UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

**CODE OF PRACTICE FOR EXTERNAL EXAMINING OF TAUGHT PROGRAMMES OF STUDY**

1 The membership of the Board of Examiners for each course and for each undergraduate Honours subject includes one or more Course or Subject External Examiners. Their main responsibilities are to ensure that academic standards are maintained and that students are treated fairly. External Examiners have responsibility for credit-bearing short courses.

There are Chief External Examiners who are members of Campus Progress and Award Boards of Examiners for undergraduate Honours combined programmes and the Certificate of Personal and Professional Development and the Postgraduate Certificate of Professional Development frameworks.

**APPOINTMENT**

2 External Examiners are appointed by Council on the recommendation of the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee acting under delegated authority from Senate, after consideration of nominations from the boards of the faculties in the case of Course and Subject External Examiners, or directly from the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee in the case of Chief External Examiners. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality and Student Experience) discharges this responsibility on behalf of Council.

3 In recommending External Examiners for appointment the Committee shall have regard to the national criteria for the appointment of external examiners as set out below:

a) Every external examiner will be expected to have:

* knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
* competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof;
* 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;
* strong reputation, 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;
* familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed;
* fluency in 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);
* met applicable criteria set out by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies;
* awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula;
* competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

Where a nominee has no previous experience as an external examiner, appointment is, where practicable, to a team of external examiners and/or with agreement that a more experienced external examiner will act as mentor. Where such an arrangement is not practicable, consideration may be given to supporting an appointment through development or mentoring by an experienced external examiner in a different field. Furthermore, it is recommended that the nominee is also appointed an Ulster University mentor who is not involved in the delivery or management of the course that the nominee is being appointed to. Mentoring may not always be appropriate for a nominee with a substantial record of experience in course design and assessment.

b) To avoid potential conflicts of interest, external examiners shall not be appointed if they are covered by any of the following categories:

* + 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;
* 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 University 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 by a colleague from the examiner’s home department and institution;
* the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution.

c) The duration of an external examiner’s appointment will be normally four years, with an exceptional extension of one year to ensure continuity, for example, where a programme is being discontinued.

d) An external examiner may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.

e) External examiners normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes at any point in time.

4 The appointment of an external examiner may be terminated by the University**,** with the approval of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality and Student Experience), if they fail to fulfil their obligations. An external examiner who wishes to resign the post should do so by writing to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality and Student Experience), giving reasonable notice whenever possible, normally at least three months from the end of the current academic session.

5 Normally each module is the responsibility of only one external examiner.

6 In discussing the role with prospective external examiners, Faculties should ensure that potential intellectual property issues, such as might arise from the need for commercial confidentiality, are discussed and any necessary consent obtained in writing.

**EXCEPTIONS AND SPECIAL CASES**

7 Nominations which do not fulfil the appointment criteria may be made in respect of, for example:

* nominees drawn from business, industry or the professions who possess considerable professional experience but not the formal qualifications anticipated, the academic background, or sufficient experience of assessment;
* a researcher, with eminent standing in the respective discipline, but lacking experience in providing and enhancing student learning experience;
* nominees to disciplines which are very small and specialist and where the pool of potential external examiners is therefore restricted.

Any application for an exceptional appointment must include a supporting statement on how the external examiner will be supported in fulfilling the expectations of the role. Consideration of such nominees may be assisted where the nominee would not be the sole external examiner for the award; hence his or her expertise would be complemented by that of others who do satisfy the appointment criteria.

**DUTIES**

8 The duties of Course and Subject External Examiners include:

a) consultation with the internal examiners, through the Course or Subject Directors, in relation to the approval and moderation of examination papers and other forms of assessment;

b) consideration of the standard of marking of examination papers and other forms of assessment and reporting to Boards of Examiners on such revisions of the marking as they consider necessary;

c) attendance at meetings of Boards of Examiners;

d) attendance with one or more internal examiners at such oral examinations as are determined by the Board of Examiners;

e) confirmation of results, progress decisions made by the Board and, as applicable, the pass and classified lists of candidates including recommendations for awards;

f) submission to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality and Student Experience) in the first instance of reports on: the standards and coherence of the course or subject; the standards of assessment; the standards of student performance; and the comparability of the standards with those of similar courses; and the assessment schemes and processes. Account should be taken of the relevant national subject benchmarks, the national qualifications framework and professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements (where appropriate);

g) such other duties as the Senate may specify from time to time.

9 The duties of Chief External Examiners include:

1. consideration of the standards of awards for combined undergraduate Honours degrees or the Certificate of Personal and Professional Development or Postgraduate Certificate of Professional Development;
2. attendance at meetings of Progress and Award Boards of Examiners;
3. confirmation of progress decisions made by the Board and, as applicable, the pass and classified lists of candidates including recommendations for awards;
4. submission to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality and Student Experience) in the first instance of reports on the standards of awards; the standards of student performance; and the comparability of the standards with those of similar programmes; and the assessment schemes and processes;
5. such other duties as the Senate may specify from time to time.

Chief External Examiners shall not have responsibility for the approval and moderation of assessment within subjects nor for the determination of results of candidates in modules.

