

External Examiners Policy and Procedure

Introduction

1. This Policy and Procedure sets out the role, powers and responsibilities the School assigns to its external examiners for its postgraduate programmes. It is intended primarily for the information of School staff involved in assessment and examination processes at the School and for the School's Board of Examiners. The Policy and Procedure outlines the principles and arrangements the School applies to the external examining of its courses leading to an award of the School, including the nomination criteria, information on how external examiners are prepared for their role, and the remit of external examiners and the School in managing the ongoing processes involved in external examining. It is fully aligned with the Expectations and Core Practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education¹ and with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), section 2.²
2. The conduct of assessment and examinations at the School is covered separately by the School's Academic Regulations.
https://nfts.co.uk/sites/default/files/u102/Documents/Student_Policies/regulations_for_taught_programmes_of_study_for_postgraduate_diplomas.pdf
3. This Policy and Procedure is reviewed regularly to ensure that the External Examiner process remains effective and aligned with current external requirements.

Aims

4. The External Examining system provides impartial and independent advice, as well as informative comment, on the School's standards and on student achievement. External examiners are expert assessors whose authority is derived from their knowledge of, and experience in, their subject disciplines and, in the case of academic external examiners, their experience of conducting assessment at higher education level. External examiners are engaged by the School to:
 - confirm that the School's policies and procedures are applied consistently and fairly to ensure the integrity and rigour of assessment practices;
 - comment on the quality and standards of courses in relation to national threshold standards defined by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) degree level descriptors³ ;
 - comment on the reasonable comparability of standards achieved at other UK higher education institutions or within the industry with whom the examiner has experience; and
 - comment on good practice and innovation in learning and teaching, and make recommendations for enhancement of the learning opportunities provided to School students.

¹ https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/revised-uk-quality-code-for-higher-education.pdf?sfvrsn=4c19f781_8

² https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

³ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf>

5. External examiners should be capable of exercising impartial, independent and expert judgement to secure the standards of School awards, as well as confirming the comparability of standards of those of higher education providers. External examiners should be able to demonstrate:
- competence and experience in the fields covered by the course;
 - sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within their discipline or field to be able to command the respect of academic and/or professional peers;
 - (for 'Academic Experts') knowledge and understanding of the UK sector-agreed reference points for the setting and maintenance of academic standards and familiarity with the standard to be expected of students in relation to their award;
 - (for 'Academic Experts') awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of courses in their subject including competence in, and experience of, designing and managing assessment;
 - their current employment status, including eligibility to work in the United Kingdom (*see para. 6 below*); and
 - fluency in the English language.

'Standing, credibility and breadth of experience' may be indicated by:

- their present post and place of work;
 - the range and scope of their experience across either higher education and/or their profession(s); and
 - current and recent active involvement in educational or professional activities in the relevant field of study.
6. External examiners should normally be resident in the United Kingdom. If a proposed external examiner is resident abroad, the nominator should take into account UK visa and immigration requirements, check that the external examiner has the right to work in the UK and consider the implication of any travel costs to the School's location in Beaconsfield before putting forward any names for consideration. Where an external examiner from outside the UK is appointed, the School should also confirm that s/he has the required knowledge of the UK higher education system.

Nomination and Selection of External Examiners

7. The School employs two different types of external examiners:
- 'Academic Experts' usually from another higher education institution and subject specialists
 - 'Industry Experts' with considerable knowledge and experience of working within the (wider) Film and Television industry.
- There are usually two 'Academic Experts' and one 'Industry Expert' serving as external examiners in any one year.
8. The appointment of all external examiners is the responsibility of the Director, on behalf of the School's Academic Standards Committee. The process for the nomination and appointment of new external examiners is as follows:

- i) the Director will be informed by the Quality Assurance Manager that a new external examiner will need to be sought before the start of the academic session in which the individual is due to commence work, usually by November of the preceding year
- ii) the Director will then consult with the appropriate Heads of Department and ask them to put forward any nominations to the appointment of external examiner, copying in the Quality Assurance Manager
- iii) any Head of Department wishing to put forward someone for nomination will then complete the Nomination Form for a New External Examiner and send this to the Director, copying in the Quality Assurance Manager
- iv) once all nominations have been received, these will be considered by the School's Director, who will then approve any appointments on behalf of the Academic Standards Committee. These will then be formally reported to the Academic Standards Committee at its next meeting.
- v) once approved, the Quality Assurance Manager, on behalf of the School's Director, will write to the external examiner confirming the appointment, subject to proof of the right to work in the UK, and will provide them with the information as set out in para. 21.

9. Nominees must have the right to work in the UK.

10. Nominees should not be from the same department in the same institution as the outgoing external examiner.

11. In view of the time commitment required to fulfil the duties of an external examiner, nominees should normally not hold more than two external examiner positions concurrently, including that with the School. Any exceptions to this would require special justification.

