



# **External Examiners for Taught Programmes Policy**

## Documentation Management

### Document Record

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Maintained by:</b>               | Quality Assurance   |
| <b>Owned by:</b>                    | University Education Committee  |
| <b>Approval Date:</b>               | May 2022  |
| <b>Location of Master Document:</b> | <a href="https://intra.brunel.ac.uk/s/QSO/Team/External_Examiners">https://intra.brunel.ac.uk/s/QSO/Team/External Examiners</a> |

### Version Control

| <b>Document Version</b> | <b>Amendments</b>  | <b>Amended By</b>         | <b>Date</b> | <b>Approved By</b>             |
|-------------------------|--|---------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|
| 1.0                     | First publication of Policy.   | N/A                       | May 2022    | University Education Committee |
| 1.1                     | Amendment to External Examiner scrutiny responsibilities and role at Boards of Examiners | Head of Quality Assurance | April 2023  | University Education Committee |
| 1.2                     | Amendments to Level 4 Scrutiny by External Examiners                                     | Head of Quality Assurance | Dec 2023    | University Education Committee |

# External Examiners Policy

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Policy applies to all External Examiners for taught programmes appointed by the University, and all University staff involved in the external examining process.
- 1.2 This Policy and the University's practices relating to External Examiners are informed by the Quality Assurance Agency's [Advice and Guidance on External Expertise](#).
- 1.3 The University's regulatory requirements for External Examiners are presented in Section D of [Senate Regulation 4](#). This Policy supports those regulations and provides operational guidance on all aspects of the external examining process.
- 1.4 The University appoints, at minimum, one External Examiner to each of its taught awards. External Examiners may be appointed to examine multiple awards.
- 1.5 An External Examiner's appointment is at programme level, but where there is a team of External Examiners assigned to a programme/s, there may be specific areas of responsibility as arranged by the relevant programme team.
- 1.6 External Examiners for taught programmes are appointed for a period of four years, but the appointment may be extended by Senate for one further year where appropriate (see Senate Regulation 4.68).

## 2 The Role of an External Examiner

- 2.1 As per Senate Regulation 4.80, the role of an External Examiner is to provide informative comment and recommendations on whether:
  - The University is **maintaining the threshold academic standards** set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications, applicable subject benchmark statements and relevant professional and statutory bodies.
  - The **assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly** against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the institution's policies and regulations.

- The **academic standards and the achievements of our students are comparable** with those in other UK higher education institutions of which the external examiner has experience.

2.2 External Examiners are also appointed to provide informative comments and recommendations regarding:

- **Good practice and innovation** relating to learning, teaching and assessment.
- **Opportunities to enhance** the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students.

2.3 External Examiners provide this commentary through the following activities:

- Scrutiny of assessment briefs/tasks/examination papers prior to issuance.
- Moderation of student assessments.
- Attendance at Panels and Boards of Examiners.
- Engagement with students.
- Production of an annual report.

2.4 The management by the University of each of these activities is outlined in the Policy.

### 3 Responsibilities

3.1 Staff from across the University support the external examining process, from nomination to reporting. The table below outlines the division of responsibility.

| Process   | Responsibility  |
|---|---|
| Selection and nomination of External Examiners (including the replacement of an External Examiner)            | Academic Departments                                    |
| Formal recommendations for the appointment of External Examiners, or for the extension of a period of service | Chair of College Education Committee                    |
| Approval of External Examiners or the extension of a period of service  | Pro Vice Chancellor - Education (via Quality Assurance) |
| Appointment of External Examiners   | Quality Assurance                                       |
| University induction of External Examiners  | Quality Assurance                                       |
| Local induction of External Examiners   | Academic Departments                                    |
| Providing External Examiners with assessment briefs/tasks/examination papers for sign off                     | Academic Departments                                    |

| Process  | Responsibility  |
|--|---|
| Providing External Examiners with samples of student work                              | Academic Departments  |
| Arranging for External Examiners to meet with students                                 | Academic Departments  |
| Inviting External Examiners to Panels and Boards of Examiners                          | Academic Departments  |
| Providing External Examiners with paperwork for Panels and Boards of Examiners         | Academic Departments  |
| Liaison with External Examiners regarding proposed programme modifications             | Academic Departments  |
| Payment for External Examiners including expenses                                      | Quality Assurance   |
| Management of the reporting system for External Examiners                              | Quality Assurance   |
| Responding to External Examiners Reports   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic Departments</li> <li>• Quality Assurance for University comments</li> </ul>                                   |
| Scrutiny of responses to External Examiners  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associate Deans (Quality Assurance)</li> <li>• Quality Assurance</li> <li>• Pro Vice Chancellor – Education</li> </ul> |
| Managing an External Examiner’s end of appointment                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality Assurance</li> </ul>   |
| Notifying Academic Departments of External Examiners approaching the end of their term | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality Assurance</li> </ul>   |

