



EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' HANDBOOK

Academic Quality Unit
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Foreword

The External Examiner system is fundamental to the University's key aim of providing an outstanding student experience. It provides essential insight into existing practices from a unique perspective and helps the University to ensure that awards delivered in its name meet threshold academic standards.

The aim of this Handbook is to ensure that policy, process and practice is transparent to all those involved, including University and partner organisation academic and administrative staff as well as External Examiners themselves. This process therefore aims to encapsulate the way the University interprets and implements the chapter of the QAA Quality Code related to external examining (Chapter B7).

In particular, the purposes of this Handbook are to:

1. Outline the roles and responsibilities of External Examiners and of the University (see Section 1)
2. Detail the induction arrangements for External Examiners (see Section 2)
3. Outline the requirements for External Examiner reports (see Section 3)
4. Describe how External Examiner reports are used throughout the University and how feedback is provided to External Examiners (see Section 3)
5. Outline the administrative procedures for the submission and payment of External Examiner fees and expenses (see Section 4)
6. Provide information about the academic frameworks and generic assessment regulations which contextualise the award and module regulations that External Examiners receive for the particular Assessment Board to which they are appointed (see Section 5).

Further information about the University's quality policies and processes can be accessed through the [Academic Quality Unit](#) (AQU) website. If you have any questions about the External Examiner system in general, please contact Margaret Chaffey in the first instance.

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Section 1: The Role and Rights of External Examiners

Role of the External Examiner

1 External Examiners have an important role within the quality assurance mechanisms in assuring comparability of academic standards outside and within the University and ensuring the fairness of the operation and assessment of courses. They also contribute towards the assurance and enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching, and the attainment by students of course outcomes.

2 The University Assessment Policy sets out the requirements for moderation of assessments and marking. Each Institute and/or course is required to formulate policies on internal and external moderation. External Examiners are expected to be familiar with the [University's Assessment Policy](#).

3 In particular, the following normally comprise the External Examiner's role:

- a. to verify the work of internal markers in respect of the assessments with which the External Examiner is associated in accordance with University policy. In order to fulfil this role the External Examiner will be presented with a sample of work (normally around 15%, or at least 6 items) across the full range of marks and, as applicable in the case of some collaborative provision, across the range of institutions where provision is delivered. The External Examiner is expected to use the sample of work to assure themselves, and the University, of the security of the whole set of marks (see moderation, below)
- b. to ensure that all students are examined within the regulations approved for the course with particular reference to the requirements of professional bodies (PSRBs) as applicable
- c. to agree with course/subject teams a process for scrutinising assessment items and assessment criteria either prior to publication to students or as part of the process of external moderation
- d. to inform the University of any matter which, in his or her view, militates against the maintenance of proper academic standards
- e. to attend the meetings of Boards of Examiners at which the results of assessments are agreed (usually referred to as Subject Assessment Boards). Where it is not possible for External Examiners to attend Boards physically, virtual attendance via Skype or other appropriate means will be considered. Where no form of attendance is possible, External Examiners will, exceptionally and as a minimum for an individual year, provide written comments to the Chair of the Board regarding satisfaction with marks
- f. to satisfy himself or herself that the work and decisions of a Board of Examiners of which he or she is a member are consistent with the best practice in higher education
- g. to ensure that the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which the External Examiners have experience

- h. to ensure that the threshold academic standards set for the course are appropriate through reference to national subject and qualification benchmarks, including the [QAA Quality Code Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards](#)
- i. to endorse the outcomes of assessments through the normal Board of Examiner processes
- j. to report annually to the University on the standards attained by students on the course, and on any other matters deemed appropriate to enable the University to assure academic standards and quality. (See [Section 3](#) for details.)

4 Additionally, External Examiners should expect to be consulted regarding proposed changes to provision, or for any other advice and guidance deemed necessary throughout the period of office.

Role of External Examiners in moderating marking of assessments

5 All Institutes and/or course/subject teams will have a formal statement of procedures for the internal and external moderation of marking which takes account of the University stated minimum requirements (see [Assessment Policy](#)). It is expected that these Institute and course/subject policies and procedures should be subject to regular review and formal approval through Institute Quality Committees and published – usually as an annexe to the Student Course Handbook (See [Assessment Policy](#), paragraph 13.3).

