 Moderation Sample

An external examiner has the right to see the assessed work of all students on any of the modules/programmes for which they are responsible. However, partner institutions will normally make available a sample of assessed work, sufficient to ensure that an external examiner can reach a judgement on the appropriateness of marking and other academic standards.

The following sets out the minimum requirements for the sample seen by an external examiner.

(i) There are two agreed approaches to moderation: external examiners may either review a range of assessed work at the partner institution or be sent a sample of assessed work through the year.

(ii) External examiners shall review

- written assignments
- course tests
- examination scripts
- projects or dissertations
- other assessments required to meet PSRB requirements (e.g. OSCEs)

(iii) External examiners may review

- copies of student presentations
- portfolios relating to practical work
- recordings of presentations or oral examinations (if not present)

(iv) Where an external examiner reviews a range of assessed work at partner institution, all work contributing to final classification / final award will (where available) be made available to the external examiner.

The external examiner shall pay particular attention to a volume of work equivalent to that set out in 3.5.1(vii) and 3.5.1(viii) below.

Assessed work may be reviewed by module or by student.

(v) Where an external examiner is sent a sample of work during the year / in advance of the meeting of the Board of Examiners, the sample shall be selected in accordance with the guidance set out in 3.5.1(vi), 3.5.1(vii) and 3.5.1(viii) below.

(vi) The assessed work reviewed by the external examiner may cover all or a proportion of modules as set out below:

(a) A proportion (as specified in 3.5.1(vii) and 3.5.1(viii)) of all types of assessed work (as set out in 3.5.1(ii) and 3.5.1(iii)) for all modules delivered in the year;

OR

(b) A proportion (as specified in 3.5.1(vii) and 3.5.1(viii)) of assessed work (as specified in 3.5.1(ii) and 3.5.1(iii)) for a proportion of the modules delivered in the year, such that over a four-year term of appointment an external examiner will have the opportunity to review assessed work on every module.

(c) In agreeing the method of sampling, partner institutions and external examiners are asked to give particular consideration to new modules or modules where there have been substantial amendments or which are being delivered and/or marked by a new or different member of staff.

It is anticipated that all types of assessed work (with reference to 3.5.1(ii)) from a new module or from a module where there have been substantial amendments to the mode of assessment or content, will be moderated by the external examiner in the first year.

(vii) The external examiner shall review 10% of each item of assessed work or ten pieces of assessed work (as specified in 3.5.1(ii) and 3.5.1(iii)), whichever is the greater.

(For example, 10% of written assignments and 10% of examination scripts for a module with two items of assessment, or 10% of essay 1 and 10% of essay 2 for a module with two items of assessment).



In some professional subjects, the PSRB may require a higher proportion of students' work to be reviewed by the external examiner.

(viii) The moderation sample shall include 10% of assessed work falling into each of the classification ranges (undergraduate and integrated masters) or mark bands (taught postgraduate).

3.5.2 The sample shall be accompanied by the comments of the internal markers on the assessed work, indicating the criteria according to which marks have been determined.

3.5.3 The partner institution and external examiner shall agree whether or not assessed work from reassessment and deferred assessment will be reviewed. It is assumed that an external examiner will have formed a sufficiently robust opinion on marking and other academic standards during initial assessment to have confidence in the standards applied during reassessment or deferred assessment.

3.6 The partner institution will keep a record of the sampling arrangements that are agreed with an external examiner.

3.7 In addition to a moderation sample, the external examiner will be provided with all the provisional marks for the modules under consideration.

3.8 As members of the Board of Examiners, external examiners will have access to all student marks relevant to the assessment.

## **4 Participation in Assessment Processes**

4.1 The key role of the external examiner in the assessment process is to confirm that:

- Internal marking is consistent, fairly applied and of an appropriate standard;
- Assessment has enabled learning outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated;
- Academic standards are appropriate for the level of the award;
- Recommendations for awards and for classification of awards are consistent, fair, fairly applied and of an appropriate standard.

Marking and Confirmation of Marks

4.2 The process for marking, moderating and confirming marks is as follows:

- All assessed items of work are marked by an internal marker;
- Specified items of assessed work are then subject to a process of internal verification/moderation by a second marker (examination scripts relating up to Level 7, Undergraduate projects and dissertations, Masters dissertations, other written assignments);
- Other items of assessed work may also be subject to internal verification/moderation by a second marker;
- Marking standards are reviewed by the external examiner (either before or after confirmation by a Module Assessment Board);

The responsibilities of Boards of Examiners include:

- Confirming all marks relating to a module (marks may not be amended once confirmed, unless there has been an administrative error in recording or transcribing the mark or following an academic appeal);
- Reviewing the performance of individual students across modules and making decisions in respect of progression and reassessment;
- Making recommendations for the award of degrees (and classification in the case of Bachelors and Integrated Masters Degrees).

