

Walbrook Code of Practice for Quality Assurance (Higher Education)

Chapter 8: external examining

8.1 Introduction

- 8.1.1. We recognise that higher education providers must make scrupulous use of external examiners to help ensure independent and external participation in the management of academic standards.
- 8.1.2. We have therefore aligned this chapter to the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) UK Quality Code for Higher Education with particular consideration of the Advice and Guidance section on External Expertise.
- 8.1.3. We also maintain detailed guidelines for external examiners.

8.2 Principles

- 8.2.1. None of our higher education qualifications shall be awarded without participation in the assessment process by at least one external examiner to ensure the appropriateness of the academic standards being applied.
- 8.2.2. The number of external examiners must be sufficient to cover the full range of modules within a programme without compromising standards.
- 8.2.3. These guidelines may be varied in the case of programmes which form part of a dual award delivered collaboratively with a strategic partner institution.

8.3 Criteria for appointment

- 8.3.1. External examiners will hold the relevant qualifications and / or extensive practitioner experience where relevant, to enable them to carry out their respective responsibilities with regard to the maintenance of academic standards in the context of UK higher education.
- 8.3.2. External examiners will have relevant current or recent experience of the standards set and achieved on the type of programme, for example, the nature and level of award, for which they carry out their external examining duties.
- 8.3.3. External examiners will have some prior experience of examining, relevant to the level and subject for which they're appointed. Where appointments are made in cases of limited external examining experience, training and support is provided, as well as mentoring which is provided by an experienced external examiner (see 8.7 Induction of External Examiners).
- 8.3.4. External examiners should be fully aware of the different components of the academic infrastructure, and in particular with any subject benchmark statements relevant to the module / programme for which they're acting

and the qualification descriptors in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) for the level of programme concerned.

- 8.3.5. To allow sufficient time for them to fulfil their duties effectively, external examiners won't normally concurrently hold more than two external examining appointments, including any appointment with us. Potential appointees will be asked to declare any other current external examining appointments as part of their application.
- 8.3.6. Normally, to avoid potential or perceived conflicts of interest, appointments to the position of external examiner to a given programme aren't made from
- i. departments within institutions for which one of our academic members of staff is currently acting as an external examiner
 - ii. the same department within an institution from which the preceding appointment to the external examining position was made
 - iii. the same department within an institution from which one external examiner has already been appointed by us
 - iv. our former academic staff or students, unless more than five years have elapsed since they left employment or graduated
 - v. academic staff from departments within institutions which are delivering the programme, or otherwise contributing directly to it, and may, therefore, not be seen as independent or impartial (e.g., through appointment as a member of our academic community)
 - vi. academic staff who act as consultants to us
 - vii. academic staff who have close links with anyone delivering or studying the module / programme in question (e.g., through collaborative research, etc.)
 - viii. academic staff from a collaborative partner of ours
 - ix. a joint arrangement involving similar programmes at another institution.
- 8.3.7. Where a programme is delivered by us and also through a partner, it's often desirable to appoint a single external examiner to cover all versions of the programme, as an aid to ensuring consistency of practice and equity of treatment of students.
- 8.3.8. The External Examiner Appointment Group retains the right to recommend to the Academic Board, with full reasons, the appointment of an external examiner where the criteria differ from those set out in 8.3.6 above.
- ## 8.4 Responsibilities and duties
- 8.4.1. External examiners are ultimately responsible to our Academic Board.
- 8.4.2. External examiners are responsible for ensuring that the standards of our awards are consistent with national standards in terms of level and credit

tariff, as reflected within areas such as the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements, and are monitored and maintained over time.

- 8.4.3. External examiners are responsible for ensuring students are consistently treated fairly and equivalently with regard to the application of academic standards across modules within a programme.
- 8.4.4. Judgements on the academic standards of a programme or module made by external examiners must be based solely upon the assessment evidence available to them, and shouldn't be influenced by other factors.
- 8.4.5. External examiners must satisfy themselves that the assessment arrangements allow students to be fairly assessed in relation to the learning outcomes of the module(s) / programme for which they're responsible.
- 8.4.6. External examiners review a sample of dissertations across all programmes / modules as is clearly explained within the external examiners contract.
- 8.4.7. External examiners have a role as a "critical friend", offering constructive criticism, comment, and suggestions for enhancement of the curriculum and / or assessment.
- 8.4.8. It's the responsibility of external examiners to declare an interest if they find themselves placed in a position of making academic decisions regarding any student with whom there may be a potential, a perceived or an actual conflict of interest.
- 8.4.9. External examiners are required to inform our Quality, Policy & Regulation team of any change in their personal or professional circumstances which might impact on their role as external examiner.
- 8.4.10. We operate a two-tier approach to assessment boards whereby programme and module assessment boards take place on the same day, depending on the level, and as such external examiners are invited to attend both.