6 Moderation of work is subject to the University's Assessment Policy, Section 13. It is important to bear in mind that in all but the most exceptional cases, External Examiners are reviewing a sample of student work and there are important principles to maintain.

7 On reviewing the sample of work, an External Examiner may propose to moderate a whole run of marks upwards or downwards in the interests of preserving the standard of the award. Indeed, in such cases the External Examiner would be performing precisely the function for which they were appointed. Occasionally, however, External Examiners may encounter individual marks with which they disagree, even where they believe a general run of marks to be accurate. This may be the case both in regard to 'borderline' students, or those where an individual student's mark is deemed to be 'too generous' or 'too strict'. In such cases, it is open to an External Examiner to discuss the matter with responsible internal markers to determine what, if any, action might be taken. Any agreed amendment to the mark of an individual student should be fully justified and should take account of the fact that changes to marks of student work from within the sample selected for moderation may indicate that the whole cohort requires checking or re-marking.

8 Equally, course teams are reminded that External Examiners are appointed as members of the Board of Examiners and should not, therefore, be asked to act as a third marker in the case of disagreement between internal markers. Again, they may be invited to participate in an academic discussion of the case(s) in point, but they should not be considered to hold a casting vote.

9 In cases where the External Examiner believes that mark(s) for a cohort should be reviewed, s/he is advised to contact the relevant Examination and Assessment Officer to discuss the matter in advance of the Subject Assessment Board.

The role of the Chief External Examiner

10 The University currently has one Chief External Examiner who maintains oversight of the conduct and operation of a group of awards bearing similar properties, specifically undergraduate awards leading to BA/BSc (Hons).

11 The role of the Chief External Examiner covers the conduct and operation of the second tier Board of Examiners, the appropriateness and application of regulations, student performance and standards.

12 The Chief External Examiner should satisfy themselves regarding the probity of the examination board processes in respect of the application of the regulations, (ie that there is fair and equal consideration of all students) and the robustness of the assessment systems and processes. In addition, the Chief External Examiner is asked to comment on the outcomes of assessment in relation to academic standards and student achievements based on data provided and to report annually on these matters.

13 Where, exceptionally, the Chief External Examiner is unable to attend a Board of Examiners, appropriate arrangements for confirmation of assessment outcomes should be made in consultation with the Academic Registrar.

Rights of the External Examiner

14 An External Examiner has the authority and the responsibility to report directly to the Vice Chancellor of the University in such cases that he/she believes there to be serious concerns about an award, particularly if it is considered that assessments are being conducted in a way that jeopardises either the fair treatment of individual students or the standards of the University's awards. Any other issues of a confidential nature, which the External Examiner may wish to raise, may also be referred, in full and in writing, to the Vice Chancellor.

15 Upon receipt of a report indicating serious concerns an investigation is carried out by the Academic Registrar and/or the Director of Quality and Educational Development as appropriate, and a written response provided to the External Examiner within ten working days.

16 The University hopes to resolve and address any serious issues notified both effectively and speedily. Where this is not the case, and an External Examiner has serious concerns about systemic failings, and has submitted a report to the Vice Chancellor and received a report of the investigation and outcomes, External Examiners may consider invoking the QAA's concerns scheme or inform the professional body as indicated in Indicator 18 of [Section B7 of the UK Quality Code](#).

17 External Examiners are also able to:

- a. request to see a sample of all draft assessment items (examination papers and coursework assessments) before they are given to students in consultation with the appropriate internal marker/s

- b. inspect any material relating to the course; particularly, but not exclusively, course handbooks, examination papers, scripts, coursework or project reports relating to the assessments with which s/he is specifically associated
- c. meet students and discuss curriculum development with academic staff
- d. withhold his or her endorsement for the recommendation of an award.

18 Final judgements on, or approval of, assessment outcomes are academic peer group processes. As with any such process, it is possible that members of the group will disagree. The Academic Board is the final authority for any award of the University. Therefore any disagreement so great that it cannot be resolved at the level of a Subject Assessment Board or Board of Examiners (i.e. where an External Examiner withholds their endorsement of the marks or awards) may come to Academic Board (or delegated subcommittee) for resolution.

