

EXTERNAL EXAMINING HANDBOOK

2. External Examining (Taught Modules/Programmes)

External Examiners **must** be appointed for all taught programmes delivered by Faculties (or delegated Schools), including Degree Apprenticeships, Postgraduate Research (PGR) Professional Doctorates (taught modules), INTO programmes, and those held with academic partner institutions. The procedures outlined in this document are applicable only to taught programmes of study. The University operates Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees (APAC) as detailed in Chapter 7 of the Assessment, Progression and Awarding: Taught Programmes Handbook. For degree and higher apprenticeship programmes please refer to section 11 of the Special Provisions for Degree Apprenticeships.

2.1 Criteria for Appointment

- 2.1.1 To be appointed as an External Examiner at the University of Exeter, the following criteria **must** be met. Any exceptions to the below criteria must be approved by the Dean for Taught Students, Associate Dean for Taught Students, or Dean of Graduate Research.
- 2.1.2 The 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.
- 2.1.3 The External Examiner's standing, expertise and experience **should** be such as to enable the fulfilment of the External Examiner's responsibilities. 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, Faculties (or delegated Schools) will be asked to state their reasons for considering the candidate meets the criteria.
- 2.1.4 The External Examiner **should** have had significant recent examining experience as an internal examiner at the required level.
- 2.1.5 The External Examiner and University of Exeter department **should** ensure that there is no reciprocal external examining between departments at the University of Exeter and the External Examiner's home department.

- 2.1.6 The External Examiner **should** not be appointed for any one programme consecutively from the same institution, nor **should** more than one External Examiner be appointed from any one department.
- 2.1.7 The External Examiner will serve for a period of four years and shall not be re-appointed for the same programme/s without exceptional reason, normally after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.
- 2.1.8 The External Examiner **should** normally not hold more than two External Examining appointments for taught programmes at the same time; this includes their appointment for the University of Exeter.
- 2.1.9 The External Examiner **should** not be a former member of staff of the University of Exeter, unless there has been a lapse of at least five years. This would normally include honorary staff, members of staff at partner institutions and those who become University employees during their External Examiner appointment.
- 2.1.10 The External Examiner **should** not have acted as an External Assessor for a programme during the approval process. A Faculty (or delegated School) may apply for an exception to this rule if it can demonstrate to the Dean for Taught Students, Associate Dean for Taught Students, or Dean of Graduate Research that it has taken full account of any potential conflict of interest.
- 2.1.11 The External Examiner **must** not be registered for an award at the University of Exeter as they are ineligible for appointment as an External Examiner in any part of the University.
- 2.1.12 The External Examiner **should** not be appointed if they fall within any of the following categories in order to avoid potential conflicts of interest. The Dean for Taught Students, Associate Dean for Taught Students, or Dean of Graduate Research will be responsible for resolving conflicts of interest in the appointment of an External Examiner.
- They are a Council or Senate member.
 - They have a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study.
 - They have been involved with the supervision of any of the students being examined on placement or professional training.
 - They are in a position to significantly influence the future of students on the programme of study.

- They are involved in collaborative research activities with a member of staff or anyone who has been directly involved as an external member of the validation panel for the programme.

2.2 Responsibilities of the University

The University of Exeter holds the following responsibilities.

- 2.2.1 At the time of nomination, the Faculty (or delegated School) should **provide** the External Examiner with sufficient information to enable them to make an informed decision as to whether or not to accept the appointment.
- 2.2.2 Quality and Standards will facilitate the nomination, appointment, provisions of induction information, reporting and subsequent payment of External Examiners.
- 2.2.3 The Faculty (or delegated School) **should** ascertain whether or not External Examiners have any access requirements or require any reasonable adjustments in order to carry out their duties, as outlined in the University's Equality and Diversity Policy.
- 2.2.4 The Faculty (or delegated School) will agree the dates of Programme/Discipline/Department APACs and any visits with all External Examiners well in advance of the assessment period.
- 2.2.5 Where resources permit, Faculties (or delegated Schools) should take the opportunity to invite new External Examiners to the University of Exeter ahead of their first Programme/Discipline/Department APACs to ensure that a Committee meeting is not the first time at which they meet the generality of academic staff.
- 2.2.6 As a minimum, Faculties (or delegated Schools) **must** provide new External Examiners with the following information by the start of the first session of their appointment:
- Faculty (or as appropriate) handbook/s or online equivalents.
 - Programme/Discipline/Programme handbooks (or as appropriate).
 - Programme specification/s.
 - Module descriptors (including International Summer School modules).
 - Faculty (or as appropriate) assessment conventions.
 - Previous External Examiner's final report and the Faculty's (or delegated School's) response.
- 2.2.7 Faculties (or delegated Schools) **must** ensure that specific PSRB (Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body) requirements regarding External Examiners are met. Where

required by a PSRB, a programme **must** appoint multiple External Examiners in order to cover the full range of theory and practice.

