



**EXTERNAL EXAMINERS
FOR MODULES AND TAUGHT PROGRAMMES OF STUDY**

POLICY AND PROCEDURES¹

CONTENTS	PAGE NUMBER
Section 1 – Introduction	3
Section 2 – Appointment of External Examiners	3
2.1 Procedure for nomination and approval	4
2.2 Selection and appointment criteria	
2.2.1 Subject External Examiners	5
2.2.2 Award External Examiners	8
2.3 Home Office requirements	8
Section 3 – Roles, powers and responsibilities	
3.1 Subject External Examiners	9
3.2 Interim visits by Subject External Examiners	14
3.3 Award External Examiners	16
Section 4 – External Examiners’ reporting requirements	19
Section 5 – Student engagement with External Examiners	20

¹ Incorporating the former documents ‘External Examiners for Modules and Taught Programmes of Study Notes for Guidance’, ‘Process for the Selection, Approval and Appointment of External Examiners for Taught Programmes’ and ‘Guidance on Interim Visits by Subject External Examiners’.

Section 6 – Termination of appointment

20

(Amendments since 2018/19 bold and underlined)

These procedures apply to UoP sites of delivery and all UK and international partnerships, unless exceptions to regulations have been formally approved.

1. INTRODUCTION

External Examiners are essential to the academic well-being of the University. Their involvement ensures that

- ◆ Standards are appropriate by reference to published national subject benchmarks, the National Qualifications Framework and the University's programme and module specifications
- ◆ The assessment process measures student achievement against the intended learning outcomes
- ◆ The assessment process is in line with the University's Assessment Policy
- ◆ The University's awards are comparable in standard to awards conferred by other UK HE institutions
- ◆ The assessment process is operated fairly and equitably and in accordance with University Regulations.

2. APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

External Examiners must be appointed for all programmes leading to a University award whether delivered within the University or at one of its partner institutions.

The University's Regulations (and the regulations of external bodies, where appropriate) require External Examiners to be involved with all examinations and other forms of assessment which contribute to the students' final awards. External Examiners must therefore be involved in assessments of pre-final stages of programmes if there is a carry forward mark to the final award.

The majority of the University's programmes operate within a standard modular framework. For such programmes the University operates a two-tier assessment process which is reflected in the University's definition of the separate roles of Subject and Award External Examiners (see Sections 2.2.1 – 2.2.2 and 3 below).

The number of External Examiners will vary from programme of study to programme of study. Normally one External Examiner will be appointed for each subject area. The range of modules for which s/he is to be responsible should not normally exceed 360 credits in any one academic year. If it is proposed that the number of credits exceed 360 (up to a maximum of 480 credits²) the nomination should be accompanied by a rationale, which should include details of the size of the cohort/s concerned, and confirmation from the nominee that s/he is confident of being able to cover the workload.

² The 480 credits may be made up of modules delivered in one institution or across a maximum of two partners irrespective of whether they are core or optional modules and of whether they are currently running.

Where there is identical provision on campus, or across partners, the same External Examiner should be appointed for these programmes wherever possible, subject to the above constraints regarding maximum workload.

Subject External Examiners are normally appointed for a period of four academic years, with appointments normally running from 1 August to 31 October (Undergraduate programmes commencing in September) and 1 August to 31 December (Postgraduate programmes).

Award External Examiners may be appointed for the full four year term or the appointment may be rotated between the relevant Subject External Examiners so that the role is potentially filled each year by a different Subject External. The proposed Award External Examining arrangements must be approved in advance by the External Examiners Sub-Committee. A Subject External Examiner will not normally be approved to act as an Award External unless s/he is in at least her/his second year of appointment with the University.

An appointment may be extended in exceptional circumstances, for example, where a programme is being withdrawn.

An external examiner may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances but only after a period of five years has elapsed since the end of their appointment.

2.1 PROCEDURE FOR NOMINATION AND APPROVAL

Responsibility for the approval of External Examiner nominations for taught programmes lies with the External Examiners Sub-Committee, acting on behalf of University Teaching, Learning and Quality Committee.

Overall responsibility for the timely nomination of External Examiners to ensure sufficient opportunity for the required Home Office checks to be conducted in advance of their appointment, and for appropriate induction, remains with the Head of School/Partner HE Co-ordinator (or equivalent). Nominations should be sought at least eighteen months before the current incumbent comes to the end of their term of office and a specific proposal for a replacement External Examiner should be forwarded to the Head of School for consideration at least 12 months before the appointment is due to take effect. For new programmes the proposed External Examiner/s should have been identified by the time the proposal reaches the point of final approval.

