

REGULATIONS

A3.7 External Examining

A3.7.1 Introduction

- i. Universities and other institutions with degree awarding powers are responsible for the quality of their programmes of study and for the standards of the awards to which they lead. The external examining system at Oxford Brookes University is a key element of the University's arrangements for setting, maintaining and assuring academic and professional standards, which include the programme approval, annual review and periodic review processes, and the University's assessment policies and regulations. The University is accountable for the standards of its awards to the funding council, through QAA institutional review, and to a range of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). The University's approach to external examining is informed by the expectation, articulated in Chapter B7 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (QAA, 2011), that scrupulous use should be made of external examiners in assuring the academic standards of the University's awards.
- ii. This policy provides guidance on:
 - the nomination and appointment of external examiners;
 - the role of the external examiner;
 - the production of the external examiner's annual report;
 - the consideration of external examiners' reports and responses to recommendations made by external examiners;
 - the relationship between external examining arrangements and other quality management processes at Oxford Brookes University.

A3.7.2 Principles

- i. External examiners provide evidence about how the University sets and assures the academic and professional standards of its awards, through their direct observation of student performance (assessed work) and assessment practices. On the basis of this they may also make inferences about the quality of teaching, and learning resources, but they rarely directly observe these.
- ii. A confidence judgement in QAA institutional audit is crucially dependent on an institution's "strong and scrupulous use of independent external examiners in summative assessment practices". According to the UK Quality Code, external examiners are appointed to provide impartial and independent advice, as well as informative comment, on the standards of the University's awards, and on student achievement in relation to those standards. Many are also asked to comment on whether or not a programme of study leading to a University award enables students to meet the relevant professional standards.
- iii. The quality of the evidence produced by external examiners is dependent on their 'externality', i.e. their independence and their expertise. External examiners should be 'independent witnesses', who are not compromised by prior association with the programme team, or by any reciprocal arrangement that exists between the Oxford Brookes subject team and that of the external examiner. They should also be 'expert witnesses', whose authority is derived from their knowledge of the discipline they are examining and their experience of assessment. The appointment criteria for external examiners at Oxford Brookes are therefore designed to ensure

that nominees are able to exercise impartial, independent and expert judgement, and they are consistent with the criteria set out in the UK Quality Code (B7, Indicator 5).

- iv. The UK Quality Code (chapter B7) expects higher education institutions to ask their external examiners to comment on:
 - a. whether the University is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards, in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements;
 - b. whether the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended learning outcomes of the programme/s and is conducted in accordance with the University's policies and regulations;
 - c. the comparability of the academic standards and achievement of students with those in other higher education institutions with which they are familiar;
 - d. good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment which they have observed;
 - e. opportunities to enhance the quality of learning opportunities offered to students.
- v. The template for external examiners' reports at Oxford Brookes has therefore been designed to ensure that these areas are addressed. External examiners' reports are an important source of direct evidence on the academic standards of awards and of indirect evidence on the quality of the University's programmes of study leading to its awards. These reports inform the annual reports at programme and Faculty level, and provide evidence, together with responses from programme teams, which is used in the annual programme review process and considered by periodic review and revalidation panels.
- vi. In line with the requirements of HEFCE 06/45, and with indicator 14 of the UK Quality Code (chapter B7), external examiners' reports are made available to all staff and students through the Personal Information Portal. This policy, and other information about the University's external examining system, is freely available on the University's website, and a brief outline of the role of the external examiner is required in all programme handbooks. The name and institution of the external examiner on their programme is also made available to students via PIP.
- vii. An annual overview of the institutional issues raised in external examiners' reports forms part of the Annual Quality Review prepared by the Head of the Academic Policy & Quality Office for consideration by the University's Academic Enhancement & Standards Committee.