2.3 Responsibilities of the External Examiner

The role of the external examiner exists to provide independent oversight of the assessment process for the programmes for which they are responsible. They are responsible for checking that assessment is conducted in accordance with University procedures and that marking is consistent with sector-wide standards.

2.3.1 External Examiners are expected to be available, capable, and eligible to undertake the role.

- a. The External Examiner **should** ensure that they meet the Criteria for Appointment as outlined in section 2.1. In the event that they do not meet the Criteria for Appointment it **should** be declared immediately so that either an exemption can be granted, or a replacement candidate found.
- b. The External Examiner is responsible to the Senate of the University, in accordance with [Ordinance 3](#).
- c. 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 for Taught Students, Associate Dean for Taught Students, or Dean of Graduate Research in writing in advance.
- d. 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.
- e. 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 in whose academic performance, they had a personal interest.
- f. The External Examiner will ensure that they have sufficient time available to enable them to undertake the duties required of the role.
- g. The External Examiner agrees to inform the University in good time, of any particular access requirements or any reasonable adjustments needed to enable them to carry out their duties, as outlined in the University's Equality and Diversity Policy.

2.3.2 External Examiners are required to actively engage with the assessment process for the programmes for which they are responsible.

- a. The External Examiner agrees to make themselves familiar with any induction materials provided for their external examiner role and **should** make themselves familiar with the programmes that they will oversee.
- b. The External Examiner agrees to make themselves familiar with the induction information provided to students.
- c. The External Examiner is a core member of the Programme/Discipline/Department APAC for the programmes for which they are responsible (see section 7.4.1e of the Assessment, Progression and Awarding: Taught Programmes Handbook).
- d. They are expected to attend meetings of the Programme/Discipline/Department APAC to which they have been invited.
 - As well as the main Programme/Discipline/Department APAC meeting, external examiners may be invited to preparatory meetings or subsequent meetings that are convened to discuss specific parts of the APAC agenda. However, external examiners are not required to attend these if they are satisfied that the business of those meetings is being conducted appropriately and in accordance with University policy.
 - External examiners are not usually required to attend APACs specifically for the consideration of referred/deferred students, provided that they are satisfied that the business of those meetings is being conducted appropriately and in accordance with University policy.
- e. Attendance for all participants, including External Examiners, can be online/virtually or in-person/physically, as appropriate to the meeting, including for Referral / Deferral APACs.
- f. When exceptionally and for good reason, attendance is not possible by any means, the External Examiner's absence must be approved in advance by the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Education, or Dean of Graduate Research.
- g. In accordance with the APAC Handbook, External Examiners can provide written comments instead of being in attendance in an APAC, including Referral/Deferral APACs, provided that, on at least one occasion in the academic year, they attend online/virtually or in-person/physically. This must be agreed in advance by the Chair. This written report must include a record of the External Examiner's remarks and recommendations on classifications and failures, and approve any proposals to scale

module marks, and/or changes an individual student's module marks, progression status or award (except when made for the purposes of error correction).

- i. Where absence is necessary to the requirement of attendance on one occasion as noted above, and this absence is known in advance, please see the APAC Handbook section 7.5.
- ii. Where an absence is unexpected or such submission is not possible before the APAC, please see sections 5.2–5.7 below.

2.3.3 External Examiners review and report on the academic standards of the programme.

- a. The External Examiner is responsible for ensuring that the standard of the University's awards is maintained and is equivalent to threshold academic standards set in accordance with frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements.
- b. The External Examiner **should** compare the achievements of the University's students with those in other UK higher education institutions of which they have experience.
- c. The External Examiner has the responsibility for ensuring that each candidate is treated fairly and with an even application of academic standards against the intended outcomes of the programme/s and in line with the University's assessment procedures.
- d. The External Examiner **must** be satisfied that decisions relating to individual students and scaling of module marks are reached in accordance with agreed regulations.
- e. The External Examiner **must** be satisfied that the marking of assessments has not been subject to any inappropriate influence or bias. They themselves are also expected to exercise their judgement free from being influenced by any previous association with the programme, the staff, or the student.
- f. The External Examiner **must** be satisfied that the assessment requirements are such as to enable students to be fairly assessed in relation to programme intended learning outcomes.
 - i. In light of this External Examiners **may** be consulted and asked to provide feedback on changes to assessments.
 - ii. The External Examiner **must** approve the methods of assessment, assessment criteria and feedback processes for all summative assessments which contribute to the final award classification. For assessments delivered within a limited time-frame, during which students have no recourse to immediate academic assistance (i.e., examinations), Externals **should** approve the form and content of prepared

questions/tasks. For assessments delivered over a longer timeframe, during which it is possible for students to submit and receive responses to academic enquiries, it is sufficient that Externals review the form of the assessment only.