Further information about the procedure for nomination, approval and appointment of External Examiners, including the required nomination forms (EE1 or EE2 as appropriate), is available on the [External Examiners' Guidance Library](#).

[The External Examiners' Guidance Library](#) also includes links to national External Examiner databases which provide a useful source of information about potential nominees.

Following approval at Faculty/Academic Partnerships level, nominations are scrutinised by the Central Quality Office to determine the most appropriate approval route:

- ◆ nominations that clearly meet all the University's appointment criteria will be considered by Chair's action

- ◆ nominations that depart from the criteria in any way and require a supporting rationale, for example, if the nominee does not have previous external examining experience will be considered by two members of the Sub-Committee not being from the Faculty proposing the appointment. In the case of disagreement between members the final decision will lie with the Chair.

2.2 SELECTION AND APPOINTMENT CRITERIA

External Examiners must meet the University's published criteria for appointment.

2.2.1 SUBJECT EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

The **Subject External Examiner** is primarily concerned with the standards of assessment in a specific group of modules (the subject) irrespective of the study programme(s) or award(s) to which the modules are attached. The Subject External Examiner will be asked to comment on assessment processes, and on the standard, content and development of the modules within the subject. S/he will be a member of the Subject Assessment Panel which confirms or modifies module marks and ensures that the students are being assessed in accordance with the assessment programme and the intended learning outcomes for the subject modules.

Subject External Examiners do not attend Award Assessment Boards (unless they are required to do so by a professional accrediting body). Nor do they see or comment on student profiles. Their focus is on the standards in the subject.

When making the nomination of an External Examiner, the Head of School (or equivalent), in consultation with other Heads of School (if appropriate), is responsible for ensuring that nominations meet the University's appointment criteria. Where a nomination departs from these criteria in any way a supporting rationale must be provided with the nomination form. The equivalent responsibility for partners lies with the HE co-ordinator (or equivalent).

The Head of School is also responsible for ensuring that any potential intellectual property difficulties, such as might arise from the need for commercial confidentiality, are resolved prior to appointment.

The selection of nominees for appointment as an External Examiner must be made with reference to the following criteria based on the indicators of sound practice in the UK Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining:

- i. where there is a team of External Examiners for a programme of studies or leading to an award there is an adequate balance including:
 - ❖ examining experience
 - ❖ academic and professional practitioners
 - ❖ members from different institutions of higher education

- ii. the nominee has achieved academic or professional qualifications in an appropriate subject and at a level appropriate for the modules/programme of study to be examined.³
- iii. the nominee is of an appropriate academic and/or professional standing to command the respect of colleagues and to maintain the comparability of academic standards in the context of higher education. Retirees can be considered provided they have sufficient evidence of continuing involvement in the academic area in question.
- iv. the nominee has sufficient recent experience of examining at the required level, preferably including experience as an external examiner, or comparable related experience to indicate competence in assessing students in the subject area concerned. For example, an external examiner for a Foundation degree should be capable of assessing whether a student is capable of proceeding to level 6 and therefore should have experience of teaching and assessing at level 6. Information on proposed arrangements for the induction and support of an inexperienced nominee should be included with the nomination form. The lack of previous external examining experience does not in itself normally bar the nomination of an otherwise suitable nominee provided that effective induction and briefing arrangements can be put in place to support the individual concerned, except in the case of an international partnership where a nominee for an Award External Examiner appointment must have previous external examining experience, as well as TNE experience. The appointment of a mentor may be a condition of approval in some circumstances eg for a Subject External Examiner appointment for an international partnership where the nominee does not have previous external examining experience.
- v. the nominee has knowledge of standards of academic assessment in the UK sufficient to make the required academic judgement about comparability of standards with other UK HE institutions. Potential nominees who do not have experience of delivering and assessing in UK HE should be briefed in advance of this requirement and their attention drawn to the relevant elements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.
- vi. the nominee has expertise in the enhancement of the student learning experience and, where appropriate, awareness of modern developments in the design and delivery of the flexible curriculum.
- vii. the nominee has an appropriate level of digital literacy (for example, familiarity with using Moodle (or a similar system), Skype and file sharing or repository tools (for example, MS OneDrive)) to enable effective engagement with the University's Digital Learning Environment, with appropriate induction and support where necessary
- viii. where appropriate, the nominee meets the criteria set out by the professional or accrediting body.

³ At least the level of the qualification being examined.