## 4 Selection, Nomination and Appointment

### Selection and Nomination

4.1 Academic Departments are responsible for the identification, initial contact and formal nomination of External Examiners.

4.2 Nominations for External Examiners must be made in accordance with the University’s criteria and requirements, as presented in Senate Regulation 4.69

- 73. Advice regarding the suitability of an External Examiner may be sought from Quality Assurance.

- 4.3 All nominations for External Examiners must be made using the “Recommendation for the Appointment of an External Examiner for a Taught Programme” form available [here](#), and once approved by the Chair of their College Education Committee, submitted to Quality Assurance via [external@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:external@brunel.ac.uk).
- 4.4 Where required, Academic Departments may request either an extension of an External Examiner’s appointment (for a maximum of 1 year) or an extension of their duties, for example the addition of a programme to their moderation responsibilities. Requests of this type must be made using the “Application for Extension of External Examiner Appointment or Substantive Change in External Examiner Duties” form available [here](#) and submitted to Quality Assurance via [external@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:external@brunel.ac.uk).
- 4.5 External Examiner appointments that start or end in the middle of an academic year should be avoided. Where an External Examiner must start mid-year, their contract may be extended such that it ends in August/at the end of the academic year.
- 4.6 Nominations for External Examiners should be submitted to Quality Assurance at least three months before the proposed start.
- 4.7 Nominations are considered in the first instance by the University’s Registrar (or nominee), and then by the Pro Vice Chancellor - Education for approval on behalf of Senate.

#### **Appointment**

- 4.8 Following approval by the Pro Vice Chancellor - Education of an External Examiner, Quality Assurance will manage the formal appointment process. This includes:
- Conducting employment checks.
  - Setting up of the External Examiner within the University’s system.
  - Notifying Senate of the External Examiner’s appointment.
  - Arranging for Human Resources to set the External Examiner up in CHIME.
  - Entering details of the External Examiner and their programme responsibilities on the University’s external [website](#).
- 4.9 When confirming their appointment, Quality Assurance will provide an External Examiner with a welcome letter which includes an overview of the role and links to the relevant University guidance documents and confidentiality statement and will invite the External Examiner to the next University induction (See Section 5).

- 4.10 Close to their appointment, External Examiners will be provided with their Brunel account details and access to previous External Examiner reports.
- 4.11 Departments will be informed of an External Examiner's appointment by Quality Assurance and on receipt of that communication will provide the following directly to the External Examiner:
- Links and access to assessment/assessment systems e.g. WISEflow.
  - Links to curriculum documents including all relevant programme specifications and block outlines.
  - Relevant handbooks (or links to).
  - Information about the Department e.g. staff roles and responsibilities, list of programmes, noting those that are accredited, student numbers etc.
  - Where there are multiple External Examiners appointed to a programme, details of the other External Examiners and confirmation of responsibilities.
  - The schedule of examinations and other assessments, meetings and dates when work will be available for the first year.
  - Copies of any relevant department/college regulations or associated policies, particular those relating to assessment.
- 4.12 At this point the Academic Department should also schedule a local induction for the External Examiner (see Section 5).

## **5 Induction of External Examiners**

### **University Induction**

- 5.1 Quality Assurance will deliver a University Induction for new External Examiners every October and March. The Induction is delivered online.
- 5.2 The University Induction for External Examiners will provide an overview of the following:
- The University.
  - Brunel Programmes.
  - Assessment and External Examining at Brunel.
  - Panels and Boards of Examiners at Brunel.
  - Brunel Academic Regulations.
  - The Annual Reporting Process.