- g. The External Examiner has the right to see all summative items of assessment for the modules under their responsibility.
- i. Typically, a sample of scripts/coursework will be sent, selected according to the following principles:
- The sample **must** consist of at least 10% or a minimum of 10 (whichever is the greater) of the submitted assessments with the following exceptions:
 - o For stage-one modules which do not count towards final degree classification, Disciplines/Departments may choose to send a smaller sample, provided that the External Examiner is satisfied that they have seen sufficient scripts to be able to report on the academic standards and assessment procedures for the programme stage.
 - o For large modules (typically those with over 300 students) Disciplines/Departments may send a reduced sample, no smaller than 5% or 30 scripts. This **should** be reported to the Faculty APAC.
 - The sample **must** be representative and cover the full range of marks.
 - Where possible, the sample should include some scripts that have been internally moderated and some scripts that have not been internally moderated.
 - Where possible scripts **should** come from a range of markers if the module has more than one marker.
 - Where possible, the sample **should** include at least one item marked according to the marking guidelines for specific learning difficulties.
 - The External Examiner **should** be given access to all scripts where possible. However, when an External Examiner has reviewed scripts outside of the identified sample, they should inform the Education Support Office and identify the scripts they have reviewed. External examiners are expected to review all assessments sent to them in a sample.
- ii. Where an External Examiner has been given access to all scripts/coursework they are requested to apply the principles above in selecting those for review.
- iii. The External Examiner is entitled to see the marks for all summative assessments contributing to an award made by the APAC of which the External Examiner is a member.

- h. The External Examiner is expected to confirm the decisions taken and awards recommended by the Programme/Discipline/Department APAC verbally in their report to the Board with an appropriate minute made.
 - i. In any case of disagreement which cannot otherwise be resolved, the External Examiner must be consulted, and their views considered by the Chair of the Programme/Discipline/Department APAC, whose decision is final.
- i. The External Examiner, as a condition of appointment and payment, shall be required to submit an annual report in the prescribed manner within four weeks of the main meeting of the Programme/Discipline/Department APAC.
 - i. The External Examiner, where considered 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.
- j. For programmes subject to specific requirements by a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB), additional requirements may be made of External Examiners.
 - i. The External Examiner, where required by a PSRB, **must** observe teaching, learning and/or assessment in the practice environment.
 - ii. The External Examiner, when required by a PSRB, **may** be required to approve applications for accredited prior learning, as per the Learning and Teaching Support Handbook Chapter 16.

2.3.4 Exclusions to External Examiner Responsibilities

- a. The External Examiner is responsible for reviewing the assessment on the programme as a whole, and is not responsible for reviewing individual student pieces of work, except where those items of work form part of a sample of work, and are intended to be indicative of the standard of marking in general.
 - i. The External Examiner is not normally responsible for, or involved in, the assessment of individual students to the extent that they do not carry out marking of assessed work.
 - ii. The External Examiner, in viewing samples of students' assessed work, **should** not expect or encourage a Programme/Discipline/Department APAC to raise or lower marks for individual students, on the basis that such a practice would be unfair to those candidates whose work is not part of the sample.

- iii. The External Examiner is not expected to be involved in individual cases relating to mitigating circumstances or academic integrity except to ensure that the decisions have been applied fairly and equitably applied. Such decisions are the responsibility of the Mitigation Committee or an Academic Misconduct Panel who will inform the Programme/Discipline/Department APAC of decisions affecting a module result or progression/award decision.
- b. The External Examiner shall not be expected to act as a second marker.
- c. The External Examiner shall not be required to act as an External Assessor or Advisor to a programme team on programme design, or be part of any activity established to review programmes on which he/she examines, except for where they have been appointed separately to that role. Such duties do not form part of the External Examiner role.
- d. The External Examiner is not required to consider formative work or summative work for stages of a programme that do not contribute to the final award.

2.3.5 Period of Appointment

- a. In accordance with Ordinance 5, paragraph 3, an External Examiner shall normally be appointed for a maximum of four years. Only under exceptional circumstances shall an External Examiner be appointed for a fifth year. Exceptional arrangements **must** be approved by the Dean for Taught Students, Associate Dean for Taught Students, or Dean of Graduate Research.