Prior to Assessment

4.3 All draft examination papers contributing to a final award, including reassessment papers, will be sent to the external examiner by the partner institution for comment. In particular, external examiners are asked to scrutinise examination papers for accuracy and to confirm that intended learning outcomes are being appropriately assessed.

4.3.1 External examiners may suggest revisions, which will either be incorporated into the final version or the partner institution will provide a written explanation to the external examiner of the reason(s) why suggested revisions have not been adopted.

4.3.2 Partner institutions may additionally discuss the content of other assessment tasks, such as coursework, with the external examiner, but this is not a requirement.

4.3.3 In reviewing examination papers and other assessment instruments external examiners are asked to comment on the coverage and emphasis of individual assessments and of the assessments for a module or course as a whole. These comments shall be taken into account in future planning.

4.3.4 Where appropriate, the external examiner may be invited to set some questions or complete examination papers.

4.3.5 The external examiner will also be invited to comment on model answers where these are prepared. Again, the comments of the external examiner on the model answer will be given serious consideration by the partner institution and a written explanation given where suggestions for amendments are not adopted.

#### Moderation

4.4 The external examiner's role is to moderate marking standards, not to mark assessed work.

External examiners will moderate assessed work (examinations, coursework, projects and dissertations) as follows:

4.4.1 Assessed work shall be made available to the external examiner, as set out in 3.5.1 above.

4.4.2 The external examiner will review the marks awarded and will use this sample to validate and comment on the academic performance of candidates, on marking standards and on academic standards in general.

4.4.3 Where marking standards are judged to be acceptable the external examiner will confirm this and no further action is required.

4.4.4 Where marking standards for a module as a whole are judged to be inappropriate the external examiner shall draw this to the attention of the Board of Examiners.

(i) If the marks have not yet been confirmed by a Board of Examiners, the Board shall review and amend as appropriate the marks of all candidates taking the module or item in question in consultation with the external examiner. This may require either the remarking of all items of work or the scaling of marks based on a representative sample that has been remarked.

(ii) If the marks have been confirmed by a Board of Examiners, the Board will not amend the marks, but will take appropriate action to ensure that the classification of students is not compromised. This will normally involve a consideration of the position of all borderline candidates who have taken the module or item in question. It may be necessary to undertake a review of further samples of work to ascertain an appropriate allowance to be made in the consideration of such borderline candidates.

4.4.5 Where overall marking standards are judged to be appropriate, but an individual mark appears to be inappropriate the external examiner shall be invited to draw this to the attention of the Board of Examiners.

(i) Where the mark has not yet been confirmed by Board of Examiners the comments of the external examiner shall be drawn to the attention of the internal markers. Where there is a significant difference between the mark given by the internal marker(s) and the view of the external examiner, it may be appropriate to review the marks of all students for the module or item in question and to make appropriate amendments. Individual marks cannot be changed but the views of the external examiner will be noted and taken into consideration where the mark concerns a borderline candidate.

(ii) Where a mark has already been confirmed by a Board of Examiners it will not be amended, but the views of the external examiner will be noted and taken into consideration, particularly where these relate to borderline candidates. Again, where there is a significant difference between the mark given by the internal marker(s) and the view of the external, it may be appropriate to review the marks of all students for the module or item in question.

4.5 In addition, external examiners may be asked to arbitrate in cases where the internal markers have been unable to reach agreement on a mark.

Arbitration takes one of the following forms:

4.5.1 Where internal markers have been unable to agree a mark, the external examiner may be consulted in order to assist with resolution of the matter. The external examiner shall be supplied with all relevant information (the disputed marks, the comments of both markers on the work in question and marking criteria). The views of the external examiner will be influential in resolving the final mark.

4.5.2 The external examiner may be asked to read or re-read specific items of work produced by borderline candidates in an effort to resolve doubts. Equally these doubts may be resolved in a viva voce examination (see paragraph 4.9 below).

## Boards of Examiners

4.6 External examiners are full members of the Board of Examiners.

4.7 As full members of the Board of Examiners, external examiners have the right to be present at all examiners' meetings, including Module, Stage (Undergraduate and Integrated Masters)/Intermediate (Taught Postgraduate) and Final Assessment Boards and Reassessment Boards, and to participate in the discussions of the Board.