Section 2: Induction

General information for External Examiners

19 Upon appointment, External Examiners are sent a 'contract letter', which confirms and provides the following information, specific to each examiner:

- award (or award element) to which the examiner is appointed
- contact details
- agreed annual fee
- link to [Taught Courses Regulatory Framework](#) for reference (NB. This applies to both undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses)
- process/principles for resignation
- process and general criteria for termination of appointment.

20 External Examiners are also directed to the [Academic Quality Unit](#) webpages where they can access current information relevant to their role along with this Handbook.

21 Course teams (typically the Course Leader) are responsible for providing examiners with course specific information, including relevant course handbooks, programme and module specifications and, where appropriate, details of professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) information including that related to continuing PSRB accreditation (e.g. fitness to practice requirements). The Course Leader is also responsible for providing their External Examiner with a schedule of key dates for the moderation of student assessments, and for ensuring that the dates of examination boards are communicated with adequate notice.

22 University policies related to learning and teaching are available directly from the [AQU webpages](#) and External Examiners are directed to this information upon appointment. Of particular relevance is the [University's Assessment Policy](#).

Arrangements for informing External Examiners following appointment

23 Appointments are normally made for four years, running from September in year one to December in year four. This provides overlap of appointments at the end of each term of office to ensure consistency and appropriate handover.

24 Where a nominated External Examiner does not have previous or has limited external examination experience, arrangements are made to ensure that they are assigned a mentor for the first 12 months of their contract. The Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee (ASQEC) will recommend such action as appropriate under the [University of Worcester's Mentoring Policy for New External Examiners](#).

25 It is expected that course teams provide incoming External Examiners with a copy of the previous year's annual evaluation report, which contains the outgoing External Examiner's report and course response.

26 The University holds an annual External Examiners' briefing day during which examiners are provided with an overview of their duties, role and rights, and the general academic regulations. The day focusses on the specific expectations of external examining at the University of Worcester and therefore all incoming External Examiners are strongly encouraged to attend, irrespective of their previous experience. This event also provides the opportunity for External Examiners to meet with members of the course team. The date of the briefing day is published on the AQU webpages and all newly appointed External Examiners are invited to this event. Following the briefing day, related materials are made available on the [AQU webpages](#).

Section 3: Annual Report to the University

27 The External Examiner attends as a full member of the appropriate Board of Examiners and is required to submit an annual report electronically to the University, via the Academic Quality Unit (m.chaffey@worc.ac.uk)

28 In some cases an External Examiner's remit may incorporate more than one course, or more than one iteration of a given course (for example as offered through a collaborative partnership). This is clarified during the nomination and appointment process where the University ensures that the expertise of External Examiners reflects the provision and specifies the scope of the role. In these circumstances, External Examiners are advised by AQU on the relevant report template/s to complete.

29 External Examiner reports are shared with students via Blackboard and discussed with the Course Management Committees which includes Student Academic Representatives (StARs).

30 With this in mind, the formal report to the University, which should preserve the anonymity of students and staff, covers the following areas:

- a. the appropriateness of the academic standards

- b. the overall performance of the students in relation to: the award under consideration, their peers on comparable courses, peers in previous years, national frameworks and/or professional body standards
- c. the strengths and weaknesses of students as a cohort
- d. the quality of knowledge and skills (both general and subject-specific) demonstrated by the students
- e. the curriculum and links to learning outcomes and assessments
- f. the appropriateness of assessment strategies and techniques
- g. consistency and rigour of marking
- h. the lessons of the examination and assessment process for the future development of the course and its management
- i. the conduct and operation of the Board of Examiners
- j. the quality of teaching and learning as indicated by the student performances
- k. any institutional issues
- l. recommendations for course improvement based on the experience of examining
- m. whether the response to the previous External Examiners report was received and adequate in its content
- n. activities undertaken during the year
- o. any identified examples of good practice
- p. comments on the University interpretation of the role of External Examiner, and the support given in order to carry out that role
- q. in the case of examiners completing their term of office - any additional comments.

31 The Chief External Examiner report covers the appropriateness and application of regulations, the conduct and operation of the Board, student performance and standards.

32 All External Examiners will be forwarded the link to the relevant report template/s annually by AQU prior to the date of the final exam board. (NB. due to the timing of Postgraduate courses, External Examiners for these awards will be sent a further reminder).

