

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS POLICY

Introduction

1. External Examiners play a crucial role in the quality assurance of courses. One or more External Examiners will be appointed to any provision that leads to a University of Suffolk award. For the purpose of interpreting the scope of this policy, the term “External Examiner” should be taken to mean a suitably qualified individual from an organisation external to the University of Suffolk. Arrangements for External Examiners for courses validated by other bodies (such as Pearson for Higher National Awards) fall out with this policy.

2. The External Examiner is appointed by the validating University to ensure that academic standards for each award are at the appropriate level and comparable with those of other higher education institutions; that student performance is judged against these; and that assessment processes measure student achievement against intended learning outcomes and are fair and fairly operated. Course Committees and Course Leaders should regard this policy as **minimum standard practice** and must also ensure that any additional requirements specified by the appropriate Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) are met.

3. This policy which incorporates:

- criteria for the appointment of External Examiners
- the rights and responsibilities of External Examiners
- arrangements and procedures for the appointment of External Examiners

is based upon the ‘expectation’ placed upon UK higher education providers to ‘make scrupulous use of external examiners’ in assuring academic standards and the associated ‘Indicators of sound practice’ identified in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B7: External Examining.

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B7.aspx>

Criteria for Appointment

4. The External Examiner is perceived as a key individual in the maintenance of academic standards and the University therefore seeks evidence of sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers in those whom it nominates to undertake the role.

5. The External Examiner will demonstrate:

- a knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality

- appropriate competence and experience, and continuing active involvement in the relevant field(s) of study, or parts thereof. This will be indicated through relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate
- competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures
- familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed
- recent experience of delivery at the relevant level(s) of provision
- fluency of English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that External Examiners are provided with the information to make their judgements)
- awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula
- competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

6. The External Examiner will meet any applicable criteria set by PSRBs, such as appropriate registration with the relevant body and/or required recordable qualifications.

7. The length of appointment shall initially be for one year and, subject to evidence of sufficient engagement with the activities and responsibilities of the external examiner role, normally be extended for a further three years, with an exceptional further extension of one year only to ensure continuity. Appointments may be terminated with 12 weeks' notice on either side. External Examiners for taught awards may not be re-appointed for another taught award provided by the University of Suffolk within five years. Re-appointment will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

8. The number of External Examiners appointed to each course, and their allocation to specific elements of the course, should fulfil the minimum specified requirements of the appropriate validating body or PSRB. Where there is more than one External Examiner appointed to a course, the Examiners should have complementary expertise and experience. Where the same course is running in more than one institution in the University of Suffolk

Learning Network it will normally be overseen by the same External Examiner or group of External Examiners.

9. If a proposed External Examiner has not undertaken the role before, the University will provide them with access to support to enable them to fulfil their role effectively.

10. External Examiner appointments should be drawn as far as possible from a wide variety of institutional/professional contexts to ensure that courses benefit from cross-fertilisation and scrutiny and in order to prevent academic isolation.

11. Appointment as External Examiner of anyone in the following categories or circumstances is not permissible:

- member of a governing body or committee of the appointing institution or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the appointing institution or one of its collaborative partners
- anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study
- anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study
- anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study
- anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme(s) or modules in question
- former staff or students of the institution unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the External Examiner have completed their programme(s)
- a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution
- the succession of an External Examiner from an institution by a colleague from the same department in the same institution
- the appointment of more than one External Examiner from the same department of the same institution.

- The appointment of an external examiner from either the University of East Anglia or the University of Essex within five years of the final University Campus Suffolk (UCS) joint award being made for the course(s) to be overseen

12. External Examiners should normally hold no more than one other substantial external examining appointment (excluding research degrees), and should normally reside in the UK.

Rights and Responsibilities

13. The External Examiner is responsible to the Senate, for the performance of his/her duties.

14. The central duties of the External Examiner are to provide informative comment and recommendations upon whether or not:

- the University of Suffolk is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications, applicable subject benchmark statements and the requirements of relevant PSRBs;
- the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the institution's policies and regulations;
- the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which the External Examiners has experience;

and to provide informative comment and recommendations on:

- good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment observed by the External Examiners;
- opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students.