### **Local Induction**

- 5.3 In addition to the University Induction, a local induction, provided by the Academic Department/programme must be arranged prior to the External Examiner undertaking any work. This induction may be in person or online.

- 5.4 The local induction should be attended by the relevant programme leaders, academics delivering on the programme, and the External Examiner's primary contact within the associated Taught Programmes Office (TPO) or equivalent. Where possible, students should be invited.
- 5.5 The local induction should cover, at minimum, the following:
- The Academic Department's teaching, learning and assessment strategy.
  - Roles and responsibilities within the Academic Department, and related programmes.
  - Guidance on the programmes the External Examiner is responsible for, including:
    - how the programme is organised/scheduled;
    - the teaching and assessment strategy, including marking and moderation;
    - accrediting body requirements (if relevant); and
    - variations to Senate Regulations (if relevant).
  - The annual calendar for the Academic Department, including the timing of Panels and Boards of Examiners.
  - Parameters of the relationship between the Academic Department and the External Examiner, for example:
    - the schedule for the scrutiny of assessment;
    - how assessment documentation will be provided;
    - how communication will be managed;
    - frequency and format of meetings; and
    - clarification on the type of information or materials the External Examiner would need to undertake their work for the University.
  - How to raise issues

## **6 Assessment**

### **Scrutiny of assessment briefs/tasks/examination papers prior to issuance**

- 6.1 As per Senate Regulations 4.4 and 4.83, with the exception of reassessments, approval of an External Examiner must be sought for all assessments which contribute to the classification of an award, including any relevant pass/fail assessments.
- 6.2 The obligation for External Examiners to review level 4 assessments is limited to new programmes only. Nonetheless, upon request, both Academic Departments and External Examiners may obtain access to assessments from ongoing programmes or to reassessments.
- 6.3 Academic Departments must provide External Examiners with all applicable assessments tasks/papers/examinations prior to them being issued to students, and should request feedback on the assessment design.



- 6.4 Where an External Examiner provides feedback and recommendations regarding an assessment, this must be considered by the Academic Department and the External Examiner should be provided with a response.
- 6.5 External Examiners should be provided with all summative assessments tasks/papers/examinations with sufficient time for them to provide comments and for the assessments to be revised if appropriate. When providing this documentation, Academic Departments should give careful consideration to the workload of the External Examiner in relation to their own institution/substantive role.
- 6.6 Generally, and as per Senate Regulation 4.82: External Examiners should have access to any available material they deem necessary to reach the judgments required by their position.
- 6.7 When reviewing assessment tasks/papers/examinations, External Examiners should consider the following:
- Appropriateness of the assessment in the context of learning outcomes and FHEQ level.
  - Appropriateness of the assessment in the context of the academic discipline and associated careers.
  - Appropriateness of the assessment in the context of the block outline.
  - Clarity of instruction/quality of communication to students.
  - Appropriateness of case studies, examples etc.
  - Appropriateness of the grading/marking scheme.

#### **Moderation of student assessments**

- 6.8 External Examiners must conduct moderation for all relevant modular/assessment blocks. To conduct this moderation, External Examiners must be provided, for each assessment, with:
- A copy of the assessment task
  - Any available indicative content/model answers
  - A full set of provisional grades/marks for all students attempting the assessment;
  - All internal moderation or double marking records;
  - A sample of assessed student work
- 6.9 Senate Regulation 4.85-89 defines the following in relation to External Examiner moderation of student assessments:
- Sample sizes.
  - Specific requirements regarding the moderation of postgraduate taught dissertations or undergraduate final year project.
  - The limit on the amount of moderation work which should be undertaken by an External Examiner on an annual basis.

- and the types of assessment which should be moderated
- 6.10 Where the total amount of assessment which requires moderation exceeds the limits defined in Senate Regulation 4.85, additional External Examiners should be appointed to the programme in question.
- 6.11 Academic Departments must make available to an External Examiner all assessments that require moderation. This may be via WISEflow or through secure hard or soft copy.
- 6.12 When providing samples of student work to External Examiners, Academic Departments must provide specific instruction on the location and range of assessments which should be moderated.
- 6.13 When reviewing student work, External Examiners should consider the following:
- The standards demonstrated by students and their performance in relation to their peers on comparable programmes at other institutions
  - Quality of the assessment process: marking; internal moderation including consistency of practice; double marking (where applicable)
  - Quality of feedback, for example:
    - Is it consistent with the mark/grade given?
    - Is it of sufficient quantity?
    - Does it clearly identify strengths but also highlight areas for improvement?
    - Are feedback practices consistent across blocks?
- 6.14 As per Senate Regulation 4.85, External Examiners are not required to study each piece of work in detail, but are required to satisfy themselves that the work is of the appropriate standard, comparable with that of other United Kingdom higher education institutions and that the marks assigned reflect the published marking criteria and intended learning outcomes.