- ix. External Examiners are drawn from a wide variety of institutional/professional contexts and traditions in order that individual subjects or programmes of study have the benefit of wide ranging external scrutiny. Normally there must not be:
- ❖ reciprocal external examining between subjects or programmes or departments in two institutions (this means that an external examiner should not be appointed from another institution where a member of the University's staff is serving as an external examiner for a cognate programme);
 - ❖ replacement of an External Examiner by an individual from the same department in the same institution;
 - ❖ an External Examiner from an institution in which the subject area concerned has been the source of examiners in the recent past (normally five years).
- x. the nominee will not have such other extensive examining commitments that they cannot properly discharge their duties in respect of this University.
- ❖ External Examiners should not normally hold more than the equivalent of a total of two substantial appointments at the same time.
 - ❖ If a proposed External Examiner already holds two appointments, the Head of School/Partner HE Co-ordinator will be required to provide a clear argument for the nomination being pursued. This should include a commentary on the amount of work, numbers of students and dates of meetings of Assessment Panels and Boards at other institutions to which the External Examiner is already committed.
- xi. the nominee will be impartial in judgement and over the last five years the nominee normally must not have been:
- ❖ a member of staff⁴, a governor, a student or a near relative or partner of a member of staff in relation to the programme of studies or who had a relationship with any of the above;
 - ❖ an examiner for another cognate subject/programme in the University or one of its partners;
 - ❖ a member of staff of any of the University's Partner Colleges
 - ❖ involved as an External Examiner for the subject or programme of study when it was approved by another validating body;

and over the last two years must not have been:

- ❖ involved in a close research collaboration with a member of staff associated with the programme/subject area;

in addition, the nominee must not be:

- ❖ personally associated with the sponsorship of students from the subject/programme;
- ❖ required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the modules or programme of study;

⁴ A former member of staff or student may not be appointed unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s).

- ❖ in a position to influence significantly the future employment of students on the modules or programme of study⁵;
 - ❖ likely to be involved with student placements or training in the examiner's organisation.
- xii. The nominee should be fluent in English and, where the programme is not delivered and assessed in English, fluent in the relevant language(s).

An External Examiner must immediately notify Sue Gregory, Quality Assurance Adviser, Central Quality Office in writing of any material change in circumstances which would lead to a breach of the conditions of appointment outlined above.

2.2.2 AWARD EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

The **Award External Examiner** acts as the "critical friend" of the Award Assessment Board, to ensure that decisions on progression or awards for students are made in accordance with the assessment regulations, and that justice is done to the individual student, taking account of any recommendations resulting from prior consideration of extenuating circumstances or assessment offences.

S/he will be a member of the appropriate Award Assessment Board(s), which makes decisions on progression and awards on the basis of the module marks confirmed by the Subject Assessment Panel. For each named award with which s/he is associated, the Award External Examiner will be asked to provide informative comment and recommendations upon whether or not the University is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards and about the comparability of standards of student performance at award level with similar awards in other UK institutions with which s/he is familiar. Responsibility for maintaining the academic standard of the award/s is, however, the corporate responsibility of the Award Assessment Board, not the Award External Examiner's alone. The Board is in a position to fulfil this responsibility because it receives a report from each of the constituent subject panel chairs on the standard of assessment in subjects/modules.

The Award External Examiner may also be a member of the appropriate group of Subject External Examiners.

The principal role of the Award External Examiner is to ensure that the University's regulations are being implemented consistently, fairly and in line with national standards and expectations for such processes. The Award External Examiner therefore needs to be fully conversant with the University's regulations and standard regulatory policies and practices across the sector.

The Award External Examiner may also be a member of the appropriate group of Subject External Examiners. Nominees should normally be drawn from an academic background relevant to the discipline in which the awards being considered reside in order to ensure those taking on this role are appropriately qualified to make a judgement on the academic standard of the award and on student performance at award level.

⁵ A nominee may be involved in the recruitment of graduates, some of whom may be graduates of Plymouth University. If this is a shared responsibility with other colleagues, however, this would not constitute 'significant' influence on the future employment of students.

In addition to the experience outlined above, nominees for the Award External Examiner role for Academic Partnerships need to have appropriate experience of partnerships.

2.3 HOME OFFICE REQUIREMENTS

The Home Office expects universities to carry out right to work in the UK checks on all External Examiners. The EE1 form completed at the start of the nomination process requires nominees to provide the necessary information to enable these checks to be undertaken. Further details of the procedure to be followed are contained in the document 'External Examiners and employment checks – Home Office requirements' available via the [External Examiners' Guidance Library](#)

3. ROLES, POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The University has clearly defined the roles, powers and responsibilities assigned to its External Examiners.

