

QUALITY FRAMEWORK

QUALITY MANUAL SECTION 6

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

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QUALITY

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1 INTRODUCTION

External Examiners (EEs) have an essential role to play in the assurance of quality and standards within UK Higher Education. They are employed by the University principally to ensure that:

- the academic standards set for an award are appropriate for the qualification
- the academic standards of student performance are comparable with similar programmes or subjects in other UK institutions with which they are familiar
- the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are sound and have been fairly conducted, in line with University regulations, policies and procedures

External Examiners are also expected to provide feedback and comment on good practice observed and to suggest actions to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students.

The UK Quality Code (Chapter B7) sets out the following expectation for external examining:

'Higher education providers make scrupulous use of External Examiners.'

2 MANAGEMENT OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 Academic Quality and Standards

Academic Quality and Standards (AQS) is responsible for the oversight and management of the University's pool of External Examiners. This includes their nomination, appointment, induction and the payment of all fees and expenses. AQS is responsible for ensuring that all External Examiner vacancies are monitored and filled in a timely way to ensure Examiners are appointed and replaced in a timely way, for example, when existing EE contracts come to an end or when new courses are validated and a new EE appointment is required. AQS also oversees and manages the External Examiner annual reporting process and retains detailed central records of all Examiner appointments and associated information, including the relevant academic points of contact at the University, for each Examiner.

2.2 Faculties, Academic Teams and Directorates

Course and module teams are responsible for ongoing engagement and dialogue with External Examiners, particularly in relation to Examiners' oversight of the assessment and moderation processes for individual courses and modules. Registry Services has responsibility for the management and operation of Assessment Boards and ensures appropriate input from External Examiners. The

management of External Examiners and the associated processes follow an annual cycle, as detailed below.

2.3 Recruitment and Appointment

Academic Quality and Standards will initiate the recruitment of a new External Examiner either by advising academic teams in advance of when an existing Examiner is approaching the end of their tenure or, for new provision, by advising when a new appointment needs to be made. A standard appointment form will be completed by the relevant academic team, with input from the proposed External Examiner. Appointment forms are submitted to AQS to ensure the appointment meets strict appointment criteria (as set out in the UK Quality Code). AQS will arrange for the appointment to be approved by the relevant Head of Department or Quality Lead acting on behalf of the HoD. All External Examiner appointments are subject to final approval by the Head of Academic Quality and Standards before a letter of appointment and contract can be issued. Once approved, AQS will issue the appointment letter, including an invitation to attend an External Examiners' induction session. External Examiners are normally appointed for a period of four years. New external examiners also receive a summary of their responsibilities and the previous (outgoing) External Examiner's annual report. The deadline for completion of External Examiner appointments is in June prior to the start of the next academic year in which the External Examiner should begin their duties.

2.4 Induction

All newly appointed External Examiners are invited to attend an induction day at the University. Attendance at these sessions is compulsory¹ for all new Externals. Attendance at the induction sessions also provides an opportunity to make essential checks to verify an individual's eligibility to work in the UK (these checks are overseen by staff from the Directorate of Human Resources). During the induction session new Examiners will receive a detailed briefing pack and will attend presentations on the role and responsibilities of Examiners, the University's Standard Assessment Regulations and the operation of Assessment Boards. Additional / extended induction arrangements may also be required for new External Examiners who are new to the Examining role. Academic Quality and Standards will provide further advice on specific induction requirements, as part of the appointment process.

2.5 Meeting with SHU Academic Contacts at Induction

The induction session also provides the opportunity for new Examiners to meet with their key academic contacts from the relevant faculty and department. University academic contacts and other faculty representatives are responsible for familiarising the new Examiner with the specific area of provision they will be responsible for, will outline local arrangements for internal and external

¹ *Every effort is made to ensure new external examiners attend at least one University induction event arranged by Academic Quality and Standards. If a new External Examiner is unable to attend a scheduled induction event, the University academic contact for the External will be expected to provide an individual induction, covering the same generic and course-specific information as would be provided at a main induction event.*

moderation and verification processes (in accordance with University policy) and will provide the External with copies of course and module information as required to inform their examining role.

2.6 Blackboard (Bb) Access

All Externals have a Blackboard (Bb) account created for their use and to give access to the relevant information to support them in their role. The University academic contact will advise the External on how Blackboard is used in the specific subject group/area, in relation to assessment and moderation processes. It is the responsibility of the academic team to provide the External Examiner's name and home institution to the relevant students, normally via module Blackboard sites, for onsite provision, and via student handbooks for collaborative provision. Students will also be informed that they should not make direct contact with external examiners and are given information on how to access External Examiner reports if required.

2.7 Annual Reporting

All External Examiners are required to submit an annual report using a standard University EE Report form, to be received by the University within one month of the main Assessment Board. Examiners' Reports are received, acknowledged, checked, analysed and disseminated to faculties by Academic Quality and Standards. Reports are stored and accessed via the QF SharePoint site. AQS also co-ordinates the process for responding to External Examiner Reports, across all faculties, by overseeing the return of specific responses from course teams and departmental, faculty and/or institutional level representatives, as appropriate. A written response from the University, to address specific comments and issues that have been raised in the annual Report, will be returned to each External Examiner. The relevant Head of Department is responsible for sign off of responses from within their area. However, depending on the nature of issues raised, additional responses may also be required from the Head of Academic Quality and Standards, Assistant Dean Academic Development, PVC and/or the Deputy Registrar.