### **Attendance at Panels and Boards of Examiners**

- 6.15 Academic Departments must invite External Examiners to all Panels and Boards of Examiners where the programmes the External Examiner is responsible for are to be considered.
- 6.16 External Examiners should be informed of the dates for Panels and Boards of Examiners as soon as they are available (ideally at the beginning of the academic year) and in sufficient time to allow the External Examiner to arrange/confirm availability, and also scrutinise any materials.

- 6.17 Specific responsibility for communication by the Academic Department with External Examiners regarding Panels and Boards of Examiners, including the circulation of materials for each meeting, shall be determined by the College.
- 6.18 The role of an External Examiner at a Panel of Examiners is as follows:
- To fully participate in discharging the responsibilities of the Panel as set out in Senate Regulation 4.56.
  - To comment on specific assessment tasks.
  - To contribute to the quality assurance of the assessment process as it relates to individual modular/assessment blocks.
  - To contribute to Panel discussion and decision making as required.
  - To observe process and help ensure that Boards operate:
    - fairly;
    - consistently;
    - in line with the University's regulations; and
    - in the interest of students.
- 6.19 Attendance of each External Examiner for each Programme considered at a Panel of Examiners is a requirement. Where necessary, the External Examiner may engage with and support the Panel through correspondence. In this instance, Chairs of Panels of Examiners are required to ensure that the External Examiner's comments and/or queries are specifically addressed by the Panel, and, where required, a response is provided to the External Examiner.
- 6.20 The role of an External Examiner at a Board of Examiners is as follows:
- To fully participate in discharging the responsibilities of the Board as set out in 4.61
  - To comment on the overall conduct of the assessment process, the performance of candidates and matters relating to the programme as a whole.
  - To contribute to Board discussion and decision making as required
  - To observe process and help ensure that Boards operate:
    - Fairly
    - Consistently
    - In line with the University's regulations
    - In the interest of students
- 6.21 Each External Examiner should be invited to participate in the relevant Board of Examiners for their area of responsibility. External Examiners are not normally required at Boards that only consider reassessments.
- 6.22 At each Board of Examiners, External Examiners will be requested by the Chair to confirm the following:

- That the Board of Examiners operated in accordance with the University's regulations and policies
  - That students were considered anonymously, consistently and equitably
- 6.23 Where an External Examiner is unable to attend a Board of Examiners, they shall be provided with the minutes of the meeting, which will demonstrate the University's management of the process.
- 6.24 The Board of Examiners reserves the right to consult the External Examiner, where necessary/appropriate, and the External Examiner can request to review reassessments.
- 6.25 Where an External Examiner raises a query or a concern regarding the operation of a Panel of Examiners or Board of Examiners, this should be referred to the relevant member of staff within the Academic Department or Taught Programmes Office (or equivalent); or if appropriate, the University's Quality Assurance Team via [External@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:External@brunel.ac.uk).
- 6.26 As per Senate Regulation 4.96: Where an External Examiner has serious concerns about the decisions of a Panel or Board of Examiners, he or she should make the reasons for concern clear to the Chair and write to the Vice-Chancellor.

## **7 The Annual Reporting Cycle**

- 7.1 Production of the Annual Report rests with the External Examiner, and the report should be based on their activity since their last report (typically a 12-month period).
- 7.2 For new appointments, the first External Examiner Report should be based on all activity leading up to the production of their first report.
- 7.3 External Examiners are requested by Quality Assurance to submit their annual report by the 31<sup>st</sup> of July each year.
- 7.4 Upon receipt of an Annual Report, Quality Assurance will identify those points raised by the External Examiner which require a response, either by the related programme team or by the University, and will produce a Response Form.
- 7.5 External Examiner Response Forms are uploaded to the University's External Examiner reporting system, and each Response Form includes a link to the Annual Report.