4.8 External examiners are required to be present at all relevant Final Assessment Boards, defined as the examiners' meetings at which University awards are recommended.

4.9 At least one external examiner shall be present where a viva voce examination is held to assist the Board in determining degree classification or where a viva voce examination is held to resolve a disputed mark in accordance with the Instructions to Examiners for the awards for which they have responsibility and paragraph 4.5.2 above.

4.10 The views of an external examiner shall be particularly influential, for example in the case of the final classification to be derived from the array of marks of a particular candidate at the relevant examiners' meetings, but within the framework set out in 4.4 – 4.9 above and in the Instructions to Examiners for the award.

4.11 The signature of the full Board of Examiners, including the relevant external examiner(s) must be appended to the sheet making recommendations to Senate on the conferment of awards. No University qualification will be awarded without the participation in the assessment process of at least one examiner external to the partner institution.

4.12 External examiners shall be consulted as members of the Final Assessment Board where an Academic Appeal is referred to the Board in respect of recommendations for awards and/or classification.

## **5 Annual Reports and Quality Enhancement**

5.1 External examiners are encouraged to comment on the assessment process and the schemes for marking and classification. In some subjects participation in the devising of such

schemes is essential. External examiners are often able to give valuable advice to internal examiners, either directly or through the Chair of the Board of Examiners.

5.2 External examiners also provide an invaluable source of ongoing advice on the structure, design and content of both modules and courses. Partner institutions and external examiners should use the opportunity afforded by the visits of external examiners to discuss the structure, content and learning outcomes of modules and degree programmes, and the assessment procedures.

The sample of student work provided to external examiners under 3.5.1 should be sufficient for them to gain an informed view of module content, assessment design etc., but additional material should be provided as appropriate.

Current external examiners and those who have been appointed as external examiners on taught programmes within the past three years are not permitted to be members of Revalidation Panels.

5.3 All external examiners are required to submit an annual report to and the University. These will then be shared with partner institutions for action plans to be devised where appropriate. A standard proforma will be provided for this purpose.

The proforma specifically requests that external examiners comment on the following issues:

- academic standards as they relate to the award or award element under consideration
- the standards demonstrated by students
- the appropriateness of learning outcomes set and their achievement by students
- course structure and design and module content
- assessment methods and processes
- marking (and classifications in the case of Undergraduate and Integrated Masters degrees)
- academic standards measured against those in other research-led institutions
- the standard of student work compared with that in other research-led institutions

5.4 External examiner reports are considered by all members of relevant committees, including student representatives. External examiners should not refer to individual members of staff or students by name or student number.

5.5 External examiners should submit reports within six weeks of the meeting of the Board of Examiners or by the annual deadlines outlined in the report form.

5.6 Payment of fees should not be authorised until the formal report has been received. UEA Academic Partnerships will send reminders to any external examiner who has not submitted their report within this timeframe. If a report is not received, UEA Academic Partnerships may not authorise the payment of the fee and may decide not to recommend the reappointment of the external examiner.

5.7 It is the responsibility of the UEA Academic Director of Partnerships to ensure that external examiners' reports are considered and acted upon.

5.8 Feedback to external examiners is important. External examiners should therefore receive a formal response from the partner institution, on what action (if any) has been taken as a result of their comments and if no action has been taken, the reason(s) for this.

5.9 A draft of the response to the external examiner and any other comments must be presented to the UEA Academic Director of Partnerships prior to its being sent to the external examiner. It is the role of the UEA Academic Director of Partnerships to confirm that all issues have been appropriately addressed and to monitor reports for common themes that may warrant further consideration or action. It is the role of the partner institution to highlight examples of good practice and consider mechanisms for its dissemination.

5.10 The partner institution will report annually to the Joint Board of Study, confirming that the process has been completed and identifying themes and issues for wider consideration and discussion.

5.11 In addition to the formal reporting mechanisms, external examiners may comment on issues of assessment design or course content during the year or during meetings of examiners. These comments should be recorded and fed into the partner institution's quality assurance and enhancement processes, for example through the course modification process.

5.12 External examiners are invited to raise any matters of a serious or confidential nature that they believe should be addressed to the UEA Academic Director of Partnerships, by submitting a separate report to the UEA Academic Director of Partnerships. Such reports will be treated confidentially and an individual response will be provided, outlining any resulting actions.

