

Section 9 – External Examination

Chapter 1 – Nomination, Appointment and Termination

Introduction and Definitions

External Examiners

External Examiners are experienced academics from other institutions who can provide an independent assessment of academic standards and the quality of assessment at the University. External examiners must have 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. External examiners should have knowledge and experience of delivering the standards relevant to the award on which they are externally examining in other institutions as well as those set out in the FHEQ, Characteristics Statements, Subject Benchmark Statements, and any Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) requirements relevant to the course.

The University will make scrupulous use of external examiners by appointing at least one external examiner to all higher education provision offered from a recognised academic institution. The responsibilities of external examiners are set out below.

Industry External Examiners

Given the industry focussed nature of the University's courses it may be desirable to appoint an external examiner from industry. This will always be in addition to an External Examiner from academia and in the case of courses with PSRB requirements, a strong understanding of the relevant body's expectations would also be expected. The responsibilities of industry external examiners do not differ in any respect from those of other external examiners, as set out below.

Lead External Examiners

For courses with more than one external examiner, the University will appoint a Lead External Examiner, who will be an experienced academic from another institution.

Lead External Examiners carry additional responsibilities in addition to those of normal appointees. In summary, a Lead External Examiner leads a team of external examiners and takes an overview of the University's assessment and quality assurance systems across the provision for which they are appointed. When dealing with awards holding prescription or accreditation by a PSRB, the Lead External Examiner takes a critical overview of the adequacy of these systems and makes recommendations for their improvement. The additional responsibilities of Lead External Examiners are set out below.

Collaborative Provision

Where a course is delivered in partnership, the University will retain responsibility for appointing external examiners in line with this policy.

External Examiner Criteria

In order to be eligible for nomination as an external examiner, an individual must have some or all of the following:

- a high degree of competence and experience in the field(s) covered by the course of study, or parts thereof, and have a good understanding of the UK higher education sector, including the requirements and standards of any relevant PSRB;
- the necessary academic experience and subject knowledge to assess threshold standards and achievement beyond the threshold level consistently. When a course(s) is prescribed or accredited by a PSRB, the examiner must be competent to identify the threshold standards, criteria and requirements of the relevant bodies;
- appropriate experience in course design and student assessment at the level of the award to enable them to identify good practice and to recommend enhancements to the assessment process and enable informed course modification;
- experience in acting as an external examiner, or willingness to undertake appropriate training and mentoring by the University in undertaking their duties;

impartiality of judgement and be wholly independent of the University and its staff (including the governing body), and any relevant partners;

no conflicts of interest (see below for examples of conflicts);

sufficient experience in quality assurance to enable them to discharge their role effectively.

Where a course(s) is prescribed or accredited by a PSRB, it is expected that the nominee will have relevant experience in teaching, assessing and ideally examining of provision with the same accreditation or prescription.

External examiners must comply with all relevant employment legislation, including any relating to safeguarding and UKVI, as appropriate.

Nomination and Appointment Process

Course Leaders are encouraged to identify suitable candidates for nomination who meet the criteria above, seeking the support of their Academic Head or equivalent if necessary. Where a Course Leader cannot identify a suitable candidate, the Quality Office can assist in sourcing suitable nominations.

Nominations should be submitted on the relevant pro-forma to the Quality Office by the Course Leader.

Nominations must be approved by the Academic Head or equivalent prior to submission to Quality.

The Quality Office will scrutinize the suitability of the nomination against the criteria above and identify any conflicts of interest (see below) prior to submission to the Academic Board. Where the Quality Office rejects a nominee, the course team can seek a review by the University Secretary and the Director of Strategic Delivery whose judgment shall be final.

When a nomination is approved by Academic Board, the external examiner will be invited to participate in the relevant induction event.

It is recommended that larger courses (i.e. those with more than 100 students), should nominate and appoint additional external examiner(s). In such cases, one external examiner should be designated a Lead External Examiner, who will undertake the additional responsibilities which are set out below.

Tenure, Extension and Reappointment

External examiners are appointed for a period of four years. In the final year of appointment a replacement external examiner should be appointed to allow an element of continuity and to act as a transition and training period for any potential external examiners without prior external examining experience.

In exceptional cases appointment may be extended to allow continuity or running out of a course (usually up to a maximum of two years). These extensions will be approved by the University Secretary and reported to the Academic Board.

Following the end of their tenure, external examiners will not be reappointed to the same course or another offered by the University until at least five years have elapsed.

Conflicts of Interest

A Conflict of Interest is a situation in which the aims, concerns or motivations of two different parties may be incompatible. If there is reason to believe that there are factors which might impinge on the impartiality or critical distance of an external examiner they should not be nominated and cannot be appointed. Below is a non-exhaustive list of circumstances which represent conflicts of interest and in which appointment cannot be made:

a member of the governing body or committee or one of the University's partners, delivery organisations or support providers, or a current employee of the University or one of its partners, delivery organisations or support providers;

anyone with a close professional (e.g. a research partner), contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the course;

anyone required to assess applicants who may be recruited as students to the course;

anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the course;

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 course(s) or modules in question;

former staff or students of the University unless a period of four years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their course(s);

a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate courses at another higher education provider;

the succession of an external examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home department and provider;

the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same higher education provider.

Conflicts of interest will be determined by the Quality Office and any potential conflicts should be declared at the nomination stage. A conflict of interest may arise during the tenure of an external examiner and that will necessitate a termination of tenure and the appointment of a new external examiner.

External examiners may not normally hold more than two concurrent external examiner appointments at the same time.

Change in Circumstances and Termination of Appointment

During an external examiner's tenure their appointment can be terminated by either party giving not less than three months' notice. External examiners can email to resign their appointment to the Quality Office (quality@rave.ac.uk).