3.1 SUBJECT EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

3.1.1 A Subject External Examiner can expect the University to

- i. provide sufficient information at the time of nomination to enable him/her to make an informed decision as to whether to accept the appointment, including the honorarium payable for the appointment
- ii. clarify at the time of appointment the range of modules within the subject area for which s/he is to be responsible (which should not normally exceed 360 credits in any one academic year)
- iii. provide appropriate induction, including the opportunity to attend the University's External Examiners' Conference, and full access to all relevant University, programme and module level documentation
- iv. facilitate arrangements for interim engagements/visits (see Section 3.2 below)
- v. provide access to all elements and forms of subject assessment, which may include examination scripts, coursework, project reports, design work and dissertations, to enable the Subject External Examiner to fulfil his/her responsibility for confirming standards in each module within his/her remit.
- vi. agree with the Subject External Examiner(s) the sample of modules to be subject to detailed scrutiny in each academic year in line with the guidance set out in the University's Marking and Moderation Policy (approximately one third of modules (across all levels)).
- vii. agree dates of meetings of Assessment Panels with all the External Examiners well in advance

- viii. where applicable, agree with the Subject External Examiner(s) the means by which they are to be offered the opportunity to comment on draft examination papers and an appropriate timescale to ensure s/he has sufficient time to return comments
- ix. follow agreed scrutiny procedures to ensure that examination questions are not recycled, involving appropriate consultation with the Subject External Examiner(s)
- x. agree with the Subject External Examiner(s) the means by which they will be able to scrutinise assessment tasks in order to confirm (or otherwise) that the assessment strategy is appropriately enacted in the questions set and invite them to provide formal confirmation of this at the time of the Subject Assessment Panel meeting
- xi. agree with the Subject External Examiner(s) procedures by which the Subject External Examiner(s) will sample assessed work and the means by which material will be made available (e.g. by post in advance of the Panel, at the time of an interim visit, and/or in the University shortly before a Panel)
- xii. include marks and appropriate comments on, or with, all scripts, projects and dissertations submitted to a Subject External Examiner for consideration
- xiii. report any case in which there has been a problem with an assessment affecting or potentially affecting a group of students (eg an unseen examination paper has apparently been 'leaked', an examination has been seriously disrupted or students have been issued with conflicting information about a coursework submission date) and consult on appropriate remedial measures
- xiv. report any alleged breach of Assessment Regulations, confirm the means by which it has been investigated, and consult on the recommendations arising from that investigation
- xv. enable him/her, where necessary, to alter the characteristics of marks distribution and, if there are inconsistencies in marking, to amend marks, provided that all scripts in the 'disputed category' ⁶ have been appropriately reviewed. The University would expect that proposed amendments to marks would be discussed and agreed at the Subject Assessment Panel.
- xvi. refer to the Award Assessment Board (through its Secretary and Chair) any major disagreement on a point of principle between Examiners (whether internal or external) which cannot be resolved.
- xvii. facilitate communication between Subject External Examiners and the Award External Examiner prior to the Award Assessment Board

⁶ External Examiners are not expected to double mark individual scripts or assignments. If a Subject External Examiner believes that standards of marking overall, or within a particular classification, are inappropriate, s/he may propose that all marks in that category be revised up or down, as the case might be. It would be expected that such a recommendation would be discussed with the module team in advance of the Subject Assessment Panel. If a Subject External Examiner, in reviewing sample scripts, identifies concerns about marks in individual scripts, they may not be revised unless the examiner also reviews comparable marks across the cohort (ie the issue may relate to classification boundaries, in which case all scripts or assignments falling within one or two marks of the boundary should be reviewed). Again, the University would expect that the issue would be discussed with the markers in advance of the Panel. Subject External Examiners would be expected to notify the Subject Assessment Panel Chair of any disagreement about marks in advance of their visit to the University or the Subject Assessment Panel.

- xviii. agree the mechanism by which responses will be provided to any issues raised in the annual report of the Subject External Examiner(s) and ensure that any comments from the Subject External Examiner(s) on the response are formally minuted at the Subject Assessment Panel
- xix. pay expenses promptly on receipt, and honorarium on receipt of the annual report ⁷
- xx. consult him/her about proposed changes to programme-specific assessment regulations which will directly affect students currently registered on the modules for which s/he has responsibility
- xxi. provide a considered and timely response to any report received, outlining any actions that will be taken as a result.

