



# Appointment of External Examiners Policy

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# Appointment of External Examiners Policy

## 1 Requirements of External Examiners

To carry out their responsibilities, External Examiners will be:

- a) able to judge each student impartially on the basis of the work submitted for assessment, without being influenced by previous association with the module/programme, the staff or any of the students.
- b) able to compare the performance of students with that of their peers on comparable programmes of higher education elsewhere and/or assure professional relevance.
- c) competent in assessing students' knowledge and skills at higher education level.
- d) expert in the field of study concerned.
- e) impartial in judgement.
- f) properly briefed on the University's requirements.
- g) expected to maintain confidentiality in relation to Programme Assessment Board proceedings and with regard to any information obtained as a result of their role as an External Examiner.

## 2 Appointment of External Examiners

- 2.1 External Examiners are appointed by the relevant Faculty Committee/Group on delegated authority from the Education Committee (EC).
- 2.2 Appointments are approved subject to satisfactory completion of the eligibility check for the right to work in the UK. External Examiners will be advised of their appointment and guidance will be given about providing an appropriately verified ID document. This must be received by the University within 3 months of appointment and before the new External Examiner is provided with a username to access University systems.
- 2.3 External Examiners will be allocated to a group of modules and will be aligned to one or more programmes. This will normally be at Levels 5 to 7, however in some circumstances moderation at Levels 3 or 4 may be required if this is specified by a professional body or if modules at these Levels are on a standalone award.
- 2.4 If a programme area is expanding, the programme team should consider whether the current Examiner/team can undertake the additional moderation or whether an additional Examiner is required. For example: if a new programme is developed, new pathways added to a framework or the programme will run at partners or alternative campuses.



- 2.5 For Degree Apprenticeships, the programme team should ensure an appropriate balance of academic and practitioner Examiners.
- 2.6 Normally External Examiners will be allocated to all deliveries of their allocated modules/programmes (ie franchise partners, satellite campus). This ensures cross comparison of student experience and performance. However, for validated programmes and dual awards which utilise a partner's modules, there should be a separate Examiner to enable focus on the alternative provision.
- 2.7 Education Committee (EC) approves extension requests and also reserves the right to scrutinise appointment decisions made by the relevant Faculty Committee/Group.
- 2.8 As a norm, an External Examiner should not concurrently hold more than the equivalent of two substantial external examining appointments. However, where a proposed External Examiner already has two appointments and the Faculty is satisfied that s/he can undertake the full range of duties involved, the relevant Faculty Committee/Group may support a third appointment where there is written justification. The relevant Faculty Committee/Group reserves the right not to approve appointments if it considers that the proposed External Examiner's number of appointments and associated workload will be excessive. Examples of special circumstances might include modules/programmes with a small number of students, disciplines in which there are very few specialists and Examiners who have existing appointments which are due to expire.
- 2.9 The relevant Faculty Committee/Group must be satisfied that parity of External Examiner workload based on numbers of students across all delivery locations, number of modules/ components of assessment has been considered.
- 2.10 External Examiners should be informed of their workload at the start of the academic year. Major changes to an External Examiner's workload must be approved by the Head of Department and relevant Faculty Committee/Group.
- 2.11 External Examiners will not normally act as consultants to a programme team or programme design, or be members of any panel/s established to review the module/s and/or programme/s they examine. However, in certain circumstances they may act concurrently as External Examiner and adviser to programme approval panels. In addition, External Examiners may also volunteer, or be requested to provide feedback and suggestions as to module/programme design through their annual reports.
- 2.12 Information on External Examiners (name, position and institution) should be published in programme handbooks/module guides. This can be by listing in programme handbooks all External Examiners involved with the modules for a particular subject area e.g. marketing. Where the External Examiner is appointed to fulfil a role on behalf of a professional body, this should be stated.

### **3 Criteria for Appointment**

- 3.1 External Examiners should be drawn from a wide variety of academic institutions and professional contexts so that the subject benefits from

appropriate external scrutiny and expert practitioner advice. External Examiners should demonstrate:

- a) knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality.
- b) familiarity with the standard expected of students to achieve the award that is to be examined
- c) competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme/module/subject to be examined.
- d) relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate.
- e) competence and experience relating to the design and operation of a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject, and sufficient recent examining/assessment experience preferably as an External Examiner.
- f) sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the subject to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers.
- g) fluency in English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language/s.
- h) that they can meet the applicable criteria set by the Professional, Statutory of Regulatory Bodies (PSRB).
- i) awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula.
- j) competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

## **4 Conflicts of Interest**

4.1 As External Examiners should be impartial in making judgement and not have previous close involvement with the University which might compromise their objectivity, an External Examiner will not be appointed in the following categories or circumstances:

- a) a member of a governing body or committee of the University or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the University or one of its collaborative partners.
- b) anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with programme/module to be examined.
- c) anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme/module to be examined.
- d) anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence

significantly the future of students on the programme/module to be examined.

