

Code of Good Practice: External Examiners (Taught Programmes of Study)

[TQA Manual - Introduction and Contents](#)

[Implementation: for all with immediate effect]

[Partner Institutions: All partner institutions delivering programmes validated by the University of Exeter are required to observe this code of good practice.]

External Examiners' Nomination forms can be requested by contacting Quality Review: grs@exeter.ac.uk

1 Introduction

- 1.1 External Examiners must be appointed for all taught programmes delivered by Colleges. The procedures outlined in this document are applicable only to taught programmes of study. External Examiners are formally responsible to the Senate of the University.
- 1.2 The responsibilities of External Examiners and Boards of Examiners are set out in the [Ordinances](#) of the University. The Ordinances are made by Council to amplify the meaning of the Statutes which sit above them.

2 Criteria for Appointment

- 2.1 Each external examiner's academic/professional qualifications should be appropriate in level and subject for examining the programme(s) to be examined, and should meet any criteria set out by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.
- 2.2 Each external's standing, expertise and experience should be such as to:
 - (a) enable fulfilment of the external's responsibility in the maintenance of the academic standards of the programme(s) in the context of higher education nationally;
 - (b) include an awareness of the latest developments in the design and delivery of the flexible curriculum;
 - (c) include expertise in the enhancement of the student experience.

Normally the University would expect such experience to be demonstrated only by those of Senior Lecturer level (or equivalent) status. Where this is not the case, Colleges will be asked to state their reasons for considering the candidate meets the criteria.

- 2.3 Each external should have had significant recent examining experience as an internal examiner at the required level.
- 2.4 There should not be current reciprocal external examining between departments.
- 2.5 For any one programme, external examiners should not be appointed consecutively from the same institution, nor should more than one external examiner be appointed to a course from any one department.
- 2.6 As a norm, an examiner should not hold more than two external examining appointments for taught programmes at the same time.
- 2.7 Former members of staff of the University should not be invited to become external examiners before a lapse of at least five years.
- 2.8 Those registered for an award of the University are ineligible for appointment as external examiners in any part of the University.
- 2.9 To avoid potential conflicts of interest, external examiners should not be appointed if they are covered by any of the following categories:
- Council or Senate member
 - as a sponsor, relative or friend,
 - as a close professional colleague,
 - having been involved with the supervision of the student on placement or professional training
 - in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study
 - involved in collaborative research activities with a member of staff
 - anyone who has been directly involved as an external member of the validation panel for the programme
- 2.10 The Dean of the Faculty of Taught Programmes will be responsible for resolving conflicts of interest in the appointment of an external examiner.

3 Responsibilities of the University

- 3.1 At the time of nomination the College should provide the external examiner with sufficient information to enable him/her to make an educated decision as to whether or not to accept the appointment.
- 3.2 The Quality Review office will issue an appointment letter and contract clarifying the period of appointment, range of programmes and modules, along with details of the College contact.
- 3.3 The College will agree the dates of Boards of Examiners and any visits with all external examiners well in advance of the assessment period.
- 3.4 The College will pay expenses promptly on receipt, and the fee on receipt of the external examiners' report.
- 3.5 Where resources permit, Colleges should take the opportunity of inviting new external examiners to Exeter ahead of their first Board of Examiners, to ensure that

a Board meeting is not the first time at which they meet the generality of academic staff.

3.6 The University will provide new external examiners with details of the general regulations and codes of good practice relating to their appointment.

3.7 As a minimum, Colleges should provide new external examiners with the following information by the start of the first session of their appointment:

- College handbook(s)
- Discipline/Programme handbooks
- Programme specification(s)
- Module descriptions
- College assessment conventions
- Minutes of the last Board of Examiners meeting
- Previous external examiner's final report

4 Responsibilities of the External Examiner

4.1 In accordance with [Ordinance 3](#) an external examiner is responsible to the Senate of the University.

4.2 The external examiner agrees that during the appointment they will not hold more than one other external examining appointment for a taught programme unless otherwise agreed by the Dean of Taught Programmes, in writing in advance.

4.3 The external examiner agrees that during the appointment they will not undertake any additional activities or accept any other engagements that lead or might lead to any conflict of interest between the external examiner and the best interests of the University.

4.4 The external examiner agrees that they will declare to the University any conflict of interest that may arise in the course of the appointment, including in particular if they are placed in a position of making a judgement about any student with whom they have had direct contact.

4.5 The external examiner has the responsibility of ensuring that each candidate is treated fairly and with an even application of academic standards.

4.6 The external examiner is responsible for ensuring that the standard of the University's awards is maintained and is equivalent to standards elsewhere.