3.1.2 The University will expect a Subject External Examiner to

- i. take up his/her appointment in full knowledge of University regulations, policies and procedures and undertake to operate within them
- ii. attend the University's Conference for new External Examiners
- iii. familiarise his/herself with the relevant University, programme and module level information provided
- iv. fulfil his/her responsibility for confirming standards in each module within his/her remit
- v. agree with the subject team the sample of modules to be subject to detailed scrutiny in each academic year in line with the guidance set out in the University's Marking and Moderation Policy.
- vi. approve the assessment scheme for all modules in the agreed sample. This will normally include approval of the form of coursework assessment and the form and content of 'initial' and 'resit' examination papers, together with accompanying marking schemes
- vii. approve any exceptions to the University's policy that examination questions should not be recycled
- viii. confirm (or otherwise) that the assessment strategy is appropriately enacted in the questions set
- ix. ensure that the assessments are conducted in accordance with the approved regulations for the modules/programmes of study
- x. ensure that students have been assessed fairly in accordance with the syllabus and regulations for the programme of study and have fulfilled the objectives of the module or programme at the relevant standard
- xi. discuss with the subject team the types of disabilities within the current cohort and the adjustments made to support those students, including provision for alternative/inclusive assessments

⁷ The University will process payments as expeditiously as possible, but Examiners should be aware that the University's payroll systems operate to strict deadlines. Claims which miss the deadline in any one month cannot normally be processed before the end of the following month.

- xii. raise with the subject team other appropriate equality and diversity issues (covering disability, race and gender) relevant to the assessment of students
- xiii. carry out at least one interim engagement with students per year (see 3.2 below)
- xiv. discuss with subject leaders and students the formative assessment included within modules ⁸
- xv. review an appropriate sample of work submitted for summative assessment (usually encompassing a sample within each range of marks and a sample of project/dissertation work) and agree with the subject team the means by which that sample is to be selected in line with the expectations set out in the University's Marking and Moderation Policy
- xvi. discuss with the subject team any previously undetected suspected assessment/examination offence(s) discovered during the review of assessed work
- xvii. agree with the subject team an appropriate method for adjusting module marks as and when necessary following appropriate moderation (noting that the University does not have a policy on scaling or norm referencing of marks i.e. the process of adjusting the range of marks across a module so that they fit an agreed distribution)
- xviii. agree with the subject team the extent of the involvement of Subject External Examiners in resits/reassessment, which must include agreeing the form and content of resits (for resit examination papers this should normally be undertaken at the same time as approval is sought for the main examination papers; the form of coursework reassessments may be dealt with at the Summer Panel or by correspondence) and agreeing marking standards, either on the basis of satisfaction with standards overall or through further sampling of work ⁹
- xix. be a full and equal member of the Subject Assessment Panel (which will also comprise the subject leader or equivalent as Chair, and internal examiners associated with assessments for the particular subject specific modules) ¹⁰
- xx. attend meetings of the relevant Subject Assessment Panel at which consideration is being given to assessments which contribute to a final award ^{11,12}.

⁸ See the relevant expectations in the University's Assessment Policy 2014-20. It is anticipated that discussions on formative assessment would take place at an interim visit. Comments will be required in the annual report.

⁹ The procedures adopted and the external examiner's agreement thereto should be fully minuted at the Summer Subject Assessment Panel.

¹⁰ The University expects its Subject Assessment Panels to discuss issues fully in order that they can reach decisions by consensus. If an External Examiner disagrees in principle with a proposed decision, s/he should notify the Chair that s/he will be unable to sign the declaration in respect of that decision, so that the Chair can consider deferring the decision until the disagreement has been reviewed on behalf of Academic Board.

¹¹ The date of the meeting of the Subject Assessment Panel will be agreed early in the Academic Year and a Subject External Examiner will be expected to keep this date free in her/his diary. In the unavoidable absence of a Subject External Examiner, the Panel may proceed provided the External Examiner has provided comments on the standard of all modules for which s/he has responsibility, and any queries regarding marks have been resolved in advance with module examiners. If it is clear at an earlier stage in the academic year that a Subject External Examiner will not be able to fulfil all the duties required of her/him, it may be appropriate for an emergency replacement examiner to be appointed. If the Subject External Examiner is unable at the last minute to attend a Panel, s/he may be deemed to be present and in attendance through a video link provided it is

- xxi. sign a declaration form as confirmation of agreement with the marks confirmed by the Subject Assessment Panel (but see footnote 6 below)
- xxii. provide a report within six weeks of the meeting of the Subject Assessment Panel, for consideration as part of the required evidence base for annual review.

3.1.3 The Subject External Examiner has the right to

- i. see and moderate all forms of subject assessment at levels 4-7, including examination scripts, coursework, continuous assessment, project reports, design work and dissertations in order to fulfil his/her role
- ii. request sight of the final stage results list for programmes with which s/he is associated
- iii. raise any concerns arising from the assessments or relating to academic standards with the Chair of the Assessment Panel and/or the Head of School
- iv. make a confidential report direct to the Vice Chancellor if not satisfied that appropriate action has subsequently been taken. Where an External Examiner has a serious concern relating to academic standards and has exhausted all internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor, he/she may invoke QAA's Concerns scheme.