The University expects external examiners to fulfil their duties as laid out in this policy and in their contract with the institution. Should an external examiner fail to fulfil their duties, the University will take the following action depending on the extent of the failure:

Minor – the University will write to the external examiner to remind them of their duties and, if necessary, invite the external examiner to a relevant induction. Examples of minor failures include non-attendance at the Exam Board;

Major – the University will consider the impact of the failure and where necessary, write to the external examiner to inform them of the termination of their contract. Examples of major failures include non-submission of the external examiner report.

During their tenure an external examiners details or circumstances may change (e.g. a change in role or move to a different institution). It is the responsibility of the external examiner to update the Quality Office with a change in details as soon as possible, particularly if the change in circumstances may result in a conflict of interest.

Where the change leads to a conflict of interest, the possibility of removing the conflict will be discussed. Where the conflict cannot be removed, the appointment may be terminated.

Where a Course Leader is concerned about an external examiner fulfilling their duties, they should raise their concerns with a member of the Quality Office.

Chapter 2 – External Examiner Obligations

External Examiners

The University welcomes the views of its external examiners on all aspects of its provision, but in particular sets out the following obligations on its external examiners:

to ascertain and provide assurance that the University is maintaining threshold academic standards in accordance with the FHEQ;

to provide assurance that the profile for student attainment beyond the threshold level is reasonably comparable with those achieved in other Universities;

to ascertain and provide assurance that the assessment processes adopted by course teams measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended learning outcomes of the course and that they are conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations;

where relevant, to ascertain and provide assurance on the threshold standards, criteria and requirements of any relevant PSRBs on a course that is accredited or prescribed by PSRB.

Should an external examiner become aware of serious concerns in the fulfilment of their duties outlined above they should raise them with the Vice-Chancellor, via the Quality Office, as soon as possible.

External examiners should not discuss individual student's performance and should a student raise issues of this nature, the external examiner should refer them onto the relevant Course Leader.

Reports

These obligations are demonstrated through the submission of an annual report on the relevant pro-forma which will offer comment on good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment and opportunities to improve or enhance the quality of the learning, teaching or assessment opportunities provided to students. If there are multiple modes, then comment should be made on the equivalency of standards and outcomes across these modes.

Reports should be submitted to the Quality Office as soon as possible following the Assessment Board, and in any event by the end of the academic year.

The Quality Office will acknowledge receipt of the external examiner report and forward it into the relevant Course Leader(s) who will provide an initial response to the examiner.

External examiner reports feed into the Annual Course Monitoring process and each report will have an Action Plan generated by the course(s) which is monitored at the relevant committee. This will be provided to the external examiner once the Action Plan has been completed, and this is usually by the end of the following academic year.

An overarching report is written by the Quality Office and is reported to Academic Board to share cross-departmental issues and good practice.

The name of the external examiner and the external examiner reports are available to staff and students via the intranet.

Lead External Examiners

In addition to the responsibilities for all external examiners, the Lead External Examiner will:

- lead the external examiner team;

- mentoring new or inexperienced external examiners;

- chair meetings of the external examiners and/or meet separately with each of them;

- resolve disputes and differences of opinion between external examiners;

- support and advise the internal examiners in ensuring that all external examiners have sufficient information and access to perform their duties;

- ensure clarity and consistency for the external examiner team in relation threshold standards and grading; and

- where relevant, ensure clarity and consistency about how external examiners ensure that PSRB criteria are met by candidates and how external examiners confirm, evidence and report that.

Where there is a Lead External Examiner, they are responsible for confirming the criteria of any relevant PSRB have been met and will produce a report which focuses on students achieving the PSRB criteria, explaining and confirming whether students had met the criteria and on what basis that this view was formed.

Information Available to External Examiners

In order to fulfil the obligations above, external examiners are expected to:

- comment on the specific assessment instruments set for students that contribute towards the acquisition of credit. This includes project briefs and any examination papers.

- meet with groups of students at all levels to gain an understanding of whether the assessments set are appropriate for the students and to allow comment on the student experience at the University.

- sample student work. External examiners do not have the right to intervene in the marks awarded to an individual student. However, should they have concerns about the internal marking, they should raise these with the Course Leader at the first relevant opportunity.

- attend the final assessment board annually and at least one external examiner is required to attend the final Assessment Board for it to proceed. In exceptional cases the external examiner may not attend the Assessment Board, however, they will be required to submit comments in advance of the board.

The above activities enable external examiners to endorse the assessment outcomes for the relevant course and offer a verbal report at the Assessment Board to formally record their agreement.

Sampling

A key part of the external examiner's role is to report on whether the academic standards of the University's awards are appropriate and that the performance of students meet those standards. In order to ensure this, the University adopts a sampling process in accordance with the below in the production of the external examination bundle.

For each external examiner, the assessment leader must create a bundle consisting of a minimum of 10% of the total assessments for each module that cover outcomes across the mark categories including, where available, failed assessments.

Wherever possible the external examination bundle should come from scripts or assessments which have been second marked or moderated internally.

Whatever sample is provided, external examiners reserve the right to seek additional student work for sampling up to and including the sampling of all student work for the year.

Retrieval Boards

External examiners will be invited to sample students work in accordance with the sampling guidelines indicated above.

External examiners shall be invited to Retrieval Boards, but can delegate responsibility to the board, in their absence. Such a delegation cannot occur where external examiner attendance is a requirement of a PSRB.

Changes to Validated Courses

Where the course team proposes to modify a validated course, the Course Leader must request the external examiner(s) to comment on the proposed changes. Their response must be submitted as part of the approval request.