A3.7.3 Nomination and appointment of External Examiners

- i. The responsibility for nominating potential external examiners lies with the Programme Lead. The nomination form is available from the APQO, and link Quality Assurance Officers will provide advice on the suitability of potential nominees prior to completion of the form. The Faculty AESC is responsible for considering all nominations and ensuring that they meet the University's criteria. The Faculty should also verify a nominee's right to work in the UK, prior to submission of documentation to the APQO (through the Faculty's liaison QAO), for approval by the Chair of AESC.
- ii. The University's criteria for appointment are designed to ensure that external examiners are able to exercise an impartial, independent and expert judgement on the academic standard of the University's awards; and are based on the person specification set out in the UK Quality Code (section B7). Faculties must therefore take into account the following points in their consideration of external examiner nominations (PSRB requirements must also be taken into account, where applicable):
 - *Seniority*
External examiners must demonstrate appropriate levels of experience within the discipline, including academic or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification they are appointed to examine. They should have sufficient standing and breadth of experience in the discipline (as a practitioner, where appropriate) to be able to command the respect of colleagues

within the sector.

Nominees from outside the HE sector should be appointed as part of a team of external examiners, since the University requires assurance on the standards of its awards in the context of the Framework for Higher Education and other relevant sector benchmarks, as well as in the context of industry/professional requirements.

- *Experience*

External examiners must have a good understanding of the standard to be expected of students studying on the programme they are appointed to examine. Nominees should therefore have experience of curriculum design, teaching and internal examining in the discipline area and at the level for which they are being appointed. Examiners should also have an awareness of current developments in teaching and learning in the discipline, therefore retirees may only be considered for appointment if they are able to provide evidence of their continuing involvement in the academic/professional area concerned.

Those being nominated to cover collaborative programmes and professional doctorates should always be experienced external examiners. Nominees for other programmes with no previous external examining experience must be appointed as part of a team. Their lack of experience should be balanced against the composition of the rest of the external examining team, and the proposing Department must provide additional information to support such nominations, including an outline of the arrangements that will be put in place to ensure they are mentored by an appropriately experienced external examiner within the established team.

- *Workload*

External examiners should not be appointed if they already hold two or more current examinerships, and such nominations should not be approved by the Faculty AESC. If a team of external examiners is large, a chief external examiner may be appointed: the chief external examiner must have sufficient expertise to be able to make a judgement of the standards achieved across the programme as a whole, and will be paid an additional fee for the production of an overview report.

- *Previous involvement with the programme*

Nominees should not have been involved in the delivery of the programme at Oxford Brookes - as lecturer, consultant, or placement provider - nor should they have been an external adviser through the programme approval process (i.e. a member of the PDT). The Faculty AESC should not approve such nominations.

To avoid potential conflicts of interest, nominees should not be appointed as external examiners if they are:

- closely associated with the sponsorship of students on the programme;
- in a position to significantly influence the future of students on the programme;
- involved in collaborative research activities with a member of staff in the Department.
- are a near relation of a member of staff or student associated with the programme

External members of programme approval panels are required to meet criteria to ensure their objectivity and independence from the design of the programme, and their appointment as external examiners at a later stage is therefore not considered to present a conflict of interest.

- *Reciprocity*

No member of the proposing academic department should be an external examiner in the same institution as the nominee. The Faculty AESC should not approve such nominations.

- *Colleagues*

The external examining team must not contain two external examiners who are or who were recently colleagues, nor should colleagues from the same department in the same institution be appointed to take over from each other.

- *Association with the University*
A nominee who has been a student or member of staff at Oxford Brookes University within the previous five years is not eligible for appointment as an external examiner, and such nominations should not be approved by the Faculty AESC. They may, however, be considered for appointment after a period of at least five years has elapsed.

Members of the Board of Governors are not eligible for appointment as external examiners.