3.1.4 The University does not expect a Subject External Examiner to

- i. act as a second marker
- ii. amend the marks of individual students
- iii. make use of viva voce examinations except where these have been arranged with the subject team in advance as a means of resolving concerns about standards of marking in a module.
- iv. consider cases of extenuating circumstances (which will be reviewed at the Award Assessment Board)
- v. act concurrently as an advisor to a programme team on programme design, or be a member of any panel(s) established to review programmes(s) on which s/he examines.

3.2 INTERIM VISITS BY SUBJECT EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

(See also Section 5 – Student engagement with External Examiners.)

possible to ensure that s/he is as well informed as other members, has access to all necessary documents, and that a visual link can be maintained.

¹² For PGT Dissertation (November) Subject Assessment Panels, provided the Subject External Examiner has attended (in person, not virtually) the Summer Subject Assessment Panel, s/he may take part in the Dissertation Panel via Skype, videoconference or telephone link. Where a panel has more than one Subject External in its membership, at least one external must take part in the Dissertation Panel by this means; the other(s) must submit a written report to the Panel in advance of the meeting.

The University's expects all Subject External Examiners to carry out at least one interim engagement per year (which may take the form of a 'virtual' visit by video conference/skype in recognition of the logistical difficulties presented by the geographical location of the University and its partners). A Subject External is also expected to carry out at least one face to face visit during his/her term of office to obtain feedback from staff and students on assessment in practice and to strengthen his/her engagement with the ongoing teaching and learning process. These interim engagements will occur at times other than at the end of the academic year.

This expectation is made clear in the contract issued to External Examiners on appointment.

The expectation was introduced on the basis that:

- i. interim visits are an essential part of the induction process for new External Examiners
- ii. on an ongoing basis, interim visits assist Subject External Examiners in understanding the overall context in which the modules for which they are responsible operate
- iii. interim visits provide a valuable opportunity for External Examiners to engage in informal dialogue with module leaders
- iv. interim visits are generally the only opportunity for examiners to obtain feedback from students about their experience and, in particular, about matters pertinent to the University's Assessment Policy on which externals are asked to comment in their annual report, for example, assessment workload, timeliness of feedback, whether formative assessment was included in each programme/stage and whether the information provided to students about assessment was explicit and accessible. External Examiners will not be in a position to comment as requested if they have not had this opportunity.
- v. In some subject areas the interim visit also provides the opportunity for externals to view students' work.

Examples of best practice from across the University regarding ongoing interaction with External Examiners include inviting externals to attend exhibitions, visit placements and practice settings or to attend project presentations or a research event (as part of which the external might be invited to present a paper or to give a guest lecture).

It is good practice to extend an early invitation to the external examiner to undertake an interim visit, for example, at the point of responding to his/her report from the previous year. Recognising the diversity of practice across Faculties/Academic Partnerships, responsibilities for following up this invitation should be agreed at a local level.

3.2.1 Overseas Partnerships

The University's expectations regarding interim visits for overseas partnerships are that:

- i. Normally at least one Subject External Examiner from the external examining team should visit the partner institution each year. This principle applies regardless of the delivery model. Exceptionally, where a visit is not possible, this interaction may take place by video conference.

- ii. The visiting External should rotate each year so that a different Subject External Examiner makes a visit each year. For logistical reasons more than one Subject External Examiner may need to visit each year to ensure all Subject External Examiners have the opportunity to visit the partner at least once during their term of office.
- iii. The rotation may be undertaken by the Award External undertaking the annual interim visit and the Award External role being rotated amongst the team of Subject Externals. However this is not a requirement of this process and the University will appoint Award Externals according to its normal process and criteria.
- iv. The Subject Externals meet together physically or virtually to discuss the partner institution following the interim visit and the Subject External who has made the interim visit should report on the visit at the Award Board, if not before to the Partnership Relations Development Manager for the partnership in question or the Head of International Partnerships.
- v. The Subject External Examiners who do not undertake a visit should have a video conference during the academic year with student representatives and with partner institution staff from their areas of subject responsibility. The outcomes of these discussions should be reported at the Award Board, if not before to the Partnership Relationship Development Manager for the partnership in question or the Associate Dean - International (Plymouth Global).