15. Prior to the confirmation of mark lists, pass lists or similar documents, the External Examiner is required to endorse the outcomes of the assessment processes they have been appointed to scrutinise.

16. In order to fulfil this role, the External Examiner has the following rights and responsibilities:

The External Examiner has the right:

- to be briefed by the Course Leader on his/her tasks as soon as possible, preferably by visiting the institution to meet the course team, and where possible the students. In cases of Practice Assessment, the External Examiner has the right to visit one or more practice locations. (The Course Leader should normally make contact with the External Examiner within two weeks of notification to the Department or partner college that an appointment has been made);
- to be informed of dates of assessment boards, and any subsequent changes in dates, in a timely manner;
- to continued updating by the Course Leader regarding changes in content or practice within the course in question;
- to be consulted about any proposed changes to assessment regulations directly affecting students currently on the course. The University of Suffolk retains the authority to consider and approve all changes to regulations;
- to be consulted about any proposed changes associated with re-approval processes for the course in question, and be provided with revised course documentation following the completion of re-approval processes.
- of access to all draft assessment materials which he/she has to verify and the right to suggest appropriate revisions in accordance with the *Assessment Moderation Policy*;
- of access to all assessed student work which contributes summatively to the award classification/grading;
- of access to course materials including definitive course records and module specifications;
- to meet with internal examiners prior to the Assessment Board;
- to conduct or attend a viva voce examination of any candidate where, in exceptional cases, the assessment regulations allow. It is not standard University of Suffolk practice to conduct viva voce examinations;
- to meet with students if this is a requirement of the relevant PSRB;
- to participate in decisions relating to cases of suspected or proven cheating/assessment offences in accordance with the *Academic Misconduct Policy*;
- to be informed by the Course Leader of the arrangements for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) candidates;

- of access to previous External Examiners' recent reports and to recent Assessment Board minutes;
- of access to quantitative data on current and recent cohorts' student performance;
- to request such other materials as are commensurate with the role;
- to be informed by the Course Leader of any arrangements regarding students on the course in question who might be undertaking a period of study in another institution.

The External Examiner has the responsibility:

- to attend all formal assessment board meetings at which decisions or recommendations for awards, or decisions regarding progression, are made. Where scheduling of assessment boards will cause difficulties for an External Examiner to attend, the External Examiner should liaise in a timely manner to explore whether alternative scheduling could be arranged. Non-attendance at an Assessment Board which makes recommendations for awards is only permissible with the explicit approval of the Academic Registrar. In such cases, External Examiners are responsible for providing assurance that the results to be presented at the board are suitable for ratification, and to provide feedback on issues pertinent to the assessment board's considerations;
- to seek to ensure that there has been consistency and equity of application of course regulations and of the procedures of the institution;
- to judge student performance impartially on the basis of work submitted for assessment;
- to draw to the attention of the Assessment Board any disagreement with the overall marking standard. This should include marks for any element of the award along with any recommendation for a cohort's marks to be remarked or scaled. Confirmed marks are, however, the decision of the relevant Assessment Board and the External Examiner is not empowered to amend individual student marks;
- to seek to ensure that awards made are comparable in standard to those in similar subjects at the same level offered in other institutions nationally and that standards have been appropriately applied; to comment on teaching standards as revealed in students' assessments;
- to oversee the procedures for the drafting of assignments and papers contributing towards the award(s), in accordance with the *Assessment Moderation Policy*;

- to approve summative assessments (examination papers/questions and proposed assignments);
- to sample the assessment of work, in accordance with the *Assessment Moderation* policy, in order to ensure that each student has been fairly assessed, is fairly placed and accurately graded in relation to the rest of the cohort;
- to engage with the University of Suffolk on-line facilities (i.e. Learn) in order to access course information, student work, and records of the assessment processes;
- to comment on the assessment process, the schemes for marking and classification and the Assessment Board procedures;
- to endorse the outcomes of assessment;
- to submit an annual report (as outlined in paragraphs 16 - 18 below) by the agreed deadline;
- to attend academic appeal hearings if called as a witness;
- to declare any changes in his/her status and circumstances which may prejudice the role of External Examiner;
- to comment on proposed changes to courses post-validation including learning outcomes and the appropriateness of teaching and assessment methods;

External Examiner's Report

17. External Examiners are required to submit an end of year report on the conduct of assessments and the standards achieved, and provide recommendations for enhancement. The report should be submitted, in accordance with any agreed deadlines, via the on-line reporting system, through which the Head of Quality Enhancement or their nominee and the relevant Head of Department or Head of Higher Education will be able to view it.