- *Right to work in the UK*
To meet UK Border Agency requirements on the prevention of illegal working, nomination forms must be accompanied by a photocopy of the nominee's passport page showing their photograph and passport number. Any subsequent appointment will be conditional upon the Faculty or APQO having sight of the original document.
- *Inclusivity*
Oxford Brookes University is committed to the advancement of equality, diversity and inclusion, and seeks, through all its policies and actions, to be a genuinely inclusive organisation. Programme Leads are asked to bear this in mind when nominating external examiners; and are strongly encouraged to nominate individuals who have appropriate subject knowledge and are also able to advise on inclusive approaches to curriculum design, teaching and learning.
- *Collaborative provision*
External examiners have a key role to play in assuring the University of the academic standards of awards delivered through collaborative arrangements, either in the UK or overseas. The University retains responsibility for the academic standards of any awards made in its name and is therefore responsible for the appointment of external examiners for collaborative provision, who must meet the criteria above. Additional notes and requirements relating to examiners appointed to collaborative programmes are set out below:

The university retains responsibility for the appointment of external examiners for collaborative provision, although the partner may nominate appropriate candidates. The examiner must be independent of both the partner and the University, and is primarily acting on behalf of the University in enabling it to maintain oversight of the standards of its awards. For programmes of study leading to joint awards, the arrangements for external examining should be agreed and specified at the point of approval.

In order to enable the University to make a comparison of the standards of its awards delivered at home and through collaborative arrangements, the same external examiner should be appointed to oversee both the on-campus and the collaborative programmes. If, for logistical reasons, an examiner only examines on a collaborative programme, efforts should be made to provide a sample of work by home students to enable them to make a comparison of standards of achievement. Where there is no matching home programme, an external examiner for a programme within a cognate discipline area should be asked to examine the collaborative programme, if possible.

For provision delivered and/or assessed in a language other than English, the external examiner must be able to work fluently in both English and the language of delivery/assessment.

Non-UK based external examiners must have experience of delivering and assessing in a UK HEI and be familiar with the current standards required of a UK award in the discipline concerned, but a non-UK subject specialist may be paired with an examiner from a UK HEI where a nominee lacks such experience. Advice should be sought from the APQO when considering such an arrangement.

- iii. External examiner nominees who meet the stated criteria are appointed for a period of four years, after which they cannot be re-appointed until a period of at least five years has elapsed. Re-appointment of a previous external examiner should only be considered in exceptional circumstances - where it can be shown that it is not possible to secure the services of any other suitable examiner - and an external examiner should never be re-appointed more than once.

Similarly, an extension to an examiner's period of office will only be granted in exceptional circumstances: for example, if the programme is due to terminate within the next year, or if an extension is required to enable them to assess four successive cohorts of students. Such extensions will never be granted for longer than one year. Applications for extension either to the period of office or to an external examiner's duties must be completed on the relevant forms available from the APQO. Advice should be sought from the APQO (via the Faculty link QAO) on the eligibility of an examiner for an extension.

- iv. The Faculty AESC is responsible for monitoring external examining arrangements within the Faculty and for ensuring that appropriate external examiners are appointed for all provision in good time to enable them to carry out their duties effectively. External examiners must be nominated for all new programmes as soon as possible after approval.
- v. Once the Chair of AESC has approved a nomination, the APQO sends out a letter of appointment (copied to the Programme Lead/Subject Coordinator, Liaison Manager, Faculty Quality Team members and link QAO) with an acceptance form which must be signed and returned by the external examiner. They will then be provided with a staff number so they can access PIP and other online University information. Once approved, the Faculty will arrange to provide the external examiner with relevant programme and module information, marking schemes, examination committee dates and a copy of the previous external examiner's report.
- vi. The APQO coordinates an annual external examiners' briefing/induction day to ensure examiners are fully prepared to take on their duties within the context of Oxford Brookes University, and are kept up to date with changes to University systems and practices relevant to their role.
- vii. External examiners may resign from their post for a number of reasons, and should notify the APQO in writing if they choose to do so. The University reserves the right to terminate an examiner's contract where the examiner is unable or unwilling to fulfil their duties (set out in section 4 below) to a satisfactory level, including the non-submission of an annual report within the specified timescale or failure to attend examination committees without good reason.