3.3 AWARD EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

3.3.1 An Award External Examiner can expect the University to

- i. provide sufficient information at the time of nomination to enable him/her to make an informed decision as to whether to accept the appointment, including the honorarium payable for the appointment
- ii. provide briefing packs, with full access to all relevant documentation, and offer appropriate induction
- iii. agree dates of meetings of Award Assessment Boards well in advance
- iv. report on proven examination and assessment offences and the penalties recommended by the Panel/Committee of Investigation
- v. involve him/her in discussions of students who may be required to withdraw from a programme because of unsatisfactory progress, academic or professional, or conduct considered to be unethical, unprofessional or dangerous (except where these issues have been resolved through the University Disciplinary Procedure)
- vi. refer to Senate any major disagreement on a point of principle between Examiners (whether internal or external) which cannot be resolved
- vii. facilitate communication between Subject External Examiners and the Award External Examiner prior to the Award Assessment Board
- viii. agree the mechanism by which responses will be provided to any issues raised in the annual report of the Award External Examiner and ensure that any comments from the Award External on the response are formally minuted at the Subject Assessment Panel
- ix. pay expenses promptly on receipt, and honorarium on receipt of the annual report¹³
- x. consult him/her about proposed changes to programme-specific assessment regulations which will directly affect students currently registered on the modules for which s/he has responsibility
- xi. provide a considered and timely response to any report received, outlining any actions that will be taken as a result.

3.3.2 The University will expect an Award External Examiner to

- i. take up his/her appointment in full knowledge of University regulations, policies and procedures and undertake to operate within them
- ii. ensure that the Award Assessment Board is conducted in accordance with the approved regulations for the programme(s) of study and that students are treated equitably within those regulations

¹³ The University will process payments as expeditiously as possible, but Examiners should be aware that the University's payroll systems operate to strict deadlines. Claims which miss the deadline in any one month cannot normally be processed before the end of the following month.

- iii. ensure that all relevant extenuating circumstances and assessment offences relating to individual students have been taken into account in reaching decisions
- iv. be a full and equal member of the Award Assessment Board (which will also comprise the Head of School or nominee, programme manager(s) and the Chairs of relevant Subject Assessment Panels, as approved at programme approval)¹⁴.
- v. attend meetings of the relevant Award Assessment Board at which consideration is being given to progression to the final stage or to conferment of awards¹⁵
- vi. provide informative comment and recommendations upon whether or not the University is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards and about the comparability of standards of student performance at award level with similar awards in other UK institutions with which s/he is familiar
- vii. act as a conduit for communicating overall good practice and/or concerns from the Subject External Examiners to the Award Assessment Board
- viii. participate in discussions about the impact of extenuating circumstances bearing in mind the University's Regulations, and the custom and practice of the Board in question
- ix. sign a declaration form as confirmation of agreement with the decisions taken and awards conferred by the Award Assessment Board (but see footnote 8 below)
- x. provide a report within six weeks of the meeting of the Award Assessment Board, for consideration as part of the required evidence base for annual review
- xi. formally endorse the results of resits/reassessment, either through her/his presence at the Referred Board or by post/fax. Alternatively, the Award External Examiner may sign a statement indicating that the Referred Assessment Board is authorised to process and confirm results without further consultation.

¹⁴ The University expects its Award Boards to discuss issues fully in order that they can reach decisions by consensus. If an External Examiner disagrees in principle with a proposed decision, s/he should notify the Chair that s/he will be unable to sign the declaration in respect of that decision, so that the Chair can consider deferring the decision until the disagreement has been reviewed on behalf of Academic Board.

¹⁵ For Summer Award Assessment Boards (UG and PGT), the Award External must attend the Board held in the first year of his/her term of office, but thereafter may have the option of remote attendance (via Skype, videoconference or telephone link), provided the University's expectations regarding an annual interim engagement have been fulfilled (not applicable if the Award External does not hold a Subject External appointment as well). In the unavoidable absence of an Award External Examiner in his/her first year of office, the Board may proceed provided that an emergency replacement examiner has been appointed, or that s/he may be deemed to be present and in attendance through a video link which ensures that s/he is as well informed as other members, has access to all necessary documents, and that a visual link can be maintained. In all other cases, the Award Board must be deferred.

For PGT Dissertation Award Assessment Boards, provided the Award External Examiner has attended (in person, not virtually) the Summer Board, s/he may take part in the Dissertation Board via Skype, videoconference or telephone link.

3.3.3 The Award External Examiner has a right to

- i. request sight of the final stage results list for programmes with which they are associated
- ii. raise any concerns that academic standards are not being maintained, that justice is not being done to the students or that there is any matter of serious concern arising from the assessments with the Chair of the Assessment Board and/or the Head of School
- iii. make a confidential report direct to the Vice Chancellor if not satisfied that appropriate action has subsequently been taken. Where an External Examiner has a serious concern relating to academic standards and has exhausted all internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor, he/she may invoke QAA's Concerns scheme.