18. Standard pro forma for the annual External Examiner reports are supplied for completion based on the following headings:

- The standards required of students align with the relevant academic thresholds for the award and subject and the performance demonstrated by students is comparable to peers on equivalent courses in other institutions. The awards are aligned with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, national subject benchmarks and, where appropriate, professional benchmarks and standards.

- The assessment strategy measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the learning outcomes of the course and, where applicable, the requirements of the PSRBs.
- Assessment procedures have been carried out in accordance with the University of Suffolk and course specific (where applicable) policies and regulations, e.g. internal and external moderation, conduct of Assessment Boards, assessment documentation.
- Feedback provided to students is constructive, related to assessment criteria, promotes learning and facilitates improvement.
- Assessment outcomes indicate that students have sufficient access to appropriate resources.
- Student performance in assessments provides evidence of good quality of teaching and learning.
- Other general comments including examples of good practice, particular strengths, distinctive or innovative features relating to standards, curriculum and assessment processes worth drawing to the attention of external audiences. Where the course has PSRB recognition, External Examiners are asked to comment on all areas of the course which contribute to professional development and other professional issues including practice learning and requirements of the PSRB. If this is the final report of their tenure, the External Examiner should provide a summary of their time in the role, noting any significant issues and enhancements that have characterised the provision.

19. The subsequent Course Leader response and action plan, once approved by the line managers and Head of Quality Enhancement (or his/her nominee), will be further shared through the University's course Risk-Based Monitoring and Enhancement (RiME) processes. External Examiners are advised that reports may be widely circulated, including to students on the course, and it is therefore essential that individual students and staff are not identified. External Examiners are also advised that students on the programme for which they are responsible will be provided with their name and the name of the institution at which they are based. External Examiners are advised not to enter into correspondence with students should they seek to make contact, referring any such students to the course leader.

20. Following final approval by the University, the External Examiner will be given access to the full report, which includes the Course Leader response and action plan, and comments, from the Head of Quality Enhancement (or nominee).

21. External Examiner reports will be made available in full to students through the Course Committee and RiME processes and through internal on-line publication (with the exception of any material that relates to individuals, is intended to cause harm to the institution or is a confidential report of serious concern) (see Paragraph 22).

22. External Examiner(s) have the authority to report directly to the Vice-Chancellor or the Head of Quality Enhancement on any questions of serious concern, particularly with respect to the fair treatment of individual students or the overall standard of the course.

23. Where an External Examiner has a serious concern relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme or programmes and has exhausted all published applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the head of the institution, he/she may invoke QAA's concerns scheme or inform the relevant PSRB.

Arrangements for Appointment

24. All External Examiner appointments will be the subject of a specific agreement between the University of Suffolk and the External Examiner. Written notice of the agreement will be issued centrally by the Head of Quality Enhancement.

25. External Examiners will be paid a standard fee in line with the level of fees current at the time of appointment, (see paragraph 28). Any necessary expenses incurred in carrying out their duties will be paid in addition to the annual fee.

26. Where necessary, overnight accommodation for External Examiners will be booked and paid for by the relevant Department or partner college.

Fees

27. Fees will be payable upon the receipt of the External Examiner's completed annual report. Administration of fees are carried out by Registry.

28. The level of fees will be determined by agreement with the Head of Quality Enhancement in consultation with the Quality Committee. A record of agreed fee levels will be maintained by Registry.

29. No External Examiners shall receive any payments other than those approved by the Head of Quality Enhancement.

Appointment of External Examiners

30. All External Examiner appointments must be approved by the External Examiner Approval Panel on behalf of the Quality Committee and Senate. Where necessary the approval of external validating bodies and/or PSRBs will also be required before an External Examiner commences his/her duties.

31. All External Examiner appointments will initially be for a single year. Should the External Examiner not effectively engage with the role, the University may decide not to extend the appointment further. Effective engagement would be evidenced through attendance of assessment boards, timely responses to communications through the year, the promptness of the provision of the annual report, and the quality of the report in reviewing the course.

