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# Academic Regulations External Examiners and Advisers

## Section 14

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## Section 14

### Appointment and Role of External Examiners and Advisers

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# Section 14: Appointment and Role of External Examiners and Advisers

## 14.1 Purpose

This section of the Academic Regulations sets out our principles on External Examining, our processes for appointing external examiners, the duties expected of them and their annual reporting obligation to us.

External Examining is a key component of our University's quality assurance framework. It provides assurance that the academic threshold standards of our taught awards are appropriate in light of UK reference points, that the achievement of our students is comparable to that on similar courses elsewhere, and that students are treated equitably in assessment.

External examiners must be appointed for all validated courses leading to an award of the University.

## 14.2 General Principles

### 14.2.1 Equity and Fairness

The role of the external examiner(s) approved by the University for courses is to ensure that academic threshold standards are appropriately set and maintained in light of relevant UK expectations, that student achievement is comparable to that on similar courses elsewhere, and that the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are rigorous and fairly conducted.

External examiners may also be involved in the approval of courses of study for individual students where such frameworks are validated.

External Examiners will also be consulted on and participate in decisions related to and/or approval of:

- a) new modules
- b) major modifications to the existing modules of a course
- c) any proposed changes to the approved assessment regulations which will directly affect students studying on the course.

No recommendation for the conferment of an award of the University above the level of Certificate of Higher Education may be made without the written consent of the approved external examiner(s).

#### **14.2.2 Appointment of External Examiners**

University appointment criteria, guidelines and processes will ensure that all external examiners have the appropriate standing, expertise and breadth of experience to carry out their duties as recommended by external reference points.

#### **14.2.3 Impartiality**

University appointment guidelines will be such as to ensure that external examiners are impartial in judgement.

#### **14.2.4 Selection of External Examiners**

External examiners will be drawn from a wide variety of institutional and/or professional contexts in order to ensure that University taught awards benefit from wide-ranging external scrutiny.

#### **14.2.5 Induction of External Examiners**

The University will ensure that external examiners are given adequate induction and briefing in order for them to fulfil their responsibilities.

#### **14.2.6 Cessation of Appointment**

The appointment of external examiners will cease at the end of their contracted tenure, or as otherwise provided for in the current University guidelines.

#### **14.2.7 External Examiners' Reports**

External examiners are required to report annually in writing to the Academic Board about the ways in which assessment has been conducted and on other issues as determined by the Academic Board

### **14.3 Code of Practice on Appointment and Role of External Examiners and Advisers**

The code of practice outlined below applies only to taught awards. Regulations for external examiners for research awards are documented separately.

#### **14.3.1 External Examiner/Adviser Appointment**

Final University approval of external examiners/advisers rests with Academic Quality and Standards Committee, acting on behalf of Academic Board. All nominations of external examiners and advisers are required to be authorised by the Dean of School.

External advisers with particular subject expertise may also be appointed to assist the external examiners, for example in language awards. The duties of external advisers will be fewer than those of external examiners and do not necessarily include participation in meetings of Progression and Award Boards. Normally, a schedule of duties will be drawn up and agreed with the Course Team and progressed in accordance with the current University Regulations. An adviser is required to submit an annual report to the external examiner and also to Quality Assurance Services.

All arrangements for and duties of external examiners for courses leading to Pearson awards will be in accordance with the associated licence agreement and appropriate University guidance issued by Quality Assurance Services.

An external examiner should normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments.

The number of external examiners to be appointed will vary from course to course, appointments may be made to groups of modules and the designation of Chief External Examiner for Progression and Award. There may also be particular requirements laid down by Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies in relation to the number of practitioner and academic external examiners required.

#### **14.3.2 Period of Tenure**

The period of tenure for an external examiner will normally be four consecutive years running from the 1st November to the 31st October. The tenure will normally allow an external examiner to assess four successive cohorts of full-time students. A new external examiner will normally take up appointment on or before the retirement of his/her predecessor.

External examiners must remain available after the last assessments with which they are to be associated to deal with any subsequent reviews of decisions.

### **14.3.3 Extension of Tenure**

In certain exceptional circumstances, for example in the case of a new award, to ensure continuity within an examining team, or where a course is running out and has only a further year to run, the period of appointment of an external examiner may be extended by a period of one year only. The external examiner must be consulted and should consent to the extension of tenure. In order to extend the term of office of an external examiner, the appropriate University process must be followed.

### **14.3.4 End of External Examiners' period of tenure**

The appointment of an external examiner will normally cease at the end of their appointed tenure. In certain circumstances it may be necessary for the appointment to cease before the completion of the approved period of tenure. Examples of reasons for the early cessation of an appointment may include:

- a) resignation
- b) changes in course structure
- c) non-fulfilment of duties
- d) failure to provide an annual report within the required timescale
- e) unprofessional conduct
- f) breakdown in relationship with staff teams or
- g) other cause which may disadvantage students

If such early cessation is thought to be necessary, the appropriate University process will be followed.

Examiners may request to temporarily cease their appointment, for example due to illness or maternity leave, and another suitable University Examiner should be asked to temporarily increase their duties to cover the period of absence. If this increase of duties by another examiner is not possible the examiner must resign and a new examiner be appointed.

One month's notice of resignation of external examiners should be made in writing, addressed to the appropriate Dean of School. The resignation must be notified to Quality Assurance Services and the appropriate School staff.

In the case of resignations late in the assessment cycle, the University may request the external examiner to perform some or all of their duties.

