

A5: EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

INTRODUCTION

The appointment of external examiners is one of the most important features of the University's system of quality assurance. The function of the external examiner is crucial to all aspects of the assessment process and his/her presence ensures the objectivity of an Assessment Board and ensures comparability of awards in the national context, the fair and equitable treatment of students, and correct application of the Academic Regulations.

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REGULATION

1. EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

- 1.1 External examiners are primarily concerned with the award-bearing stages of a course.
- 1.2 In the case of undergraduate courses external examiners shall primarily be concerned with degree and honours degree stages. External examiners always have the entitlement to scrutinise examination questions and coursework, but do not have any obligation to do so except for the main award-bearing stages of the course.
- 1.3 Where new courses offer sub-degree exit awards, an external examiner(s) shall be appointed from the date of the commencement of the course.

2. THE APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

- 2.1 All external examiners shall be appointed by Academic Council. The arrangements for the appointment of external examiners for research degrees shall be as specified in [Regulation A6: Research Degrees](#).

- 2.2 There shall be at least one external examiner appointed to examine students for a course. For award-bearing courses, there shall normally be two external examiners.
- 2.3 An external examiner shall normally be appointed for a period of four years. This period of appointment may be extended, provided that no person shall act in that capacity for more than five consecutive years.
- 2.4 An external examiner shall not be re-appointed within a period of five years dating from the termination of the previous term of appointment.
- 2.5 Normally, an external examiner shall not hold more than two substantial appointments or their equivalent as an external examiner; such restriction shall apply whether or not the concurrent appointments are confined to the University or relate in part to another institution of higher education.
- 2.6 External examiners appointed to undergraduate degrees will primarily be concerned with degree and honours degree stages and his/her delegated authority will be sought at the commencement of his/her appointment to permit the University to undertake the assessment processes associated with the sub-degree exit awards. However, an external examiner may elect to be involved in all stages of a course should he/she so wish.
- 2.7 At the commencement of his/her appointment, an external examiner shall be briefed on the course aims, learning outcomes, curriculum, syllabus, teaching and assessment methods and the regulations governing such assessment, as they relate to courses leading to the award of academic credit.

3. CRITERIA FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

The criteria for the appointment of external examiners shall be:

- (i) An external examiner's academic and/or professional qualifications shall be appropriate both in terms of the level and the subject(s) of such qualifications to match the general requirement of the assessed subject(s).
- (ii) An external examiner shall have appropriate standing, expertise and experience in his/her subject or discipline to ensure the maintenance of academic standards; such standards shall reflect the general expectations of higher education relative to national standards for the particular subject or discipline.
- (iii) An external examiner shall normally have recent examining or academically comparable experience which shall be adequate to the requirements of the subject area to be examined. However, an external examiner without previous experience shall be appointed normally only where the Assessment Board already includes an experienced external examiner.

- (iv) To ensure that courses benefit from comprehensive external scrutiny, external examiners shall be appointed from a broad range of institutional/professional backgrounds and traditions. In particular, the following guidelines shall be observed:
- (a) an Assessment Board shall not have more than one external examiner appointed from the same institution;
 - (b) an external examiner shall not be appointed where such appointment can be construed as creating a reciprocal arrangement with another institution;
 - (c) an external examiner shall not be replaced by an external examiner from the same academic institution or organisation following the conclusion of his/her period of office or from the same academic institution or organisation that supplied the external examiner during the preceding five year period.
- (v) There shall be an appropriate balance of academic and professional expertise in the team of external examiners.
- (vi) Any person who, during the preceding five years, has been included in any of the categories listed below shall normally be ineligible for appointment as an external examiner:
- (a) a member of staff, a governor, a student or a near relative of any member of staff concerned with the course;
 - (b) a person who has had any close association with the University, the course or individual members of the course teaching staff;
 - (c) a person who has been significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the course(s) or modules;
 - (d) a person who is personally associated with the sponsorship of students on the course concerned;
 - (e) a person who is required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the course;
 - (f) a person who, within his/her own organisation, will personally be involved with training of students on the course.

4. AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

- 4.1 The primary responsibility of an external examiner is to ensure that students are assessed fairly and impartially and that the standard of a particular University award is comparable with those of other awarding bodies.
- 4.2 Further to the provisions of [paragraph 4.1](#) of this Regulation, external examiners shall have the following authority and responsibilities:
- (i) to approve, as appropriate, the form and content of draft examination papers, coursework and/or other forms of assessment that contribute to the assessment in award-bearing stages;
 - (ii) to approve proposed changes to assessment regulations where these affect students currently enrolled for the course;
 - (iii) to ~~attend~~ participate in meetings of the Assessment Board as appropriate and have right of access to the work of students where such work is subject to assessment for academic awards within the Board's jurisdiction;
 - (iv) to have access to the work of those students recommended for the highest category of the award(s) and of those deemed to have failed the assessment for the award. External examiners shall also have authority to request representative samples of work for each category of the award to ensure that the relative placing of the students in order of merit is fair and impartial;
 - (v) for the award(s) to which his/her particular appointment relates:
 - (a) to moderate the grades awarded by the internal examiners,
 - (b) to require a viva voce examination in the case of any student,
 - (c) to participate as required in the review of any decision relating to an individual student award;
 - (vi) to act, if invited by a course or programme management team and if willing, as an external subject expert and advise on the appropriateness of the subject content of a new or revised module(s);
 - (vii) to comment upon, *inter alia*, assessment practice, standards, organisation and management and, as appropriate, collaborative arrangements.
 - (viii) to ensure the confidentiality of all materials they have access to in their role as external examiner.
- 4.3 Every recommendation for the conferment of an award of the University by an Assessment Board shall be subject to the written consent of at least one of the external examiners for the award.
- 4.4 Where an external examiner(s) declares the subject of any contention to be a matter of principle, the Assessment Board shall either accept the view of the external examiner(s)

or refer the matter to Academic Council for a decision. Similarly, any unresolved disagreement between the external examiners shall be referred to Academic Council for resolution.

5. ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

- 5.1 Each external examiner shall complete a standard written annual report to the University on the conduct of the assessments concluded during the year and on issues relating to those assessments.
- 5.2 The course/programme management team, under the direction of the Head of School and Course Leader, is required to address each of the points raised in the external examiner's report; the Head of School shall subsequently respond formally, in writing, to the external examiner(s) to advise him/her of the course of action adopted in respect of each of the comments raised in the report.
- 5.3 Where an external examiner considers that any aspect of an assessment erodes or jeopardises the standard of the University's degrees, diplomas or certificates, he/she shall report such concern, at the earliest opportunity, in writing to the Principal of the University.

6. TERMINATION OF APPOINTMENT

Exceptionally, Academic Council may terminate the appointment of an external examiner before the expiry of the period of appointment. Normally, such termination shall be effected only where an external examiner persistently fails to comply with the University Regulations relevant to his/her appointment, such as failure to submit an Annual Report, or where there has been a significant change in circumstances as these relate to the course and/or the external examiner.