- 7.6 External Examiner Reports and response forms are available to staff and students via the [External Examiner Report Page once the response has been approved](#).
- 7.7 External Examiner Reports may be provided by Academic Departments to external parties, such as accrediting or regulatory bodies. In this instance, the report will need to be exported from the University's system by way of printing it to PDF.

## **8 Responding to External Examiner Reports**

- 8.1 On receipt of an External Examiner Annual Report (via the Response Form), programmes should give full consideration to the comments made by the External Examiner.
- 8.2 The Academic Department is responsible for responding to its External Examiner reports. Typically, this is undertaken by programme leaders, Heads of Department or Directors of Teaching and Learning. Where required, Quality Assurance or the Pro Vice Chancellor – Education will provide a formal response to an External Examiner report/comment.
- 8.3 Where an External Examiner raises a point which cannot be addressed by the primary responder, for example, matters relating to Academic Department/programme administration, consultation with the relevant managerial staff must take place and a direct response to the External Examiner should be provided in the Response Form.
- 8.4 When responding to External Examiner comments, staff should consider the following:
- Is the response addressed directly to the External Examiner? (ie. "Dear X", not "The External Examiner has stated...")
  - Does the response address all of the External Examiner's comments?
  - Do any references to future action on the part of the programme provide specific timescales and expected outputs?
  - Is the response appropriate considering its publication to students and the wider University?
  - Does this response identify (even inadvertently) specific students? If so, the response should be amended.

## 9 Reporting and Consideration of External Examiner Reports

9.1 Reporting and consideration of External Examiner Reports should be conducted as follows.

| Level             | Reporting and Consideration  |
|-------------------|--|
| Programme/College | External Examiner reports are considered as part of annual monitoring, and on an ongoing basis where there are specific actions to address.  |
| University        | On an annual basis, University Education Committee will receive an overview of taught External Examiner reports from the previous academic year. Senate will receive this report via University Education Committee. |

## 10 Managing the Ongoing Relationship with External Examiners

10.1 There is an expectation that there is a continuous exchange of information between Academic Departments and their External Examiners, so that:

- There is mutual understanding between both parties regarding timescales and respective workloads.
- There is an ongoing understanding of the schedule for assessments, Panels of Examiners and Boards of Examiners.
- The External Examiner is able to easily liaise with the relevant academic or Taught Programmes Office (or equivalent) staff
- There is an ongoing positive and development discourse, which enhances the associated programmes.

## 11 Consultation on Programme Modification

11.1 External Examiners may be consulted on planned programme modifications. This may be through the annual assessment and reporting cycle, or at other times in the year.

11.2 As advised by Quality Assurance, consultation with an External Examiner regarding a proposed programme modification may be required.

## **12 End of term of appointment and termination of appointment**

- 11.1 Quality Assurance will write to External Examiners at the end of their appointment to confirm their term has ended.
- 11.2 An External Examiner may terminate their appointment at any time by writing to the Vice-Chancellor (SR4). Should the Department receive such a notice, it should be forwarded immediately to Quality Assurance.
- 11.3 As per Senate Regulation 4.102: The Vice-Chancellor may terminate the appointment of an External Examiner at any time. Premature termination of the appointment may take place if the External Examiner fails to fulfil the responsibilities of the role of the External Examiner as defined by the University. A letter terminating the appointment will be sent by the Registrar.

## **13 Replacing External Examiners**

- 12.1 Departments must nominate replacements for External Examiners as per Section 4 of this Policy.
- 12.2 Quality Assurance will provide Colleges via agreed distribution groups with a monthly report which lists all current External Examiners and highlights those whose end date is within 15 months and require replacing. Distribution groups are determined by each College and, at minimum, include the Deputy Dean (Academic Affairs), Associate Dean (Quality Assurance), and College Education Manager.
- 12.3 Academic Departments are advised to nominate the replacement for an External Examiner at least three months before the required start.

## **14 Payment of External Examiners**

- 13.1 External Examiners are paid an annual fee on production of annual report. This is processed by Quality Assurance and paid through Payroll.
- 13.2 Fees paid to External Examiners and the reimbursement of incurred travel and subsistence expenses will be made as per the University's "[External Examiners and Reviewers: Summary of Fees](#)" document.