2.8 Fees and Expenses

A standard fee structure is used to determine the amount of fees paid to External Examiners, dependent on the scale and volume of work they are engaged in for the relevant course team / department. Academic Quality and Standards (as part of the LEAD Directorate) holds the budget for the University's External Examiner system and is responsible for the payment of all External Examiner fees and expenses, with the exception of visits to students' placement settings and visits to collaborative partners. Externals' visits to students in placement settings should be arranged by the course team, as necessary and where required. Externals with responsibilities for collaborative provision should have an opportunity to visit the partner organisation and meet with students at least once during their tenure. The cost of visit(s) to a partner location will be paid by the department, as part of the overall costs associated with the collaborative arrangement. AQS, in consultation with faculties, will undertake reviews of Examiners' fees from time to time to ensure the University's EE fee structure remains in line with sector norms. Payment of fees is conditional upon receipt of the Examiner's Annual Report.

2.9 Ending of Appointments

External Examiner tenures normally last for four years after which their contract will come to an end. A faculty/department may request an exceptional extension to an existing External Examiner appointment, to enable the External to continue for further limited period, subject to a new appointment being made. External Examiner appointments can be terminated at any time where there is a failure to meet specific obligations in accordance with the terms of their contract with the University or in circumstances where a conflict of interest arises that cannot be resolved.

3 OVERVIEW OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER ROLE

3.1 Main Areas of Responsibility

The following paragraphs provide a brief overview of the main areas of responsibility of External Examiners. For a more detailed description of the Examiner's role at either Course or Module level, see **Annex 1** of this section of the Quality Framework, **External Examiners: Role and Responsibilities**.

3.2 Verification of Assessment Tasks

External examiners are expected to verify that new or substantially revised assessment tasks are appropriate to test intended learning outcomes and are set at the right level. It is the responsibility of the relevant academic contact at the University to engage the External Examiner in relation to the verification of assessment tasks, including how and when this activity will take place. It is important to note that External Examiners also have an advisory role in respect of all matters relating to the curriculum and to assessment and therefore may request to see all assessment tasks/briefs and the associated student work, irrespective of the level, though normally it would not be necessary for them to review tasks set for level 4 work. External Examiners are expected to comment on this aspect of their work in their annual report.

3.3 Moderation Process

In accordance with the University's Moderation Policy, Examiners are expected to externally moderate (usually by sampling) all 'first-sit' student work that contributes to an intended award. Externals are not required to moderate assessed work at levels which do not contribute to the calculation of the intended award unless there is a specific professional, statutory or regulatory body requirement for this. Sampled work will normally include at least three pieces of work from each degree classification band and should also include examples of low, middle and higher marks from each band. In some disciplines, all dissertations may need to be reviewed but this will be agreed between the External Examiner and the relevant course team / academic contact. The role of the External Examiner in the moderation process includes confirmation of mark sets, making recommendations for further internal moderation of marks or recommending adjustments to whole mark sets, where required. Externals should also review and comment on the appropriateness of the marking, the use of assessment criteria and the quality and appropriateness of feedback to students. Further details are included in External Examiners: Roles and Responsibilities (see Annex 1, below).

3.4 Methods of Engagement and Access to Students' Work

Methods by which External Examiners engage with the moderation process and how they will access student work varies according to local practice and specific arrangements within individual departments, subject groups and disciplines. Mechanisms for the sampling of student work by External Examiners currently includes the use of Blackboard, Dropbox, via email, samples of work sent via post and / or through an External Examiner's attendance onsite to review students' work and participate in scheduled, structured moderation sessions (e.g. this may be combined with attendance at student exhibitions, performances or presentations). Specific arrangements for external moderation activities and the sampling of students' work will be confirmed to individual External Examiners by the relevant University course team/academic contact.

3.5 Attendance and Participation at Assessment Boards

External Examiners who are designated by departments as 'Course Externals' form a key part of the constitution of Assessment Boards. Externals are expected to attend Assessment Boards to endorse the Board's decisions or to recommend further action where required. External Examiners may not change marks or degree classifications for individual candidates. Rather their role is to confirm that marking criteria and marking standards are appropriate and are being applied appropriately and consistently. Further details of the role of Course External Examiners at Assessment Boards is included in Annex 1, below, External Examiners: Roles and Responsibilities.

3.6 External Examiner Annual Report

The annual External Examiner Report is the primary means of assuring the University that the standards of awards are being maintained and that assessment processes are operating in accordance with University policy and procedures. External Examiners have the right to raise any matter of serious concern directly with the University Vice-Chancellor. External Examiners may also invoke the QAA's Concerns Scheme or inform a relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRBs) of any concerns arising from their external examining at the University. The report must be submitted electronically Academic Quality and Standard, no later than four weeks after the final Assessment Board meeting for the academic year of the report.

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December 2015	2	AQS	December 2015
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[External Examiners Website](#)

[A Handbook for External Examining \(HEA\)](#)

[Departmental Assessment Board Policy](#)

Moderation Policy

External Examiners Fees and Expenses

External Examiners' Induction: Information and Guidance

External Examiners: Roles and Responsibilities (Annex 1)