33 It is a condition of appointment that all External Examiners provide a written annual report using the relevant UW Report Template, **within 3 weeks** of their attendance at the awarding Subject Assessment Board (or other Board of Examiners). The completed report should be sent electronically to m.chaffey@worc.ac.uk. Payment of the annual fee is processed automatically upon receipt of the report. The University reserves the right to take appropriate action in relation to non- or late submission of the report (See paragraph 53).

External Examiners of Collaborative Provision

34 The general external examining arrangements and regulations for courses delivered in collaboration with the University's partner organisations are the same as those for the University's other provision. However, as an External Examiner for a collaborative programme, the University expects that External Examiners would normally meet with the partner course team and/or students at least once every two years (twice during a period of tenure). This is in addition to attendance at the Board of Examiners.

35 The host University Institute should make clear at the outset the arrangements for external moderation of partner provision, the most appropriate point in the

academic year to attend the partner organisation where applicable and the arrangements for the Board of Examiners. In some instances the key contact for these arrangements will be the HE Manager or the course leader at the partner organisation in liaison with the Link Tutor from the host Institute.

36 The University views the opportunity for External Examiners to meet with students as particularly useful for collaborative programmes delivered through partnership arrangements. The outcomes of such meetings should be reported in the External Examiner's annual report.

37 In cases where External Examiners have been appointed to act as an External Examiner for a programme/course which is delivered either by **multiple partner organisations and/or on multiple sites**, the External Examiner should expect to see clearly identified samples for external scrutiny and statistical profiles from **each** partner organisation/site of delivery in order to ensure equivalence of standards. For programmes delivered by multiple partners, a further internal moderation activity should have taken place prior to external moderation to enable representatives from all partners to ensure consistency in the application of assessment criteria and complete internal moderation across all partners (sometimes referred to as 'standardisation').

38 The University requests that External Examiners comment on both the comparability of standards and quality of the learning experience and consistency in assessment practice, e.g. application of grading criteria, for the course/programme as delivered at each partner organisation/site of delivery and any specific issues for the course as a whole throughout the report. Where there are inconsistencies in standards, quality of learning experience or assessment practice or comments that are specific to individual partner organisations, these should be identified through the annual report to enable appropriate response, support and action. Similarly, if there are instances of good practice at one or more partner, these should be clearly identified.

39 Where individual modules or short courses from a wider curriculum framework are offered through partnership arrangements, the University expects that the External Examiner will see clearly identified samples and statistical profiles for external scrutiny. In order to ensure appropriate oversight, the University expects a 'supplementary report' to be completed for each individual partner to identify any specific issues, comments and areas of good practice for the individual partner organisations. The Supplementary Report for each partner should be appended to the main report.

(External Examiners who are required to complete a Supplementary Report will be notified by AQU and sent the appropriate template).

Use made of External Examiners' Reports

40 External Examiners' reports form an essential aspect of the quality assurance and enhancement processes operated by the University. Discussions of External Examiner reports are incorporated specifically within the processes of annual evaluation and periodic review, and also through Course Management Committees where they are formally discussed with student representatives.

41 The process for receipt of, and responding to, External Examiner reports is as follows.

42 Copies of reports are, upon receipt, sent to the Director of Quality and Educational Development (Chair of Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee (ASQEC)) who produces an overview report to Academic Board, and also responds to all institutional issues raised by External Examiners, following consultation with relevant University colleagues.

43 Reports are also sent to the Head of Institute, Course Manager/Leader and other members of the University as deemed appropriate (normally determined by Institute structure, e.g. Heads of Division or Heads of Centre). Reports on courses taught collaboratively with partners are copied to the head of the partner organisation (normally the Principal of an FE college) and HE manager or equivalent and UW Link Tutor.

44 An initial response to any issues raised in the External Examiner report is prepared by the Course leader, formally signed off by the appropriate Institute Quality Committee, and forwarded to the External Examiner, normally within six weeks of receipt of the report.

45 In addition, the course annual evaluation report, including External Examiners' reports and the course team responses to these, is discussed with students via Course Management Committees. Course annual evaluation reports also highlight any issues regarding University procedures for the attention of the University's committees responsible for academic quality. The course annual evaluation report is forwarded to the External Examiner for information.