- e) anyone significantly involved in current or recent substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme/module to be examined.
- f) former staff or students of the University unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the External Examiner have completed their programme/s.
- g) a reciprocal arrangement involving similar programmes in the same Department at another academic institution.
- h) the succession of an External Examiner from an academic institution by a colleague from the same subject area in the same institution within a five-year period.
- i) the succession of an expert practitioner External Examiner from a professional context (ie non-academic company or organisation) by a colleague within a five-year period.
- j) the appointment of more than one External Examiner from the same subject area in the same academic institution or professional context. However exceptions may apply where a Department has a large or diverse group of programmes and subject areas. This would be assessed on a case by case basis in conjunction with the Quality and Teaching Excellence Department, and a robust rationale would be required for Committee consideration. It may be acceptable to have more than one Examiner if there is no crossover between the programmes (ie no shared modules) and programmes are not part of the same framework or cluster of related programmes.
- k) a former External Examiner for the University in the previous five years.

## **5 New External Examiners without prior experience**

- 5.1 A nominee without direct External Examiner experience will normally only be appointed if suitable mentoring arrangements can be put in place to support them during their first year.
- 5.2 The relevant Faculty Committee/Group may approve a new External Examiner subject to mentoring arrangements being identified which will normally involve an experienced External Examiner on the relevant External Examiner team being asked to undertake a mentoring role.
- 5.3 The Faculty will be expected to ensure that the External Examiner attends a briefing session (either at the annual External Examiners' Webinar, or one organised for this purpose by the Faculty).
- 5.4 The External Examiner will also be provided with full contact information for the External Examiner who has agreed to act as mentor, and the Faculty Registrar who can provide advice on regulatory issues.



## 6 Approval Procedure

- 6.1 External Examiner appointments are normally for a period of four years and five months commencing 1 August and finishing 31 December, in order to assess four successive cohorts of students and to deal with any subsequent reviews of decisions.
- 6.2 Newly appointed External Examiners will normally take up appointment on or before the retirement of their predecessors. External Examiners should remain available until after the last assessments, with which they are to be involved, have been completed in order to deal with any subsequent reviews of decisions.
- 6.3 The completed application form should be reviewed for approval by the relevant Faculty Committee/Group not less than six months prior to commencement of the appointment. This enables time for a suitable replacement to be sought in the case of non-approval.
- 6.4 Any interested senior members of academic staff from the discipline (e.g. Professor, Associate Professor) may make suggestions for potential External Examiners. Suggestions should be submitted to the Head of Subject for consideration. Nine – twelve months before an External Examiner will need to be appointed, Quality and Teaching Excellence will send an alert to the Head of Subject (or nominee) to inform them that a new External Examiner will be required. The Head of Subject (or nominee) will inform the Programme Leader, forward the names of proposed candidates and, in discussion with the Programme Leader, identify a preferred individual.
- 6.5 It remains the responsibility of the Programme Leader, or nominee, to approach the potential External Examiner at the appropriate time. It is important that the requirements of the appointment are clearly described, including an indication of the expected workload and expectations around visits to the University. It should be noted that Examiners are not expected to visit franchise partners or satellite campuses during their tenure. Any such arrangements are at the discretion of the relevant Faculty and subject to approval from the relevant Faculty budget holder. The application form includes a section to confirm that the proposed Examiner has agreed to the proposed workload.
- 6.6 The form New External Examiner Appointment (EE1) must be completed by the nominee (Parts B and C) and by the nominating member of staff (Part A). Once approval from the Head of Department has been confirmed, the form should be forwarded to the Governance and Enhancement team in Quality and Teaching Excellence who will provide it to the relevant Faculty Committee/Group Secretary for consideration by the committee. The nominating member of staff will be informed of the relevant Faculty Committee/Group decision. Key External Examiner details will be inputted to SITS and appointments will be reported to EC on a regular basis.
- 6.7 Quality and Teaching Excellence will be responsible for informing the nominee of the relevant Faculty Committee/Group decision and for issuing an appointment letter with details of tenure, request for a verified copy of an



appropriate ID document in order to complete the eligibility check for the right to work in the UK, areas of examining duty and related administrative matters. It will be accompanied by relevant University regulations and procedures and module descriptors, programme specifications and any subject benchmark statements.

- 6.8 The Faculty should arrange for a briefing of a newly appointed External Examiner as soon as possible after appointment, preferably including a visit to the University to meet staff and students.

