Recruitment of External Examiners:
Guidance for Course Leaders

External examiners are appointed for all University of Suffolk provision, usually for a four year term. Consequently, the task of seeking a replacement external examiner (or one for new provision) is a regular task facing course leaders. Here we provide guidance on the process of appointing an external examiner, and give some tips on how this task might be approached.

The external examiner role

External examiners are an essential element of our quality assurance processes, providing external assurance that assessment processes are completed according to our policies and procedures, and that the academic standards employed in assessment are aligned with appropriate national benchmarks and professional expectations. They are also a means by which opportunities for enhancement can be highlighted and good and innovative practice be identified for dissemination and wider application.

Course teams are expected to work collaboratively with their external examiner(s) to provide access to materials for inspection and approval, to arrange for visits and attendance at Assessment Boards, and to address emergent issues and seek to enhance course provision.

No University of Suffolk awards can be made without receiving assurance from an external examiner that the awards proposed are appropriate, so it is essential that we seek to appoint external examiners to fill vacancies as a matter of priority and in a timely manner.

Finding candidates for external examiner roles

It is expected that course teams, in liaison with their managers, take responsibility for identifying an appropriate candidate for vacant external examiner posts. It is important to note that this is not an application process for anyone interested in becoming an external examiner. The course team is responsible for ensuring that any nomination they put forward meets the criteria set out in the Appointment of External Examiners Policy and is supported by their Head of Department or College Head of HE. It is worth particularly noting that nominees:

- should have significant recent experience of HE provision and assessment at the same or higher level as the course to be overseen, and be in a substantive post at an institution delivering HE (preferably one with taught degree awarding powers)
- should have no recent working or other relationship with the University and its partner institutions, or any members of the relevant University department or partner college
- should not be from the same institution as any recent previous external examiner for the same, or any closely related, provision.

Some teams have found the JISCMail forum very helpful when seeking candidates: https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=External-Examiners.

Course teams in Health related departments might find it helpful to ask their Head of Department to use the Council of Deans of Health as a means of locating a suitable candidate.
The approval process

The full process for external examiner candidate approval is as follows:

1. A candidate is sought by the course team.
2. Once a nominee is identified, the External Examiner Approval Form should be completed in collaboration with the nominee, signed off internally and passed to the Validation and Exams team (validation@uos.ac.uk) along with the nominee’s CV.
3. The External Examiner Approval Panel, on behalf of the Quality Committee, will consider the nomination and, if deemed appropriate, approve the nominee (or during the independence transition, recommend approval to the University of East Anglia and University of Essex).

If a nominee is not deemed appropriate, the course team will be asked to seek an alternative and to inform the unsuccessful nominee of their non-approval.

As set out above, the appointment process involves a number of stages and so can take some time. Consequently, course teams are encouraged to seek potential nominees well in advance of the date when any new external examiner will begin their role. For example, for an appointment due to begin in the September of an academic year, course teams should seek to have an individual nominated by the end of the previous March.

Appointment and induction

The approval process confirms the appropriateness of a nominee for an external examining position at the University of Suffolk. However, following this, two further stages need to be completed to confirm appointment:

i. The nominee will be offered the position as external examiner through the provision of a contract by the Validation and Exams team, which they will need to formally accept.

ii. The nominee will be required to provide evidence to the University’s Human Resources team of their eligibility to work in the UK, through provision of their passport or equivalent documentation.

Unless these two stages are completed, an external examiner will not be paid for any work or be registered onto the University’s IT systems (and so will not be able to access online systems including MySuffolk and the virtual learning environment Learn).

All new external examiners are invited to attend the annual External Examiner Forum, normally held in October, where their role as an external examiner is explored in the context of the University of Suffolk and the course they have been appointed to. This event also provides an opportunity to meet with course teams and to complete stage (ii) above by meeting with HR team members on the day.

Further support

The Quality Assurance and Enhancement team and the Validation and Exams team are happy to provide advice and support to course teams seeking to appoint external examiners. In the first instance, please contact the Educational Developer, Andrew Revitt (a.revitt@uos.ac.uk) or Vicky Smith in the Validation and Exams team (Vicky.Smith@uos.ac.uk).