

External Examining

This section of the Hartpury Quality Enhancement Framework covers the independent external participation in the management of threshold academic standards and enhancement by external examiners.

Key reference points

QAA Quality Code and Southern England Consortium (SEEC) Credit level descriptors.

Audience

Members of staff and particularly Heads of Department, Programme Managers, Module Leaders, External Examiners, and members of examination boards.

External examining sections

1. Scope and principles
2. Key roles and responsibilities
3. Nomination and appointment
4. Appointment
5. Annual Reporting
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1. Scope and principles

External Examiners are appointed to provide the institution with independent, impartial judgement and advice regarding the quality and standards of the provision. They may be academics at other institutions and/or professional practitioners. Their role is to ensure that the academic regulations in relation to assessment are applied appropriately, that nationally agreed standards are being upheld and that student performance is comparable to that at other institutions, and also to support the provision to enhance the student experience and future employability. Additionally External Examiners may be asked to contribute to the design of new curriculum, ensuring that external frameworks and benchmarks are met. The External Examiner's name and affiliation are published to students on the Virtual Learning Environment, for both programmes and modules.

A definition and the overall standard roles and responsibilities of External Examiners are detailed in the academic regulations. External Examiners' roles and responsibilities may differ for provision accredited by Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs).

The institution recognises the importance of the work undertaken by external examiners and as such wherever possible supports its staff in acting as external examiners for other higher education providers, and agrees with staff the time and support they need to fulfil these duties.

2. Key roles and responsibilities

Key individuals

- a) a) The **Academic Registrar** has operational oversight of external examining and prepares an annual report for Academic Board (following scrutiny by Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee). The Academic Registrar will produce an annual report for the Academic Board drawing together the outcomes, recommendations and commendations from all External Examiner reports and a summary of confirmed appointments for the academic year.
- b) **Module External Examiners** will have responsibility for the assessment process being conducted correctly and standards being comparable within a specified group of modules. They are expected to attend the Module Examination Boards that they have sit modules coming to, and if unable to attend be available for consultation as required by the regulations.
- c) **Programme External Examiners** have oversight of a group of cognate programmes. The role is responsible for ensuring parity of approach to assessment across the programmes. They also consider the progression and achievement profiles of the programmes and ensure outcomes are appropriate and align with external standards and expectations. They are expected to attend the Programme Examination Boards that occur at the end of the academic year, where the majority of progression and achievement profiles are considered, and be available for consultation for all Programme Examination Boards as required by the regulations. They also support the department with their continuous monitoring for enhancement activity.
- d) The **Deputy Academic Registrar** provides a point of contact for External Examiners and is a source of advice for them. They will maintain records of appointments and have an oversight of correspondence between the institution and the External Examiners, including arrangements for examination boards.
- e) The **Head of Department** (or nominee) will oversee the search for appropriate External Examiners. They will be able to provide information to appointed External Examiners regarding the particular context of the curriculum they are examining, particularly with regard to provision linked to PSRBs. They have responsibility for considering External Examiner annual reports, and producing the institution's responses back to the External Examiner. They will ensure good practice or suggestions for enhancement are taken forward through the relevant institution committees and integrated into monitoring reports including the Department Enhancement Plan.

Committees

- b) **Academic Board** has ultimate oversight of external examining and has responsibility for ensuring External Examiner feedback themes result in enhancement. It will approve new appointments and requests to terminate appointments early.
- c) The **Examination Boards** have responsibility for ensuring student marks and outcomes are appropriate and for offering an opportunity for external scrutiny and verification of curriculum output and in particular assessment. The **Module Examination Boards** have responsibility for confirming the outcomes for each assessment point of a module are appropriate. These outcomes are then reported to the Programme Examination Board, to inform their discussions. The **Programme Examination Boards** have responsibility for considering and verifying all student profiles to determine progression and achievement.
- d) The **Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee (ASEC)** has an overview of External Examiner activity and will receive each External Examiner's Annual Report for endorsement before they are published to students. It is responsible for considering changes in responsibilities, monitoring action plans resulting from reports and will highlight good practice or issues requiring enhancement, including any themes that may emerge, to further committees as appropriate. Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee will receive an annual summary of appointments for the forthcoming academic year.

3. Nomination and appointment

The nomination and appointment processes have been designed to ensure that External Examiners are transparently appointed with the necessary expertise and experience to carry out their duties. Throughout the nomination and appointment processes there are steps which provide checks and balances to assure maintenance of academic standards and legal obligations. The QAA Quality Code contains guidance around expectations of the nomination and appointment process and this will be considered.

Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee will receive a summary of appointments to support the suitable and timely replacement of outgoing External Examiners. If a programme is accredited by a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) their requirements regarding external examiners will be considered and met as appropriate.

Appointment criteria

When considering the appointment of External Examiners a number of criteria are applied to ensure that the nominee is competent and impartial and that examining teams are well balanced and diverse. Where the programme is awarded by a body external to the institution, then the process relevant to that awarding body will be followed.

The appointment criteria are detailed within the nomination form and are centred around:

1. Academic and/or professional qualifications and expertise
2. Standing and experience
3. Independence, objectivity and impartiality
4. Variety of institutions and professional contexts
5. Workload.

All nominees will be tested against these criteria as part of the appointment process, and the Head of Department (or nominee) and Academic Board will make reference to them when considering potential candidates for nomination. Prior to completion of the nomination form

the Head of Department should make an informal approach to interested parties to determine whether they would be willing to take on the External Examiner role. If there are any potential issues surrounding the appointment criteria identified at this point then these would be discussed with the Academic Registrar to determine whether they pose a genuine conflict of interest which would mean the nomination criteria would not be met. The nomination form contains details of how these criteria will be applied and must be completed by the Head of Department and nominee to formally nominate an External Examiner for consideration. The nomination form should be submitted to the Academic Registrar, who will ensure that the nomination form is submitted to Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee for deliberation, and then Academic Board for confirmation of the outcome, and that the outcome is disseminated appropriately.

4. Appointment

If the Academic Board confirms an appointment the External Examiner will be officially informed and provided with details of a point of contact within the Department (usually the Head of Department) and confirmation of the point of contact within the HE Academic Services Office, as outlined in the External Examiner Nomination form. New External Examiners will receive tailored induction activities as required.

Change of responsibilities

Where an External Examiner's portfolio is proposed to be changed, to include (or remove) modules or programmes, the Deputy Academic Registrar must be informed. They will support the Head of Department in preparing the External Examiner Change of Responsibilities Form ready for scrutiny by Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee.

The Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee will consider the External Examiner Change of Responsibilities Form and is responsible for approving the proposed change. It considers whether:

- The External Examiner is appropriately qualified and experienced to undertake responsibility for the proposed provision.
- The proposed workload allows them to discharge their responsibilities appropriately.

If approval is withheld, the reasons for this will be given within the form.

The Deputy Academic Registrar will then ensure:

- All appropriate parties, including the External Examiner, are informed of the outcome of Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee scrutiny of the proposal.
- The change (if approved) is recorded and the appropriate fee is applied.

Extensions to tenure

The normal tenure of an External Examiner is four years. An exceptional extension of no more than one year to the tenure may be requested. This would be considered on a case by case basis, taking into account any precedents. Possible reasons for requesting an extension to tenure include:

- Retaining an experienced External Examiner when the remaining members of the examining team are inexperienced or new to the institution and/or external examining.
- Staggering the tenure dates across a team to provide consistent team-wide external examining experience for future years.

- Enabling continuity of arrangements when significant changes have taken place to provision (for example staff turnover, restructuring, curriculum review, 'running out' of modules or awards).

Difficulty in finding a suitable replacement would not normally be accepted as sufficient reason in itself for an extension, except when the discipline is small and specialist, leading to a restricted pool of potential External Examiners. Before completing an External Examiner Change of Responsibilities Form the Head of Department should consult the Academic Registrar. Once completed the form should be provided to the Deputy Academic Registrar, who will ensure it is considered by the Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee. From this point the process is the same as for changes in responsibility.

Early termination of appointment

Should an External Examiner wish to resign before the end of their tenure (as stated on their appointment letter), they should notify the institution in writing as early as possible to ensure a replacement can be found promptly.

The appointment of an External Examiner may be terminated by the institution at its sole discretion if the External Examiner has not fulfilled his or her duties in a manner consistent with the standards required. Failure to submit an annual report would not in itself constitute grounds for an early termination of tenure, however, the institution would be seriously concerned if an External Examiner consistently failed to submit reports over successive years. Other aspects of the role not adhered to, such as regular non-attendance at Examining Boards, providing limited or no feedback on assessment and a change in external examiner details which result in the appointment criteria now being in dispute will also be taken into consideration for the early termination of tenure.