A3.7.4 Role of the External Examiner

- i. The external examiner's principal role is to provide a judgement on the rigour of the University's processes for maintaining academic standards, and on the comparability of the standards achieved by students on Oxford Brookes awards with those on similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions. The external examiner may also provide advice on other aspects of the provision, such as course content or teaching and learning strategies.
- ii. The primary formal roles of external examiners are to:
 - Assure academic rigour and equity of treatment in assessment which contributes to final awards;
 - Monitor and provide assurance that the agreed assessment process has taken place, in accordance with the approved regulations governing the programme, and see evidence that the requisite internal moderation procedures have been complied with;
 - Monitor and provide assurance that students have fulfilled the stated programme learning outcomes in their submission for conferment of the award;
 - Approve proposed examination papers and draft coursework assessment briefs which count towards final awards, to ensure that students will be assessed fairly in relation to approved syllabuses and regulations, and in such a way that external examiners will be able to judge whether they have fulfilled the objectives of the programme and reached the required standard;
 - See and agree samples of work from all students proposed for both the highest category of the award and for failure, and samples of the work of other students in order to satisfy themselves that each student is fairly classified;
 - Provide advisory comments on the standard of marking for the internal examiners to act upon during the following year.

Approval of draft examination papers and other assessment material

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- iii. The form of assessment for each module or programme component is specified in the definitive programme documentation as agreed through the programme approval process and modified from time to time with the approval of AESC. Drafts of final examination papers and other assessment material that counts towards the final award must be sent to external examiners for their approval. External examiners on collaborative programmes must approve the assignment briefs and examination papers in the same way as for home provision, and an explanation for any variation in assessment for the home and collaborative programmes should be provided to the external examiner by the Liaison Manager.

External moderation of standards of assessment

- iv. External examiners maintain an oversight of the processes for the assessment of all work that counts towards the final award by sampling assessed work. Normally, unless the number of assessment items is sufficiently small for all to be scrutinised, subject or programme teams will reach an agreement with external examiners on the size and scope of the sample of assessed work to be submitted for inspection. This should include representative samples of each grade or class of degree, borderline cases, cases of failure, malpractice or those affected by illness etc. External examiners should be sent copies of the relevant grading schemes and assessment criteria together with a record of marks for each assessment item. It is expected that any significant differences between first and second markers should have been resolved through the internal moderation process before submission to the external examiner. However, in exceptional circumstances external examiners may also be asked to:
- contribute to decisions on borderline cases;
 - comment on the marking standards of internal examiners and, if a problem is identified, recommend changes to marks, taking due account of the effect of any changes on the rest of the cohort.

Attendance at examination committees

- v. At least one external examiner for the provision under consideration must be present at every examination committee, either in person or via telephone/video-conference. An examination committee which does not include an approved external examiner is not authorised to recommend the conferment of awards. Failure to attend such meetings without good reason will be seen as a breach of contract for which the University has the right to terminate the examiner's appointment. In order to facilitate attendance, the Programme Portfolio Manager should provide the external examiners with the dates of the relevant examination committee meetings at the start of each academic year. Within the Undergraduate Modular Programme, a Chief Examiner must always be present at the MEC which agrees awards. The responsibility for confirming marks and awards is the collective responsibility of the examination committee, but the external examiner must endorse the recommendations of the committee. In the event of a dispute between internal and external examiners which cannot be resolved, the matter should be referred to the Chair of Academic Board or their nominee.

Involvement in oral and viva voce examinations.

- vi. Where an oral examination is compulsory for all students, this will be stated in the approved assessment strategy for a programme or module. If a viva voce examination is required, the external examiner should be present.