12. Nominees should not be former School staff or students until at least five years have elapsed since their departure from the School.

Term of office

13. External examiners would typically be appointed as an external examiner for a period of a maximum of four years. An external examiner who has completed his or her term of office is not eligible for a new appointment until at least five years have elapsed.

14. The period of office for external examiners normally begins on the 1st July and finishes on the 31st March.

Expenses and fees

15. The Academic Standards Committee is responsible for determining how to set external examiner fees and the Quality Assurance Manager is responsible for arranging the payment of fees and expenses. Payment of expenses must follow that set out within the School's Expenses Policy. Payment of fees is made annually after receipt of the completed report from the external examiner.

Termination of appointment

16. If, during their term of office, an external examiner becomes involved with the School in a way that could compromise their independence, such interest or involvement should be declared to the Quality Assurance Manager so that a judgement can be made on the continued appropriateness or not of the appointment.
17. The School can terminate an external examiner's appointment at any time where the external examiner is deemed to have not fulfilled his or her obligations.
18. External examiners who wish to resign for whatever reason before the end of their normal term of office must give three months' notice in writing to the School's Director, copying in the Quality Assurance Manager.

Conflict of interest

19. Individuals in any of the following categories will not be appointed as external examiners:
 - members of the Board of Governors, School committee members or employees of the School;
 - anyone with a current or previous personal, family or legal relationship with a student being assessed;
 - anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on any of the courses in question; or
 - anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the courses in question. Significant involvement in this context means directly involved with the close knowledge of one another's work.

This is a non-exhaustive list.

20. It is important to ensure that the School does not put in place reciprocal arrangements between cognate courses with another institution. The School should avoid a situation where a member of the School and a member of another higher education institution are both simultaneously sitting on Final Boards of Examiners for Masters students at both institutions. Instead, the School should attempt to select examiners from the full pool of experts available rather than continually reappointing from a small, similar group, in order to maintain objectivity.
21. School staff performing external examiner duties at other higher education institutions should keep the Quality Assurance Manager informed in order to ensure that reciprocal arrangements involving cognate courses do not occur. The Quality Assurance Manager keeps an accurate record of the institutions where School members of staff are currently acting as external examiners. This list is made available upon request.

Publication of Details of External Examiners

22. Once appointed, the names, positions and institutions of external examiners will be included in new Student Course Handbooks and will be made available to students on Facebook Workplace. Students are informed that they must not make any direct contact

with external examiners under any circumstances and that other routes exist for any queries they may have about the assessment process.

Induction

23. The School undertakes to ensure that all external examiners are informed about its organisational practice and procedures, with specific relation to assessment and the regulations that govern it. New external examiners receive in advance:

- The Advice and Guidance on External Expertise from the UK Quality Code for Higher Education;
- A copy of the School's Academic Regulations;
- At least one sample copy of a Course Handbook, which includes course aims and objectives, curricula and teaching methods, methods of assessment, marking schemes and how progress is monitored;
- A copy of any relevant forms or templates, information on fees and expenses and how to claim for these, the number of days of expected work the role involves and key School contacts; and
- A copy of the School's Privacy Notice, which advises how the School uses and handles data in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

In addition to this, new external examiners are also given a brief induction session by the Quality Assurance Manager and/or Registrar upon their first visit to the School.

Role of External Examiners

24. External examiners are expected to:

- to provide impartial and independent advice on academic standards and student achievement;
- assess and comment on whether the course enables students to achieve the defined learning outcomes and whether the assessment is appropriate in this regard;
- to consider the level of achievement of students on the course, in relation to standards elsewhere in the sector for the same kind of course within similar degree programmes;
- to review and approve, if appropriate, assessment criteria for the courses examined;
- to scrutinise a representative sample of assessed work / feedback and dissertations across a rotating sample of courses examined, chosen by the external examiners at their interim visit in the late autumn, in order to judge whether marks are fairly and consistently applied to students and whether markers are applying full range of marks open to them and that such marks are justified;
- to participate as a member at the Final Board of Examiners meeting and to agree jointly, as a member of the Board of Examiners, decisions of the Board of Examiners; and
- to be satisfied that the business of the Board of Examiners is correctly and robustly carried out, in line with School policies and regulations.