4.7 The external must judge each student on the basis of work submitted for assessment without being influenced by any previous association with the programme, the staff, or the student.

4.8 The external should compare the performance of students with that of students on comparable programmes elsewhere.

4.9 The external must be satisfied that the examination requirements are such as to enable students to be fairly assessed in relation to the programme syllabus.

- 4.10 The external must approve the form and content of prepared examination question papers.
- 4.11 The external must be satisfied as to the form and required content of any coursework which contributes to the final assessment.
- 4.12 The external should be consulted about any proposed change in the form of assessment.
- 4.13 The external has the right to see all examination scripts including course work which contributes to the final assessment. Where it is agreed between the College(s) and the external that a selection of scripts only is made available, the principles for such selection must be agreed in advance. The guiding principle for selection is that the external must have sufficient evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and that they are consistent.
- 4.14 Where external examiners see only a selection of scripts from a module, this should include sample scripts from the top, middle and bottom of the range, and all the scripts of failing candidates.
- 4.15 The external has the right to moderate the internal marking and will not normally be required to mark work unless marking the whole cohort or with the express agreement of the external themselves in exceptional circumstances.
- 4.16 The external has the right to conduct a viva voce examination where a viva is permitted under the relevant examination conventions. Details concerning vivas are included in the code of good practice for Boards of Examiners.
- 4.17 The external shall normally be present at any meeting of the Board of Examiners at which recommendations are made for the award of degrees, diplomas or certificates. When, exceptionally and for good reason, this is not possible, the external's absence must be approved by the Dean of the Faculty of Taught Programmes. (This will be held to exclude the examination of referred candidates and re-examinees, where communication by email, fax or letter may be held to be sufficient.)
- 4.18 The external must be satisfied that decisions relating to individual students are reached in accordance with agreed regulations and conventions.
- 4.19 The external is entitled to expect that all available relevant information has been presented to the Board before it reaches a final decision, particularly in borderline and other difficult cases. The external must be given access to students' marks for all the modules contributing to an award, whether or not the external has been involved in an earlier Board of Examiners meeting that approved individual module results.
- 4.20 The external examiner is expected to sign the final mark sheet as a confirmation of agreement with the decisions taken and awards conferred by the Board of Examiners.
- 4.21 In any case of disagreement which cannot otherwise be resolved, the external's decision is final, but the external must provide the Board with a clear statement of the reasoning behind it.

- 4.22 As a condition of appointment and payment, the external shall be required to submit an annual report in the prescribed manner within four weeks of the main meeting of the Board of Examiners.¹
- 4.23 An external examiner who considers it appropriate may send an additional report to the Vice-Chancellor under separate cover marked 'strictly confidential'. If an external examiner remains concerned having exhausted all internal procedures including a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor, they may refer to the QAA arrangements for addressing concerns.
- 4.24 An external examiner shall not be expected to:
- (a) act as a second marker;
 - (b) amend the marks of individual students;
 - (c) consider cases of mitigating circumstances; and
 - (d) act concurrently as an advisor to a programme team on programme design, or be part of any activity established to review programmes on which he/she examines.

5 Period of Appointment

- 5.1 In accordance with Ordinance 3, para 3, an external examiner shall normally be appointed for a maximum of four years.
- 5.2 An external who has served for a period of four years shall not be re-appointed for the same programme(s) without exceptional reason.

6 Termination of Appointment

- 6.1 The University has identified the following circumstances under which the appointment of an external examiner may be terminated early:
- (a) failure to attend Board of Examiners meetings without the prior agreement of the Dean of the Faculty of Taught Programmes (acting on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor);
 - (b) failure to submit an annual report within the specified time;
 - (c) failure to carry out duties identified in the University's code of good practice;
 - (d) cessation of, or non-recruitment to, the programme(s).
- 6.2 The early termination of the appointment of an external examiner shall be made by the Vice-Chancellor on the recommendation of the Dean.

7 Student Contact with External Examiners

- 7.1 The contacting of external examiners by students regarding any aspect of their programmes of study is prohibited and will be treated as an offence under the

University's Disciplinary Procedures. Externals are requested to inform the University's Examinations Office should such an occurrence take place.

- 7.2 An informal meeting between students and the external may be held at the request of the external by arrangement and with the agreement of the College.

PROFESSOR J M KAY
Deputy Vice-Chancellor

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This Code of Good Practice is maintained by Quality Review. If you have any queries please contact grs@exeter.ac.uk.

¹See also the statement of procedures for external examiners' reports at: [http://www.admin.ex.ac.uk/academic/tls/tqa/Part 9/9GSoPEErpts.pdf](http://www.admin.ex.ac.uk/academic/tls/tqa/Part%209/9GSoPEErpts.pdf)

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