Meeting students

- vii. This is not a requirement of the external examiner's role, but they may, by arrangement with the Faculty, meet students in order to assist them to judge the overall quality and standards of the programme/s. These meetings should be conducted in accordance with the definition of the external examiner's role.
- viii. The secondary roles of external examiners are to:
- Be consulted about and agree to any proposed changes in the approved progression and assessment requirements which will directly affect students currently on the programme;
 - Comment and give advice on the content and structure of the curriculum, assessment practices, and on teaching and learning strategies on the programme;

Involvement in modification of provision

- ix. External examiners will also be consulted on changes to programmes where these lead to alterations to learning outcomes and assessment. The external examiner may be requested to act on occasion as a 'critical friend' giving advice on curriculum development to ensure the maintenance of quality and standards in new and revised programmes. The external examiner must be informed of major changes to programmes and may be consulted in advance about proposed changes, particularly where they affect programme titles, learning outcomes, assessment criteria or the assessment process.
- x. External examiners' powers may extend to:
 - obtaining reasonable access to any assessed parts of the programme/s offered by the University - it will be normal practice for the external examiner to review scripts and other assessed work for the whole academic year at the time of the final exam committee meeting at the end of the academic year. However, the external examiner may agree with the Head of Department to receive assessed work at other appropriate times throughout the year, as appropriate to the nature of the provision.
 - commenting on work other than that submitted towards final awards.
 - requesting additional sampling of students' work where an equity issue is highlighted by the normal external examining procedures;
 - assisting in the selection of candidates for individual interview.

UMP Chief External Examiner

- xi. The appointment of Chief External Examiner to the Undergraduate Modular Programme carries the following particular duties and responsibilities:
 - to ensure fair and consistent application of assessment processes across all programmes within the UMP;
 - to confirm awards at the Modular Examination Committee;
 - to act as a 'critical friend' in developing guidelines and regulations for the Undergraduate Modular Programme.

A3.7.5 External Examiners' reports

- i. As the annual reports are key documents in assuring the academic standards of the University's awards, it is essential that external examiners' reports are comprehensive and that they cite the evidence upon which their judgements and comments are based. Reports for collaborative programmes are, where appropriate, expected to distinguish between issues that relate to the home programme and those that relate to the provision delivered by different partners. If, in the judgement of the University, a report is inadequate the external examiner may be asked by the APQO to resubmit it. Failure to submit reports in a timely fashion, or to provide them to an adequate standard in the required format, will be regarded as grounds upon which to terminate an external examiner's contract.
- ii. An external examiner has the right to report directly to the Vice Chancellor on matters which they consider to pose a serious risk to the academic standards of an Oxford Brookes award. They are provided with guidance on how to do this in the External Examiner's Handbook, along with information about how to make use of the QAA's causes for concern procedure in the event that an issue cannot be satisfactorily addressed through internal procedures.

Processing of external examiners' reports

- iii. Annual reports should be submitted by email on an electronic template to the External Examiners Administrator (via the registry-externals@brookes.ac.uk email address). Receipt will be acknowledged by the Academic Policy and Quality Office, who will then make arrangements for payment of the examiner's fee. The APQO will also identify late reports and send out reminders to external examiners.
- iv. Once received, the report is sent to the Subject Coordinator or Programme Lead, and/or the Liaison Manager (for collaborative provision) and Faculty staff responsible for academic quality and standards: namely, the Associate Dean (Student Experience), the Principal Lecturer for QA, and the Faculty Quality Officer. The report will then be reviewed by the Faculty link Quality Assurance Officer, in order to ensure that no student or staff names are mentioned, and then

published on PIP to enable access by other members of the programme team and students on the programme. For collaborative provision, the Liaison Manager is responsible for ensuring that reports are copied to the programme manager at the partner organisation.