## 7 Changes to an External Examiner Allocation and Extension of Contract

- 7.1 The agreed duties of an External Examiner can be varied with agreement of the Examiner.
- 7.2 Amendments to module allocations such as removal/addition to reflect updates to programme structures, should be dealt with via an annual workload confirmation exercise. The addition of new partner or campus delivery should be dealt with in a similar way, with prior consultation by the Programme Leader and agreement obtained from the Examiner.
- 7.3 Where significant allocation changes are proposed, the relevant Faculty Committee/Group agreement is required. Instances include major subject changes, the addition of a brand new programme and associated increase in modules, or where a professional body requires formal approval. The rationale for such a proposal should be presented on the form Application to Approve a Reallocation of External Examiner Duties (EE4). The nominating member of staff will be informed of the relevant Faculty Committee/Group decision. The change will be reported to EC and details amended on SITS.
- 7.4 Extensions can be requested in exceptional circumstances only and must be accompanied by a robust rationale detailing the reasons for the request. Examples of exceptional circumstances are: covering the final cohort of a programme which is phasing out; or where there is a major professional body re-accreditation/re-validation event which would benefit from collaboration with the experienced Examiner. This would normally be for a maximum of 1 year.
- 7.5 A strong rationale for such a proposal which outlines the exceptional circumstances should be presented on the form Application to Approve an Extension of Appointment (EE3) for an Existing External Examiner and scrutinised as appropriate before EC approval. The nominating member of staff will be advised of the outcome by Quality and Teaching Excellence and details will be amended on SITS. Quality and Teaching Excellence will advise the Examiner.

## 8 Premature Termination of Appointment

- 8.1 Under certain circumstances, the appointment of an External Examiner may be terminated before the completion of his/her period of office. Premature termination may occur in the following instances:





- a) serious illness.
  - b) resignation of the External Examiner.
  - c) changes in module/programme or programme structure which renders the appointment no longer applicable.
  - d) a conflict of interest arising during the term of office.
  - e) non-fulfilment of External Examiner's duties, such as failure to undertake moderation, provide annual reports or persistent non-attendance at examination boards.
  - f) unprofessional conduct.
  - g) irretrievable breakdown of relationship with module/programme teaching teams such as to disadvantage students on the module/programme.
  - h) non completion of the right to work check within 3 months of appointment.
  - i) appointment of an examiner as an employee of Northumbria University.
- 8.2 In instance b), it is expected that the External Examiner will normally give the University reasonable notice of intention to resign, for example a minimum of 2-3 months. This will allow sufficient time for a suitable replacement to be found.
- 8.3 In instance e), it is expected that there will be documented evidence of steps taken by the Chair of the relevant Faculty Committee/Group to address identified problems. Faculties should attempt to contact the Examiner by various means (ie email, telephone, letter). If no response is received this should be escalated to the relevant Programme Leader, continued non response should be escalated to Head of Subject/Department and Deputy Faculty Pro Vice Chancellor.
- 8.4 If termination of an appointment is necessary because any of the instances c), d), e), f) or g) occur it is the responsibility of the Programme Leader/Programme Team to make a recommendation to the relevant Faculty Committee/Group. The recommendation should be presented on the form Recommendation for Premature Termination of External Examiner's Contract (EE5). Any interested senior member of academic staff from the discipline (e.g. Professor, Associate Professor) may recommend the termination of an External Examiner to the relevant Faculty Committee/Group on the above grounds. It remains the responsibility of the relevant Faculty Committee/Group to endorse and make a formal recommendation to Education Committee (EC). If it supports the recommendation, Education Committee (EC) will terminate the appointment. The Academic Registrar will notify the External Examiner, specifying the reasons for the termination and all records will be amended accordingly.
- 8.5 In instance c) the University will give the External Examiner reasonable notice as far as is possible. In instances d), e), f) or g) the University reserves the right to terminate the appointment immediately.



- 8.6 If termination of an appointment is necessary because instance h) occurs, it is the responsibility of Quality and Teaching Excellence to regularly contact the Examiner to request completion. The Programme Leader/Team should be advised and requested to contact the Examiner, the Head of Department should also be informed. The recommendation should be presented on the form Recommendation for Premature Termination of External Examiner's Contract (EE5), which should progress for formal approval as per 8.4.
- 8.7 In instance i) the Examiner's contract is mutually terminated immediately following the offer of employment, as this presents an immediate conflict of interest. The Examiner or Department should notify Quality and Teaching Excellence as soon as possible. The Examiner should not be asked to undertake any further moderation work or provide cover until a new Examiner is appointed. The Programme Leader/Team should find a replacement Examiner as soon as possible.