**PARTICIPATION IN THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

10 New Course and Subject External Examiners are expected to commence their period of appointment with an induction.

11 The general duties of Course and Subject External Examiners are prescribed in the Regulations Governing Examinations in Programmes of Study. While the University has agreed that External Examiners for Honours and non-Honours degrees may elect, if they so wish, not to be involved in the examining process for undergraduate degree modules at Levels 3 or 4 which do not contribute to a final award, their involvement is welcome. All other modules, and Level 3 and 4 modules which contribute to an exit award, require the involvement of the relevant external examiner.

In order that Course and Subject External Examiners can fulfil their duties, the Course or Subject Director shall ensure that:

a) all draft examinations papers and coursework assessment schemes for the modules in each External Examiner’s area of responsibility are approved by the External Examiner in advance; (the deadline for submission of draft examination papers to External Examiners is week 3 of the semester. Final versions are submitted to the Examinations Office by week 8). External Examiners have the authority to approve all coursework but are not required to approve every piece of coursework set. The nature and extent of involvement in the coursework assessment schemes must be discussed and agreed in advance;

b) External Examiners have access to all examination scripts and coursework for the modules in their area of responsibility;

c) where it is agreed that the External Examiner should see a selection of the scripts and coursework, the principles for such a selection are agreed in advance; External Examiners are given enough evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and are consistent; External Examiners should see a sample from the top, the middle and the bottom of the range. They must sample the work of candidates at classification boundaries. They should also see all work assessed internally as failures;

d) where External Examiners are to attend oral examinations, the arrangements are agreed with them in advance. Where at the discretion of the Board of Examiners it is agreed that interviews are held with selected candidates to assist External Examiners in judging the standards of assessment and the quality of student learning, the principles for the selection and the form of the interviews are discussed with the External Examiners in advance. (It should be made clear to students that such interviews are not part of the assessment process and will not contribute to their individual results.) External Examiners may choose to meet with groups of students;

e) External Examiners are entitled to attend all meetings of Boards of Examiners of which they are members. With the exception of BSc Hons Nursing Studies, they shall be present at all meetings where the performance of candidates which contributes to the final result is being considered. In the BSc Hons Nursing Studies, at least one external examiner shall be present at each Board of Examiners which considers final results. In the case of linked postgraduate diplomas and master’s degrees, the Faculty may determine in accordance with approved procedures whether the External Examiners attend for one or both award stages.

The approval of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality and Student Experience) shall be obtained for alternative arrangements when an External Examiner is unable to fulfil the attendance requirements specified in the Regulations Governing Examinations in Programmes of Study.

12 Chief External Examiners for combined undergraduate Honours degrees shall not have responsibility for the approval and moderation of assessment within subjects, nor for the determination of results of candidates in modules. The general duties of the Chief External Examiner are prescribed in the Regulations Governing Examinations in Programmes of Study. In order that the Chief External Examiner can fulfill his or her duties, the campus Director of Combined Studies or the Programme Director of the professional development framework shall ensure that:

a) the Chief External Examiner is able to attend the meeting of the Progress and Award Board of Examiners;

b) the Chief External Examiner is provided with generic award regulations;

c) where at the discretion of the Progress and Awards Board of Examiners it is agreed that interviews are held with selected candidates to assist the Chief External Examiner in judging the standards of assessment and the quality of student learning, the principles for the selection and the form of the interviews are discussed with the Chief Examiner in advance. (It should be made clear to students that such interviews are not part of the assessment process and will not contribute to their individual results.) The Chief External Examiner may choose to meet with groups of students.

13 Unresolved disagreement between examiners shall be reported to the Senate.

14 The signature of the External Examiners must be included on the course result sheets to indicate endorsement of results and decisions.

**REPORTS**

15 Course and Subject External Examiners are encouraged to discuss with the internal examiners the structure, content and coherence of the course and the assessment schemes and procedures.

16 External Examiners are required to submit a written report to the Dean of Learning Enhancement within one month of attending the last meeting of the Board of Examiners in each academic session. They are asked to report as appropriate on the topics in 7 f) or 8 e).

17 Reports of Course and Subject External Examiners are distributed to faculties and partner institutions for consideration during the annual review of the operation of the course. It is open to External Examiners to submit to the Vice-Chancellor or Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality and Student Experience), in addition to the annual report, a confidential communication about the course(s)/subject with which they are involved.

18 The report (or a summary) of each Course/Subject/Chief External Examiner will be discussed with student representatives and each report will be made available in full to all students on the course. A confidential report made to the Vice-Chancellor or Pro-Vice-Chancellor will not be made available to students.

19 The reports of Chief External Examiners for Combined Honours degrees are considered by the appropriate Campus Co-ordinating Group and the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee. The reports for the Certificate of Personal and Professional Development and Postgraduate Certificate of Professional Development are considered by the relevant Programme Committee and by the Distributed Education Board. It is also open to Chief External Examiners to submit, in addition to the annual report, a confidential communication to the Vice-Chancellor or Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality and Student Experience).

For further information, see the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B7: External Examining at [qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/UK-Quality-Code-for-Higher-Education-2013-18](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/UK-Quality-Code-for-Higher-Education-2013-18) and Advice and Guidance [qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/external-expertise](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/external-expertise)

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