25. External examiners will also be provided with samples of practical work by students to review usually in the form of films, television programmes and games during their interim visit. These must meet current standards and practices of the sector / industry.
26. The role of the external examiner is primarily that of a moderator of the assessment process thus the external examiner must never be asked to mark/grade or otherwise assess directly the work of individual students.
27. Where external examiners are expected to advise on individual cases, the final decision will still be made by the Board of Examiners, with the views of the respective external examiners being made known to the remaining members of the Board of Examiners.
28. In order to be quorate, at least one external examiner must participate in any approved decision of the Board of Examiners and it is expected that all external examiners should attend the Final Board of Examiners meeting.
29. If an external examiner is not able to attend a meeting of the Final Board of Examiners, his or her non-attendance must be reported to the Quality Assurance Manager as soon as possible. Special arrangements can be put in place where an external examiner cannot attend a meeting in person which may include, where practically possible, participation by live video link or telephone. Such arrangements must be recorded in the minutes of the Board of Examiners. Where such a link is used in this way it must be live and in real time for the external examiner to be considered as participating in the meeting. Where this arrangement is employed, the external examiner must be provided with all the preparatory documentation for the Board in advance of the meeting.
30. In fulfilling these functions, the School expects the external examiner has agreed with their own institution / employer the time commitment required for the role.

Submission of the External Examiner's Report

31. A key requirement of the external examiner's role is the provision of an annual report based on what the external examiner has observed of the School's assessment processes and students' assessed work, of any good practice and on opportunities to enhance the quality of courses and the learning experience, where appropriate. A template for the External Examiner Report is provided.
32. As part of their Report, external examiners are expected to provide informative comment on the extent to which:
 - the School is maintaining threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications;
 - the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against intended outcomes of the course and is conducted in line with School policies and regulations;
 - the academic standards and the achievements of the students are comparable with those of other UK higher education institutions of which the external examiner has experience.
33. As part of their Report, external examiners are expected to provide informative comment on quality assurance and quality enhancement and are asked to do the following:

- confirm that sufficient evidence was received to enable the role to be fulfilled and if evidence was insufficient, give details;
 - state whether issues raised in the previous reports have been, or are being, addressed to their satisfaction;
 - highlight areas of good practice and innovation; and
 - recommend, where appropriate, opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students.
34. External examiners are also expected to provide informative comment as part of the Report on teaching, course structure and content including:
- good practice and innovation relating to learning teaching and assessment; and
 - opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to the School's students.
35. Once their term of office has come to an end, external examiners are also required to provide a reflective review of this period. This reflective review is included as a section in the External Examiner Report and will be filled out by external examiners during their final year only.
36. Reports must be submitted within three weeks of the Final Board of Examiners, usually by 15 March.

Causes of concern

37. External Examiners have the right to raise any matter of serious concern with the School's Director by means of a separate confidential report, if necessary. The Director will respond in writing, outlining any actions to be taken as a result.
38. Where an external examiner has serious concerns relating to systematic failings in the academic standards of the course and has exhausted all procedures internal to the School, including the submission of a confidential report to the Director, s/he may invoke the Quality Assurance Agency's Concerns Scheme⁴.

Actions in Response to External Examiner Reports

39. The School is responsible for ensuring that it has robust mechanisms in place to handle External Examiner Reports and for taking appropriate action where required in response to these reports. The School is expected to use such data to identify any issues mentioned that require action.
40. The Academic Standards Committee has the responsibility of overseeing the operation of processes in responding to External Examiner Reports so that appropriate action is taken where required. The Academic Standards Committee is also responsible for identifying issues or suggestions made in the Reports and to raise these matters in

⁴ https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/qaa-concerns-scheme.pdf?sfvrsn=c13dfd81_6

appropriate fora outside of Committee and to monitor and report on any follow-up to these.

41. Once the Academic Standards Committee has agreed responses to the External Examiner Reports, the School's Director, jointly with the Quality Assurance Manager, will respond to each Report individually. These responses should demonstrate that the School has given full and serious consideration to the comments made and indicate which actions will be taken or not taken as a result of the comments.

Analysis of Themes Arising from External Examiner Reports

42. The School is committed to using External Examiner Reports, and responses, to widen and enhance the student experience. External Examiner Reports provide invaluable independent feedback to the School and the Academic Standards Committee uses this information to identify common themes in order to help shape its strategic approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement.

Participation of Students

43. The Student Union President and Student Representatives are members of the Academic Standards Committee and will thus have access to, and can feed back to, External Examiner Reports through this forum. Whilst the Student Union President and Student Representatives should not share the full reports with fellow students more widely, they can ask for a summary to be drawn up instead that can be freely shared.
44. Students do, however, have the right to view full External Examiner Reports and the School will make these available to students on request (*see para.46 for further information*).

Data protection

45. External examiners should not identify students or staff by naming them in their reports and that where an external examiner identifies a student, the student will have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation to make a subject access request.
46. External Examiner Reports are not published by the School. However, External Examiner Reports can be disclosed to students or the public upon receipt of a request for a copy of a Report in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act (2000). Extreme care should be taken to redact any Report which contains information that could identify other students.

This policy was approved in March 2019