2.3.6 Termination of Appointment

- a. The University has identified the following circumstances under which the appointment of an External Examiner may be terminated early:
 - Failure to attend Programme/Discipline/Department APAC meetings without the prior agreement of the Dean for Taught Students, the Associate Dean for Taught Students, or Dean of Graduate Research (acting on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor).
 - Failure to submit an annual report within the specified time.
 - Failure to carry out duties identified in the examiner's contract.
 - Cessation of, or non-recruitment to, the programme/s.
- b. The early termination of the appointment of an External Examiner shall be made by the Dean for Taught Students, Associate Dean for Taught Students, or the Dean of Graduate Research.

2.3.7 Student Contact with External Examiners

- a. 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. External Examiners are requested to inform the University's Quality and Standards team **should** such an occurrence take place.
- b. An informal meeting between students and the External Examiner may be held at the request of the External Examiner by arrangement by and with the agreement of the Faculty (or delegated School).

2.3.8 Submission of Reports

- a. All External Examiners are required to submit an annual report in the prescribed manner within four weeks of the main meeting of the Programme/Discipline/Department APAC.
- b. When compiling the annual report, the External Examiner is expected to comment upon:
 - The curriculum, its aims, contents, and development.
 - Resources.
 - The academic standards of the student cohort in relation to that of previous cohorts and other comparable institutions.
 - The quality and standard of provision in relation to comparable institutions.
 - Any issues arising regarding equality and disability.
 - The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award.
 - The design, structure and marking of assessments.
 - Assessment procedures.
 - The level of access to any material needed to make the required judgements.
 - The coherence of policies and procedures relating to External Examiners.
- c. At the end of the report, External Examiners are asked to make recommendations for improvement to University processes and for the specific programme examined. Externals are asked to state whether these recommendations are Essential, Advisable or Desirable. The definitions for these criteria are as follows:
Essential: Areas of concern which, in your opinion, place academic quality and/or standards at immediate risk and requires an urgent response from the Faculty Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education within two weeks. In the case of the Medical School and Business School, the response may be delegated to the respective Associate Dean for Education.
Advisable: Areas of concern regarding threshold standards which, while currently being

met, in your opinion, could be significantly improved.

Desirable: Areas where, in your opinion, there is potential for enhancement.

- d. 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.
- e. External Examiners' fees and expenses shall not be paid by the University until in receipt of a report.

2.3.9 Distribution of Reports

- a. Once the annual report has been submitted it will be provided to the Programme Director (or equivalent), Faculty Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education (or equivalent) and the Dean for Taught Students, Associate Dean for Taught Students, or Dean of Graduate Research as appropriate. In the case of validated programmes, copies of reports will also be provided to the nominee of the partner institution. In the case of the Medical School and Business School, the response may be delegated to the respective Associate Dean for Education.
- b. External Examiner annual reports will be shared with student representatives through Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLC) and **should** not include any reference to an individual student or member of staff by name. Reports are released for requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

2.3.10 Response to Reports

- a. Faculties (or delegated Schools) are expected to provide a formal response to the recommendations raised in an External Examiner's report. Responses **should** be completed by the Faculty (or delegated School) within 2 weeks of the receipt of the report by the Faculty (or delegated School) for Essential recommendations and within 8 weeks for all other recommendations. Responses must be approved by the Faculty Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education. In the case of the Medical School and Business School, the response may be delegated to the respective Associate Dean for Education.
- b. Faculty responses will then be approved by the University Dean for Taught Students, Associate Dean for Taught Students, or Dean of Graduate Research, and Faculties will

be informed of the outcome within 2 weeks for Essential recommendations and within 8 weeks for all other recommendations.

- c. Following approval by the Dean for Taught Students, Associate Dean for Taught Students, or Dean of Graduate Research, the External Examiner will be provided with the response to their report.
- d. As noted above both External Examiner reports and Faculty (or delegated School) responses (or partner institution responses) **should** be shared with student representatives through SSLCs. Faculties (or delegated Schools) are encouraged to formulate their responses through discussion with the SSLC where timing allows. If this is not possible, the response **must** be shared at the next scheduled meeting of the SSLC.

2.3.11 Academic Review

- a. External Examiner reports on taught programmes are made available to external and internal quality review activities.

2.3.12 Monitoring of Reports

- a. Responses to all reports will be monitored by Quality and Standards.
- b. A copy of the External Examiner's report and the Faculty (or delegated School's) response for the previous year should be included early in the agenda of the Programme/Discipline/Department/Faculty's (or delegated School or partner institution's) annual main meeting of the board of examiners, usually their Assessment Progression and Awarding Committee (APAC) meeting.