Modules

- 8.4.11. External examiners must satisfy themselves that the assessment arrangements allow students to be fairly assessed in relation to the learning outcomes of the module(s) for which they're responsible. Prior to any changes being implemented, external examiners will be consulted to ensure they're satisfied with the suggested change.
- 8.4.12. Where formal assessments are set, external examiners are required, in advance of the assessment being made available to students, to review and approve all assessment materials that contribute to the final assessment, e.g., examination papers, coursework assignments, and associated guidelines. In the case of Multiple-Choice Question (MCQ) banks, an indicative sample of assessments from the bank should be provided to the

external examiner. At FHEQ Level 4, assessment is reviewed at designated intervals throughout the year.

- 8.4.13. External examiners have a right to see all examination scripts, assignments, and other completed tasks that contribute to the final module mark. If only a sample of assessed work is initially made available for review by the external examiner, the sampling criteria (normally at least six) must be agreed in advance. The guiding principle for selection is that the external examiner must have sufficient evidence to determine that internal marking is of an appropriate standard and consistent across students.
- 8.4.14. External examiners have the right to moderate the internal marking and ask for the marks of all candidates for an assessment component within a module to be systematically adjusted. External examiners can't request the adjustment of individual marks unless we ask them to review cases.
- 8.4.15. External examiners are expected to attend the relevant module assessment boards. Where an external examiner can't attend the module assessment board, they're expected to submit a report for consideration.

Programmes

- 8.4.16. An external examiner is appointed in respect of each programme. Programme external examiners are responsible for ensuring both the overall standard of the award and parity of standards across modules.
- 8.4.17. External examiners must satisfy themselves that the assessment arrangements allow students to be fairly assessed in relation to the learning outcomes of the programme(s) for which they're responsible.
- 8.4.18. External examiners are required to attend meetings of the programme assessment board at which recommendations are made for the award of degrees, diplomas, and / or certificates, unless their absence is exceptionally agreed in advance with the Chair. Where an external examiner can't attend the programme assessment board, they're expected to submit a report for consideration.
- 8.4.19. External examiners are required to submit an annual report to the Quality, Policy and Regulation team using the prescribed form and according to the agreed timetable. Receipt of the completed report will prompt payment of fees due to the external examiner.
- 8.4.20. External examiners may not be appointed for more than one programme unless there is commonality of modules across programmes.

8.5 Appointment of external examiners

- 8.5.1. Our faculty is responsible for seeking applications from suitably qualified individuals to act as external examiners.

- 8.5.2. Applications should be made using the External Examiner Application Form and should be accompanied by the applicant's CV. Nominations for appointment are then presented to the External Examiner Appointment Group for consideration and approval in line with the criteria set down by the Academic Board (see 8.3 Criteria for appointment).
- 8.5.3. It's the responsibility of the External Examiner Appointment Group, acting on behalf of the Academic Board, to ensure that applicants satisfy the criteria for appointment, that there is no conflict of interest, that they have appropriate academic expertise and experience, and that there's no reason to doubt their ability to operate in a fair and impartial manner.
- 8.5.4. On approval by the External Examiner Appointment Group, external examiners receive a letter of appointment from the Quality, Policy & Regulation team and are required to sign an external examiners agreement.
- 8.5.5. We keep a central register of external examiner appointments so as to ensure effective management in line with agreed policy and to avoid conflicts of interest.

8.6 Period of appointment

- 8.6.1. External examiners are normally appointed for a maximum of four consecutive years, with the possibility of an extension in exceptional circumstances. In such cases, the Academic Dean will recommend the extension to the External Examiner Appointment Group.
- 8.6.2. A five-year interval will apply before a retiring external examiner may be considered for appointment to another programme offered by us. An external examiner won't be reappointed for the same programme(s) without exceptional reason.
- 8.6.3. As far as possible, appointments of external examiners are phased to avoid a number of new external examiners starting at the same time and to allow for the mentoring of new external examiners by more experienced colleagues.
- 8.6.4. An appointment may be terminated by either party with six months' notice.
- 8.6.5. The appointment of an external examiner may be terminated early in the following circumstances
- i. failure to carry out agreed duties regarding the quality assurance of assessment materials and marking, or to act within our General and Academic Regulations
 - ii. failure to submit an annual report within the specified time
 - iii. as a result of the withdrawal of the programme or relevant modules within it

- iv. a change in the circumstances of the external examiner which may result in conflict of interest or significant operational difficulties.