The decision to initiate an early termination of tenure is not taken lightly. Following transparent discussion with the Department and the External Examiner, the request to terminate the appointment early will be considered by Academic Board. The outcome of this consideration will be communicated on behalf of the institution by a formal letter from the Chair of Academic Board.

5. Annual reporting

Engagement with External Examiners will be continuous throughout the academic year to support timely responses to suggestions that may enhance the students' experience and employability. An External Examiner is also required to complete an Annual Report on the conduct of assessments, including confirmation that the decisions of examination boards are recorded accurately, and on issues related to assessment including suggestions to enhance assessment policies, regulations and processes. The report is important to the monitoring and evaluation of the academic provision and will inform an overarching summary report on the institution's academic health to Academic Board. The External Examiner's fee is paid upon receipt of an annual report of sufficient detail and Right to Work documentation.

The External Examiner Annual Report provides External Examiners with the opportunity to feedback directly on issues for consideration by the institution and to make additional comments on any areas not specifically covered in the report. Specific questions are asked of External Examiners who have oversight of an award on behalf of a Professional, Statutory and

Regulatory Body. If an External Examiner wishes to raise a serious concern and has exhausted the routes outlined they may submit a confidential report (that will not be published) to the Chair of the Academic Board, to which they will receive a formal written response. If they feel their concern has not been responded to appropriately then they may invoke the QAA's concerns scheme.

External Examiners completing their tenure are invited to provide a short overview of their term in office.

The reporting template also includes a section to be completed by the Head of Department on behalf of the institution following receipt of the External Examiner's comments. This will include actions proposed in response to those comments and will include involvement from student representatives. The complete External Examiner Annual Report will be considered by the Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee and once endorsed the actions will be integrated within the Department Enhancement Plan.

External Examiner reports are shared with current students through the virtual learning environment (posted by the Deputy Academic Registrar who would also send them to the External Examiner). If a request is received to release an External Examiner's report under the Freedom of Information Act the relevant External Examiner will be informed and it will be actioned accordingly.

The Annual Summary of External Examiner Feedback

The Academic Registrar makes an annual report to the Academic Board drawing together the outcomes, recommendations and commendations from all External Examiner's reports, and suggestions for enhancement of the processes for external examining. The Annual Summary of External Examiner Feedback is submitted to the first Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee meeting of the academic year for consultation prior to submission to Academic Board. Colleagues from the Students' Union are members of this committee and can therefore inform its outcomes and how these are disseminated amongst the student body.

The Annual Summary of External Examiner Feedback will be considered as part of the Academic Board's review of the institution's academic health, and will feed into enhancement activity.

6. Annex

Log of operational changes made to the HQEF External Examining Section

| Version | Section | Change |
|-------------|---|--|
| 16-17 v1 | All | This was the original Approved document |
| 17-18 v2 | 2 – Key Roles and Responsibilities | Amendment of Role The role of the Quality Assurance Administrator in providing the point of contact within HE Academic Services and co-ordinating communication with the external examiner, is proposed to be undertaken by the Deputy Academic Registrar. |

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|-------------|---|--|
| | | Resulting in: change of personnel in: External Examining web text, External Examiner Change of Responsibilities Form and the External Examiner nomination form. |
| 17-18 v2 | 2 (a) and (b) | Clarity of Requirement for External Examiner Attendance at Examination Boards In line with increased clarity in the regulations Module External Examiners are expected to attend boards that receive the sits of their modules and do not have to attend boards which receive resits only. Programme External Examiners would be expected to attend end of year boards where the majority of progression and achievement decisions are made, and not in year boards. All external examiners must satisfy the regulatory scrutiny requirements. Resulting in: change in text in the External Examining web text. |
| 17-18 v2 | 5 – Annual Reporting | Associate Faculty Board being renamed Academic Board Resulting in: change in title in all documents. |
| 18-19 v3 | All | Nomenclature Academic Registrar replaced the Associate Dean: Quality and Standards Dean of Teaching and Learning replaced the Associate Dean: Teaching and Learning Curriculum Validation Committee replaced the Curriculum Approval Committee |
| 19-20 v1 | All | The references to the Quality Code have been updated to reflect the revised UK Quality Code. |
| | The External Examiner Report Templates | Both report templates have had a question in the Quality Enhancement section added, to enable specific feedback about academic partners to be more easily identified acted upon. |

7. Section documents

External Examiner nomination form

External Examiner change of responsibilities form

Module External Examiner's Annual Report

Programme External Examiner's Annual Report