32. The External Examiner's term of office, including the initial year, will normally be one which allows the External Examiner to assess four annual intakes of students up to a maximum of four years. Appointments will normally commence on 1 September and terminate on 30 September.

33. Where two or more External Examiners are employed on a course:

- a) explicit note should be made of the modules to which each is appointed;
- b) where possible their appointments should be staggered for the sake of continuity.

Procedure

34. The Course Leader or Course Leader-designate will nominate External Examiners in line with the requirements identified in 4-15 and on the following timescale:

- for existing courses the External Examiner should be nominated during the final year of office of their predecessor to provide continuity of External Examiner activity;
- for new courses External Examiners should be nominated as soon as possible following the completion of the validation process.

35. Details of a proposed External Examiner must be provided on the Nomination for Approval of an External Examiner form. Part A of the form requests details of the post and should be completed by University of Suffolk staff. Part B of the form requests details of the nominated External Examiner and should be completed by the nominee. Once completed by the nominee, the form should be submitted, together with a CV and any other documentation required by the University or other validating bodies, to the nominating Line Manager (normally the relevant Head of Department or Head of Higher Education) who will complete Part C of the

form in their role as Chair of the Assessment Board. The nominating Line Manager may supply additional supporting information at this stage.

36. The nominating Line Manager should submit the form and other documentation, including the Curriculum Vitae, to Registry. Any additional forms for external validating bodies must be completed at this stage.

37. Forms will be submitted by Registry to the External Examiner Approval Panel for approval. This panel will be made up of the Head of Quality Enhancement, and two nominated members of the Quality Committee, and will be clerked by a member of the Registry team.

38. Where necessary the External Examiner Approval Panel will seek clarification of information from the nominating Line Manager.

39. Approved forms will be signed by the Chair of the Quality Committee on behalf of Senate.

40. Approved forms will be submitted by Registry to PSRBs as required.

41. A copy of the approved form will be sent by Registry to the originating Department or partner college.

42. Registry will send to the newly appointed External Examiner:

- information about the University of Suffolk
- a formal letter of agreement, for signature
- a copy of the terms and conditions of appointment as External Examiner
- a copy of the rights and responsibilities of External Examiners
- information on how to access the University of Suffolk policies and procedures
- copies of External Examiner Travel and Related Expenses Claim forms
- Change of Personal Details Notification form

43. The Chair of the Quality Committee will inform the nominating Line Manager of any rejected External Examiner applications.

44. The Chair of the Assessment Board (normally the relevant Head of Department, or equivalent post in the Learning Network) will ensure that an External Examiner briefing (paragraphs 46-48 below) has occurred.

45. A listing of all current External Examiner appointments is distributed to the Faculties, Departments and Learning Network annually by Registry.

46. Should an External Examiner retire from their academic/professional post, their appointment as an External Examiner will be terminated after one further academic year.

Information to External Examiners

47. The Course Leader should send a course information pack to new External Examiners and should undertake a briefing session with the External Examiner. This may be at the annual induction event for External Examiners.

48. All new External Examiners must be briefed on their role as soon as possible after appointment. In most circumstances this will be through attendance at the University of Suffolk External Examiner Forum (induction event). The briefing should include:

- the dates of Assessment Board meetings;
- the External Examiner's role in relation to the assessment team as a whole;
- the aims and learning outcomes of the course;
- its syllabuses and teaching methods;
- the methods of assessment and marking scheme;
- the regulations for the course including those concerned with opportunities for reassessment;
- the extent of Examiners' discretion;
- the institution's internal monitoring and evaluation procedures;
- external validating bodies' requirements and conditions of award;
- emphasis of the crucial role played by External Examiners as part of the broader University's system of quality assurance and enhancement

49. The information pack should include:

- information on the University of Suffolk including travel information, accommodation, contact names and addresses;
- the course handbook(s) depicting the definitive course scheme, including course aims, philosophy, structure, regulations and syllabuses;

- published national subject benchmarks, where available;
- assessment materials from the previous year to include examples of:
 - examinations
 - major theoretical and practical assignments
 - project work;
- signposting to departmental webpages providing contextual information and staff profiles.