8.6.6. The early termination of the appointment of an external examiner is a matter for decision by the Academic Board.

8.7 Induction of external examiners

8.7.1. The Academic Dean is responsible for ensuring that, prior to the commencement of their duties, external examiners are

- i. appropriately briefed, either in person or by telephone
- ii. provided with all necessary documentation, both with regard to their module and programme related duties, and to the aims and philosophy of the programme for which they will act as an external examiner given an opportunity to clarify any issues.

8.7.2. Wherever possible, external examiners are provided with an opportunity to attend an induction meeting and meet relevant academic staff prior to commencing their duties. This also includes shadowing opportunities where appropriate / possible.

8.7.3. On appointment, external examiners are sent the following

- i. contact details for relevant staff
- ii. our guidelines for external examiners
- iii. the student or programme handbook / student induction pack for the programme
- iv. information regarding the module(s) and programme and their assessment for which they'll have responsibility, including a full programme specification and all relevant module specifications
- v. latest module assessment reports and relevant assessment material
- vi. information regarding any planned changes to the programme or to relevant modules
- vii. details of the membership and responsibilities of the programme and / or module assessment boards
- viii. the timetables and deadlines for external examining activities together with the dates and locations of key meetings
- ix. our Code of Practice for Quality Assurance
- x. minutes of the last programme and / or module assessment board meeting(s) as appropriate
- xi. a copy of the regulations pertaining to the programme and our General and Academic Regulations for Students
- xii. the final report of the retiring external examiner.

8.7.4. The Academic Dean is responsible for ensuring that external examiners are kept up to date with regard to any changes to the module / programme which may affect their ability to carry out their duties and / or discharge their responsibilities as external examiners. This may also include any changes in legislation regarding students with disabilities (see Appendix A - Students with Disabilities).

8.8 Annual reports

- 8.8.1. The annual report forms are designed to seek independent, objective feedback from each external examiner, allowing for free comment on the full range of issues within the remit. Annual report forms will be made available to students and members of the academic community and also through consideration by the deliberative committees. Summaries of examiners' reports and the action taken in response will also be made available to student representatives as part of the annual monitoring process.
- 8.8.2. The annual report must be submitted to the Quality, Policy & Regulation team within four weeks of the final module or programme assessment board meeting(s) of the year (as relevant).
- 8.8.3. The external examiner may be asked to resubmit the annual report if it's deemed incomplete.
- 8.8.4. The report will be distributed by the Quality, Policy & Regulation team to the Academic Dean as appropriate, highlighting any matters of concern / good practice.
- 8.8.5. Any areas of serious concern identified by the Quality, Policy & Regulation team will be reported directly to the Vice-Chancellor and the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.
- 8.8.6. External examiners may also refer to the QAA Concerns Scheme should they have a serious concern about the academic standards and / or quality of the programme they're responsible for overseeing, or may raise these concerns with us via a separate confidential written report addressed to the Chief Executive. Such a written report would be in addition to the annual report form. This should only be necessary if no satisfactory action is forthcoming as a result of any issue or concern being highlighted within the annual report.
- 8.8.7. The Academic Dean responds by letter to the external examiner providing a commentary on any issues raised and identifying any action that will be taken as a result.
- 8.8.8. Any issues raised in the external examiners' report(s), and the accompanying action plan(s), are incorporated into the annual monitoring report. These are presented to the Faculty Board as part of the annual monitoring process.

8.8.9. The Quality, Policy & Regulation team prepares an annual, overarching report to the Academic Board on general issues of concern and / or examples of good practice raised by external examiners, and the actions taken. This report is then presented to the Faculty Board to monitor the progress of any required actions.

8.9 Contact between students and external examiners

8.9.1. External examiner details (name and institution) are published on the VLE. However, students aren't permitted to contact external examiners directly regarding any aspect of their programmes of study. Any attempt to do so will be treated as suspected malpractice under our Code of Practice chapter 9: malpractice. External examiners are required to inform us should they be contacted directly by a student.

8.9.2. External examiners may request formal meetings with students. Such requests must be made in writing to the Registrar Quality, Policy & Regulation and be supported by a clear rationale setting out the reasons for such a meeting. Written authority must be obtained prior to any such meeting taking place. We have the right to observe such meetings.

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