The University does **not** expect the Award External Examiner (or Award Assessment Board) to adjust marks agreed by the Subject Assessment Panel.

4. EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

External Examiners must comply with the University's annual reporting requirements as set out below.

External Examiners have a vital role to play in the monitoring of academic standards and in providing information on outcomes, as demonstrated through assessment. Every External Examiner is therefore required as a condition of their appointment to complete and submit to the relevant Faculty Quality Administrator¹⁶ an annual report in accordance with the standard template. Award External Examiners are also required to complete a separate Award External Examiner's report. The report/s should be submitted as soon as possible after the Panel/Board meetings, and by 31 July at the latest (or within six weeks if the Panel/Board meetings are after this date).

Where more than one Panel/Board meeting is held per year (for example, for Postgraduate programmes or for Continuing Professional Development programmes in the Health area) the External Examiners concerned are required, in addition to completion of the annual report, to complete an abbreviated version of the report template (the 'panel', 'board' or 'dissertation' report) following attendance at subsequent Panel/Board meetings to provide the University with ongoing assurance of standards. Faculty Quality Administrators will provide additional guidance on reporting requirements and deadlines where this additional requirement applies.

On receipt of an External Examiner's report the Faculty/Academic Partnerships will

- save the report in the central External Examiners' database
- make copies available to the Dean, Associate Dean/s, Head/s of School and to staff in Partner institutions where relevant
- make the report available to all members of staff teaching on the modules/programme
- copy Award External Examiners' reports to relevant Subject External Examiners, and vice versa, for information
- provide a response to each External Examiner using the final section of the External Examiner's report template, with a copy lodged with the Faculty Quality Administrator.¹⁷ The response should be signed off by the Head of School (or Higher Education Co-ordinator, or equivalent, in the case of Academic Partnerships) before being sent to the External Examiner.

¹⁶ The report forms and guidance on where to return completed forms are available at <http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/external-examiners> External Examiners are requested to return completed forms electronically to facilitate their distribution.

¹⁷ For undergraduate programmes within the University, the response should be completed by 10 September, or within 4 weeks of the receipt of the report, if the report is not received by the 10 September deadline; for Academic Partnerships the deadline is 28 September. For postgraduate programmes, the response should be completed within 4 weeks of the receipt of the report.

- ensure that the Chair of the Award Assessment Board responds directly to issues raised by the Award External Examiner, whether these are programme specific or related to wider matters
- share the full report with students through the student portal/DLE and appropriate student/staff committee structures to strengthen student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement
- ensure that the report and response are considered by the relevant programme committee/s as part of the evidence base for annual programme review and that the External Examiner is sent a follow up action plan and subsequent updates, if appropriate.

External Examiners should note that if the University receives a request for a report under the Freedom of Information Act, then the report will normally be released, subject to omitting any reference to named individuals and deleting the name and contact details of the examiner concerned.

Individual students or staff should **not** be identified in the report. Examiners should note that, where an individual is named in a report, if s/he requests copies of personal information held by the University Data Protection legislation, the University would normally release that information.

An External Examiner's report may have implications for the way in which the modules/programme are designed and delivered, but it is for the University rather than the External Examiner to consider what changes should be made.

5. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

In line with the relevant indicators of sound practice in Chapter B7: External examining of the QAA Quality Code, the University makes Subject External Examiners' details (name, position and home institution only) and their reports, available to students via the DLE. It is, however, made clear to students that they may not initiate contact with External Examiners. If any such contacts are attempted then details, with copies of any correspondence, should be notified to the relevant Faculty Quality Administrator, who will liaise with the relevant Head of School.

6. TERMINATION OF APPOINTMENT

If an External Examiner is for whatever reason unable to fulfil his/her role, s/he will be expected to tender his/her resignation.

While the University expects that a prospective External Examiner will have been briefed about University Regulations and procedures in advance of accepting the nomination, if an Examiner subsequently identifies that s/he is not comfortable about operating in accordance with these Regulations and procedures, the University expects that the Examiner will tender his/her resignation in sufficient time for a replacement appointment to be made. In these, or other circumstances in which an External is unable to serve the full term of his/her appointment, the University's expectation is that there should be at least a six month notice period.

If an External Examiner has for whatever reason not carried out the full range of his/her responsibilities within the terms of these procedures and of University Regulations, or if there is a material change of circumstances which would lead to a breach of the conditions

of appointment, the University may terminate the appointment. These may include, but are not limited to, persistent failure to attend a meeting of the Subject Assessment Panel or Award Assessment Board or failure to submit the required report/s.