- v. Responses are prepared by the Subject Coordinator or Programme Lead, liaising as necessary with the Associate Dean (Student Experience) and Directorates to incorporate responses to any institutional issues that have been raised. Responses should be approved by the Faculty AESC Chair and sent out to the external examiner within six weeks of the report, copied to the APQO through the liaison QAO.
- vi. The report will also form part of the evidence considered during the annual review process at both programme and Faculty level. Any issues identified for action by the external examiner should be included in the annual review action plan at the appropriate level, and this should also be sent to the external examiner. An annual summary of institutional issues, identified good practice and areas of concern (that are serious, or common across a number of reports) is prepared by APQO for AESC. External examiners' reports, together with responses from programme teams, also provide direct evidence on the quality and standards of provision which is considered by periodic review panels and revalidation panels.

Freedom of Information

- vii. The University does not place the full reports received from external examiners in the public domain, but under the Freedom of Information Act it may be asked to release them on request. The information released in response to requests for the personal details of external examiners will be limited to name, job title and the name and address of the examiner's employer as this concerns an examiner's professional and working life and such information is considered to be already in the public domain. If an examiner is retired, they will be described as 'independent'.

A3.7.6 Players

i. Academic staff

It is the responsibility of academic teams to nominate external examiners for their provision, ensuring nominees meet the University's criteria for appointment and providing additional information to support nominations where necessary.

Academic teams are also responsible for providing external examiners with sufficient evidence to enable them to make their judgements. They should send, on an annual basis, information about the programme, including the aims, intended learning outcomes, curriculum content, teaching, learning and assessment strategies, and assessment modes and weighting (these details will be held in programme and module handbooks). They should also provide information about the regulations that apply to the programme and the assessment processes, including dates of examination committees.

Academic teams are also responsible for agreeing the sample size for moderation by the external examiner, and for sending scripts, marksheets, and documentation relating to the marking and internal moderation process in good time to enable the external examiner to carry out their duties effectively.

Academic teams are also responsible for preparing timely responses to comments made by external examiners in their annual reports, and for putting in place action to address any shortcomings or to build on good practice identified.

ii. Academic Policy & Quality Office

The APQO is responsible for maintaining an overview of the University's external examining arrangements. The Office maintains a database of all external examiners across the University and provides Faculties with regular updates on the status of external examiners for their provision. Information relating to external examiner arrangements is maintained on the APQO website.

The APQO is responsible for receiving external examiner nominations following consideration by the relevant Faculty AESC, and submitting them to the Chair of AESC for approval. The APQO issues appointment letters on completion of the appropriate approval process.

The APQO receives external examiners' reports and processes the payment of fees and expenses. The APQO is also responsible for analysing reports for the production of an annual report to AESC on institutional issues and good practice identified by external examiners across the University.

iii. Faculty Academic Enhancement & Standards Committees

The Faculty AESCs are responsible for considering nominations for external examiners, ensuring that the University's criteria for appointment are upheld and that nominations are rigorously and consistently assessed. The committees should also monitor nominations to ensure that University guidelines on equality and diversity are adhered to. The Faculty AESCs make recommendations for approval to the University AESC, via the APQO.

The Faculty AESCs are also responsible for ensuring that timely responses are made to external examiners' comments in their reports, and for monitoring action taken by programme teams to address any issues identified.

iv. Faculty Academic Administration Teams

Faculty Academic Administration teams are responsible, together with the Associate Deans (Student Experience), Principal Lecturers (Quality Assurance) and the APQO, for managing the faculty's external examining arrangements; for example, coordinating nominations and responses to reports, and ensuring external examiners are provided with the information they require.

v. University Academic Enhancement & Standards Committee

The Chair of AESC is responsible for conferring final approval on external examiner nominations submitted by Faculty AESCs, on the advice of the APQO. The Chair's decisions are reported to the Committee for ratification.

The University AESC is responsible for monitoring institutional themes arising from external examiners' reports, and for ensuring that appropriate action is taken at institutional level to address any issues and/or to disseminate good practice.

vi. Examination Committees

The academic regulations relating to the operation of examination committees can be found at (A3.8)

For further information about these regulations, please contact the Head of Academic Policy & Quality Office.

Approved:

Academic Enhancement & Standards Committee, 15th September 2010

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