5.13 Where an external examiner has serious concerns relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme that have not been resolved through the partner

institution's published internal procedures or by submission of a confidential report to the UEA Academic Director of Partnerships, the external examiner may invoke the Quality Assurance Agency's concerns scheme or, where relevant, report concerns to the professional, statutory or regulatory body.



# APPENDIX 1

## INFORMATION PACK FOR EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

General Information to be provided with Letter of Appointment:

- External Examiner System for Awards Policy (Taught Programmes)
- Relevant Degree Regulations and Instructions to Examiners
- General Information available electronically via the University and partner institution web sites
- Programme specifications
- External Examiner's report proforma
- Policy on Accreditation of Prior Learning
- Statement on Equal Opportunities for Students
- Policy on Plagiarism and Collusion
- Policy on the Submission of Work for Assessment (including policy relating to penalties for late submission)
- Module details
- Assessment/marking criteria
- Details of the dates of meetings of Boards of Examiners
- Any other information deemed relevant

# APPENDIX 2

## GUIDANCE NOTES

### 1 Appointment of Boards of Examiners

1.1 Boards of Examiners are appointed on an annual basis.

1.2 Each year the Joint Board of Study will confirm the appointment of partner institution Boards of Examiners.

1.3 As set out in the Regulations, Boards of Examiners must include a Chair and at least one external examiner. In liaison with partner institutions, UEA Academic Partnerships are responsible for ensuring that the number and subject expertise of the external examiners is sufficient to cover the volume and range of the courses being examined and the associated assessments.

1.4 Where recommendations for the appointment of Boards of Examiners include the reappointment of an external examiner for a fifth year or a potential conflict of interest (including a reciprocal arrangement between the partner institution and the external examiner's home department), the approval of the Academic Director of Partnerships on behalf of the Learning and Teaching Committee of Senate, is required.

### 2 Liaison between Partner Institutions and External Examiners

2.1 In accordance with paragraph 3.1 of the Policy, partner institutions will provide external examiners with relevant information, as set out in Appendix 1 of the Policy.

2.2 In addition, new external examiners should be invited to visit the partner institution for a briefing to discuss the role (3.2 of the Policy).

### 3 Moderation Sample

3.1 In accordance with paragraph 3.2 of the Policy, the partner institution should agree with the external examiner the approach to the selection of the moderation sample, noting the minimum requirements set out in paragraph 3.5.1.

3.2 Specifically, the partner institution should agree whether the external examiner will:

- Moderate every module in every year, or will adopt a moderation cycle such that each module is reviewed once during a four-year term of appointment;
- be sent a sample of assessed work during the year, or will review a sample of assessed work at the partner institution;
- review a sample of assessed work as set out in 3.5.1(iii)

## **4 Reports, Responses and Feedback**

4.1 Partner institutions are responsible for considering and responding to external examiners' reports and for taking action as appropriate. The University has introduced a proforma for responding to issues raised by external examiners and to facilitate the monitoring of resulting actions.

4.2 It is important that partner institutions show that they have carefully considered any issues raised by the external examiner. The use that the partner institution and the University makes of external examiners' reports is a key instrument for quality assurance and enhancement. There are four interconnected strands in the procedure for responding to external examiners' reports:

4.2.1 Having considered the comments made by external examiners, course teams may wish to make amendments to assessment design or to course structures and content via the course modification process. Similarly, partner institutions may make amendments to administrative procedures in the light of comments made.

4.2.2 In considering the comments of external examiners, partner institutions may identify areas of good practice or issues of a more general nature that require dissemination and discussion across the partner institution.

4.2.3 Course teams are required to demonstrate to the partner institution and the University that they have considered the comments made by external examiners and addressed where appropriate any issues of quality enhancement raised in the reports, using the proforma to assist with this task (see 4.2 above).

4.2.4 Partner institutions are expected to inform external examiners in writing of the actions they have taken in response to the report and clarify any issues of confusion. Where it has

been decided not to take action in response to an issue raised in an external examiner's report the reasons for this should be explained.

4.3 Partner institutions should ensure that actions arising from external examiners' reports are monitored. The proforma for responding to external examiners' reports may be helpful in this task.

4.4 Partner institutions and the UEA Academic Director of Partnerships are responsible for ensuring that responses to external examiners are appropriate and have addressed all issues raised. A draft of the formal response should be reviewed by the UEA Academic Director of Partnerships prior to it being sent to the external examiner.

4.5 Partner institutions should additionally identify opportunities for the dissemination of good practice highlighted in external examiners' reports and/or course team response.