### 14.3.5 Changes to External Examiners' responsibilities

External examiners' responsibilities may be changed within the period of tenure. This may be due to the award to which the examiner was first appointed ceasing to run or where it is decided by a School to change the responsibilities allocated within a large team of examiners. This may also occur when there is illness or where an external examiner ceases their tenure early due to resignation or the University has sought the early cessation of duties of an examiner. To change an external examiner's responsibilities:

- a) the external examiner must be consulted and agree the proposed change
- b) appropriate University process must be followed.

### 14.3.6 Duties of External Examiners

On appointment, external examiners are assigned specific duties including:

#### a) **Confirming Standards for Awards**

External Examiners confirm that the threshold standards set for the awards are appropriate by referencing relevant national subject benchmark statements, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, the national qualifications framework, University validation documentation and any appropriate Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requirements.

#### b) **Comparing Achievement of Students**

External Examiners draw on their professional experience to compare the achievement of students with that of their peers on comparable courses of higher education elsewhere.

#### c) **Confirmation of Assessment**

External Examiners confirm the appropriateness of the form and content of proposed examination papers, coursework and other assessments which count towards an award above the level of Certificate of Higher Education, except where the Certificate of Higher Education is the target award. In confirming the appropriateness of assessments, external examiners are asked to ensure that the assessments are capable of measuring achievement of the intended learning outcomes, in such a way that internal and external examiners will be able to judge whether students have fulfilled the objectives of the course and reached the required threshold standard.

#### d) **Commenting on Proposed Changes to Assessment Regulations**

External Examiners should be consulted about any proposed changes to the approved assessment regulations which will directly affect students currently on the course.



e) **Modifications**

External Examiners participate in decisions and/or approval of new modules and modifications to existing modules of a course.

f) **Accessing Assessed Work**

To ensure that each student is fairly assessed in relation to the rest of their cohort, external examiners are expected to see the work of a representative sample of students proposed for the highest available category of the award and for failure; to see samples of the work of students proposed for each category of award; to have appropriate access to all assessed work where practicable.

g) **Moderation**

External examiners have the right to moderate the marks awarded by internal examiners. The marks may relate to modules of a course or groups of modules, appropriate to their subject or professional expertise.

The modules may also contribute to an award for which the external examiner is not responsible.

h) **Alteration to Sets of Marks**

Exceptionally, the external examiner(s) may propose to the Progression and Award Board or Module Board the adjustment up or down of marks for a particular cohort of students on a particular module to maintain academic threshold standards. The adjustment must apply to the whole cohort marks and cannot be used to adjust the marks of individual students in isolation.

In such a case, discussion will be held with internal examiners in accordance with the provisions for the conduct of Progression and Award Boards.

i) **Attendance at Progression and Award Boards**

External examiners are required to:

- attend Module Board in accordance with the University Regulations and
- attend the meeting of the Progression and Award Board at which decisions on student progression and recommendations for awards are made.
- ensure that those recommendations have been reached by means according with the University's requirements and normal practice in higher education.

No recommendation for the conferment of an award of the University above the level of Certificate of Higher Education may be made without the written consent of the approved external examiner(s). Normally, this is through the signing of the spreadsheet of marks at the

conclusion of the Progression and Award Board and/or Module Board but may also be by oral agreement followed by written confirmation.

Signing the spreadsheet of marks is also confirmation that:

- the external examiner is satisfied that the conduct of the Progression and Award Board and/or Module Board has been in accordance with the regulations of the University
- and
- any further consideration of the decisions made at the Progression and Award Board and/or Module Board is limited to the University regulations for the review of a decision of a Progression and Award Board or Module Board and an appeal against the outcome of that review.

**j) Matters of Principle**

On any matter which the external examiner(s) have declared a matter of principle, the decision of the external examiner(s) shall either:

- be accepted as final by the Progression and Award Board
- or
- be referred to the Academic Board.

Any unresolved disagreement between external examiners shall be referred to the Academic Board. If the disagreement concerns only one or more individual students, the recommendations for all other students should be signed.

Any unresolved disagreement between external examiner(s) and a Progression and Award Board shall be referred to the Academic Board.

**k) Participation in Reviews of Decisions**

External examiners may be asked to participate as required in any reviews of decisions about individual students' awards taken during the examiner's period of office.

**l) Submission of an Annual Report**

External examiners are required to report annually in writing to the University and within four weeks of the date of the Progression and Award Board and/or Module Board for the award they examine. The reports are intended to provide assurance to the University that:

- academic threshold standards set are appropriate in light of relevant external reference points;
- student achievement is comparable to similar provision elsewhere;

- the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are rigorous and fairly conducted.

Reports must be made using the template issued by Quality Assurance Services and submitted electronically to the designated e-mail address

The purpose of the report is to assure the University that the academic threshold standards of its awards are appropriate, and to enable the University to judge whether the course is meeting its stated objectives and to make any necessary improvements, either immediately or at the next review as appropriate.

The University requires that:

- external examiners submit their reports to the University within 4 weeks of the date of the Progression and Award Board and/or Module Board with which they are associated
- external examiners' reports are considered at course level and the outcomes of such consideration are formally recorded
- reports do not reference individuals by name
- reports are made publicly available
- the final report of an examiner's tenure will be shared with the incoming external examiner for the purposes of continuity.

External examiners will be provided with a written response to their comments and recommendations by relevant School staff.

External examiners have authority to submit a confidential report direct to the Chair of the Academic Board if they have serious concerns that they do not believe are appropriate to raise elsewhere.

m) **Other Reports**

External examiners will provide other reports as required by the University.

n) **Matters of Serious Concern**

External examiners have the right to report to the University through the Chair of the Academic Board on any matters of serious concern arising from the assessments which put at risk the threshold standard of the University's awards, or jeopardise the fair treatment of students.