The Assessment of Students

A3.3 Regulations on External Examiners

A3.3.1 The rights and responsibilities of external examiners

1. The University defines the role of the external examiner as being the following:

- **academic standards:**
  to contribute an external impartial perspective to the evaluation and maintenance of the standard of the award and its comparability with similar awards in other institutions;

- **quality assurance:**
  i. to contribute appropriate advice to course teams concerning the operation and development of the course, from the perspective of his/her involvement in assessment;
  ii. to be advised of changes to the course which affect its assessment methods and regulations;
  iii. to provide an annual report, as specified by the University. This report will be considered by the Dean of the School and the Academic Policy & Quality Unit with respect to any immediate implications for the operation of the course and as part of the annual review process;

- **assessment process:**
  to ensure fairness in the assessment process and justice for the individual student in judgements about the student's performance. The role will be discharged by reviewing the content and form of all assessments, by ensuring the fairness and consistency of marks and decisions on students' performance, and by ensuring that students' results and awards are determined in accordance with the course regulations;

2. The specific duties of an individual external examiner may vary according to the nature and organisation of the course, but within the external examining team as a whole the rights and responsibilities detailed in 3.1.3 below will apply.

3. The external examiner(s) must:

   a) be able to judge the standard of the award impartially on the basis of work submitted for assessment, without being influenced by previous association with the course, staff, or any of the students;
b) be able to compare the academic standards with those of courses leading to comparable awards elsewhere;

c) comment on the form and content of all examination papers and coursework outlines that count towards the award, in order to ensure that all students will be assessed fairly in relation to the course syllabus and regulations and in such a way that the external examiner(s) will be able to judge whether students are able to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes for the programme, have fulfilled the programme's objectives and reached the required standard prior to final approval by the school.

d) be advised of any proposed changes to the assessment regulations which will directly affect students currently on the course;

e) have the right to attend examiners' meetings and have access to all assessed work;

f) see samples of the work of students, selected to reflect the range of student performance sufficient to ensure that each student is fairly placed in relation to the rest of the cohort; the marking is fair and appropriate.

g) ensure that the assessments are conducted in accordance with the regulations for the programme of study;

h) attend the meeting of the Examination Committee at which decisions on recommendations for awards are made and ensure that those recommendations are reached by means according with the University's requirements and normal practice in higher education;

i) participate as required in reviews of decisions about individual students' marks and awards;

j) report to the University on the conduct, appropriateness, effectiveness and standard of assessments, in the manner specified by the University;

k) have the right to report to the Vice Chancellor on any matters of serious concern arising from the assessments which put at risk the standard of the University's awards.

4. To carry out these responsibilities the external examiner(s) must be:

a) competent in assessing students' knowledge and skills at the appropriate level for the award;

b) expert in the field of study concerned;
c) impartial in judgement;

d) properly briefed on their role, the course, and the University's requirements.

5. New external examiners will be briefed as soon as possible after appointment. The briefing will cover: the dates of examiners' meetings, the examiner's role in relation to the examining team as a whole, the objectives of the course, its syllabuses and teaching methods, the method of assessment and marking scheme, the regulations for the programme including those concerned with compensation for failure and opportunities for reassessment, the extent of examiners' discretion, and the University's requirements and conditions of award.

6. An award will not be conferred without the written consent of the external examiners.
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A3.3.2 The appointment of external examiners

1. All external examiner appointments must be approved by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. A Board of Examiners which does not include approved external examiners is not authorised to assess students for an award or to recommend the conferment of an award upon a student.

2. New examiners should take up their appointments on or before the retirement of their predecessors. External examiners should remain available until the last assessments with which they are to be associated in order to deal with any subsequent reviews of decisions.

3. Appointment dates for external examiners will take account of the timing of assessments in such a way that they may be fully involved in the assessment process. The examiner's normal term of office will be one which allows the examiner to assess four successive cohorts of students; this will normally mean four calendar years but maybe longer where necessary.

4. External examiners should not normally hold more than the equivalent of two substantial undergraduate appointments at the same time. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee will use this guideline in considering nominations and will expect to see convincing arguments in support of proposals for a heavier workload for an examiner.

5. In order to protect their independence, external examiners should not concurrently act as consultants to a course team on course design, or be members of a panel established to review the course they examine.

6. In approving the appointment of external examiner(s) for a course the Academic Quality and Standards Committee will be seeking to ensure that the external examiner(s) will be competent and impartial, and that the Examination Committee as a whole maintains an appropriate balance and diversity in order to ensure that students are fairly assessed.

7. The appointment of an external examiner may be terminated before the expiry of his/her normal term of office by approval of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. Such a termination of appointment will normally be considered only on the basis of the external examiner's unwillingness or inability to fulfil the responsibilities in A3.3.1.3 above.
8. The University requires course regulations to describe the nature and methods of assessment and show how external examiners will be involved in all forms of assessment which count towards the recommendation of an award. Within the terms of these regulations it is for external examiners to decide in detail how to fulfil the responsibilities described above.

9. The amount of the fee payable to an external examiner is at the discretion of the University.
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A3.3.3 Chief external examiners

If the team of external examiners is large, a chief external examiner may be appointed. Where the University chooses to identify a chief examiner, he or she should have sufficient external examining experience to take an overview of the course and ensure that a consistent standard is maintained across subjects. The approval of the appointment of an external examiner who is to act in this capacity will be subject to the normal criteria as set out above.
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A3.3.4 External examiners’ reports

1. External examiners are required to report annually on the conduct of the assessments just concluded and on issues related to assessment, including:

   a) the overall performance of the students in relation to their peers on comparable awards;

   b) the strengths and weaknesses of students;

   c) the quality of knowledge and skills (both general and subject specific) demonstrated by the students;

   d) the structure, organisation, design and marking of all assessments;

   e) the quality of teaching as indicated by student performance;

   f) the lessons of the assessments for the curriculum, syllabus, teaching methods and resources of the course;

   g) any other recommendations arising from the assessments.

2. The purpose of the report is to enable the University to judge whether the course is meeting its stated objectives and to make any necessary improvements, either immediately or at the next review as appropriate.

3. The external examiner(s) have authority to report direct to the Chair of the Academic Board if they are concerned about standards of assessment and performance, particularly where they consider that assessments are being conducted in a way that jeopardises either the fair treatment of individual students or the standard of the University’s awards. However, recourse to such a report should be in the event that normal channels of communication (to the course tutor or Head of School) have already been pursued and exhausted or where such normal channels are inappropriate.

4. Course teams should remind external examiners of the University’s guidance on the content of reports when a report becomes due. That guidance will also be provided to external examiners in writing by the Academic Registrar.
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A3.3.5 The place of external examiners in annual programme review

1. External examining is a vital means of maintaining standards and providing information on outcomes for use in annual programme review. External examining is, however, a separate process from annual review and it is important that there should be no confusion or role conflict between the two.

2. The role of the external examiner is to report back to the School on student outcomes as shown through assessment. The report may have implications for the way in which the programme is designed and delivered, but it is for the School rather than the external examiner to decide what changes should be made as a result.

3. External examiners' annual reports will always form part of the documentation used in annual programme review, and the School will scrutinise both the reports and the records of the responses to them.
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A3.3.6 The place of external examiners in the approval of new programmes

External examiners may provide advice to the School when developing and approving new programmes. However, because of external examiners' existing association with the School's programmes, such advice would not, on its own, fulfil the University's requirement for the School to provide evidence of external advice having been sought in order for a new programme to be approved. External advice in the context of new programme development and approval should come from an additional and independent source.