46 External Examiners' reports are considered for general as well as specific issues by senior managers within the Institute and, as appropriate, these will be referenced in each Institute's annual evaluation report.

47 Full information on the [annual evaluation process](#) can be found on the AQU webpages.

48 External Examiners who have raised institutional issues, can expect a response from the Director of Quality and Educational Development and/or Head of Institute, normally following the process of considering reports through the University committee processes.

Typical Timescales

49 The process is the same for undergraduate and for postgraduate awards, although in the case of the latter final examination boards are generally held in September or early October and so the early stages may occur slightly later:

- a. June/July/September/October (following examination boards, typically): reports received by the Academic Quality Unit
- b. August/September/October: AQU sends acknowledgement of receipt
- c. August/September/October: course leaders provide an initial response to issues raised
- d. October: course teams and student representatives discuss External Examiner reports and other data on academic standards and quality – eg assessment outcomes, at Course Management Committees and confirm full response and actions
- e. November/December: course teams submit annual evaluation report to Institute Quality Committees for scrutiny (see [Annual Evaluation Process](#) pages for full details)
- f. December/January: External Examiner receives the full annual evaluation report, including full response/actions arising from External Examiner report
- g. January: ASQEC receives report reviewing all External Examiner reports, including responses to institutional issues raised. A summary of this is forwarded to all External Examiners, and responses to External Examiners who raised institutional issues sent.

Section 4: Fees and expenses

Payment of Fees/Expenses

50 **Expenses:** expense claims for visits to Worcester or to partner institutions should be made through the [aCloud](#) system. This is being introduced from February 2017. If you have any initial queries, please contact [Margaret Chaffey](#).

Further information can be found here

http://www.worc.ac.uk/aqu/documents/Access_aCloud_Expense_System.pdf

51 **Annual Fee Payment:** the annual fee will be processed automatically upon receipt of an appropriately completed annual report from the External Examiner.

Section 5: Termination of Contract

52 All External Examiners are entitled to submit their resignation for any reason. However, the University would expect that such action would not put the standards of

awards in jeopardy. The University would therefore expect sufficient notice (a minimum of 3 months) in order to make revised arrangements for awards.

53 The University reserves the right to terminate the contract of any External Examiner, subject to the agreement of the Academic Board. Such action will only be taken where there is evidence that key duties are not being carried out, resulting in a lack of evidence of the standards of University awards and normally following efforts to rectify the situation. Such actions include repeated non-receipt and/or significantly delayed receipt of an annual report or routine non-attendance at Board of Examiner meetings.

Section 6: Useful Information

Contacts

You may wish to use this page to record certain contact details at the University of Worcester

Academic Contact
(Course Leader)

Email/telephone

Examinations Officer

Email/telephone

Administrative Contact
(UW Institute)

Email/telephone

Director of Quality and Educational Development

Dr Marie Stowell

Tel. 01905 855579 (m.stowell@worc.ac.uk)

Quality Officer (External Examiners)*

Margaret Chaffey

Academic Quality Unit,

Tel. 01905 855519 (m.chaffey@worc.ac.uk)

*Appointment enquiries, visit expenses, accommodation booking requests and report submission

Links to information

[UW quality policies and procedures](#)

[University regulations and procedures](#)

[Taught Courses Regulatory Framework \(TCRF\)](#)

(N.B. this applies to both undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses)

[Regulations for the appointment of external examiners](#)

Grade Descriptors:

[Grade Descriptors – Levels 4-6](#)

[Grade Descriptors - Level 7 \(Masters\)](#) - new for September 2016

[Grade Descriptors – Level 8](#) (Professional Doctorate Taught Element Assessment Criteria) - new for September 2016

[Assessment Policy](#)

[Curriculum Design Policy](#)

EE Report Templates

[External Examiner's Report Template](#)

[Supplementary Report Template](#)

National Links

[The Higher Education Academy, Guidance on External Examining](#)

[Quality Assurance Agency: Quality Code](#)

[Quality Assurance Agency: Quality Code: Chapter B7 – External Examining](#)

Additional Information

[University of Worcester home page](#)

Link to maps:

[Directional Maps](#)

[Campus/site maps](#): (for car parking - click onto the site to be visited and select the 'car parking' tab)