

Introduction to External Examining at Bangor University

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The Purpose of the External Examiner

External examining provides one of the principal means for maintaining nationally comparable standards within autonomous higher education institutions in the UK.

QUALITY ASSURANCE in Higher Education

UK Quality Code for Higher Education

- Published by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)
- Sets out the **Expectations and Practices** that all providers of UK higher education are required to meet as well as **Guiding Principles**
- Expectations are supplemented by **Practical Advice**, which indicate how expectations may be met

Expectations for Standards

External Expertise

The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.

External examiners contribute to course design and approval, course review, setting and maintaining academic standards and alignment with the relevant national qualifications framework, Characteristics Statements and their alignment with Subject Benchmark Statements, and any other requirements, such as those from PSRBs or funding bodies.

The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.

External examiners comment on the consistent application of the provider's standards and confirm their alignment with UK-recognised standards in determining awards.

Core Practices

related to the External Examiner role

- The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.
[Maintainer of academic standards]
- The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.
[Guardian of national standards]
- Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.
[Maintainer of academic standards]
- The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent. [Process checker]

Expectations for Quality

External Expertise

Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.

External examiners play an important role in identifying good practice and making recommendations for enhancement of assessment policies and procedures.

[Critical friend]

The Role of the External Examiner

There are four broad aspects of the role of an External Examiner:

- Maintainer of academic standards
- Guardian of national standards
- Process checker
- Critical friend

Specific Tasks of an External Examiner 1

On all taught programmes at Levels 5, 6 and 7
(and L4 for Foundation degrees)

- Comment on all draft examination papers and a representative sample of draft assignments which contribute to the final award;
- Moderate a representative sample of internally marked work;
- Attend the Board of Examiners meeting (normally June for UG & late October/early November for PGT programmes);
- Endorse the outcomes of the assessment processes by signing Confirmation of Results Process form.

Specific Tasks of an External Examiner 2

- Annually report on standards of student performance and how they compare with the sector, the fairness of assessment methods and the accuracy and consistency of internal marking;
- Contribute to the ongoing development and enhancement of the provision through feedback and dialogue with the programme team;
- Observe students in their practice where appropriate (Nursing, Midwifery, Initial Teacher Training, Music);
- Scrutinize documentation related to recognition of prior learning, where relevant.

Preparing for External Examining

With reference to the programme specification, External Examiners should familiarise themselves with the programmes and the modules that they will examine.

In particular, they should look at:

- programme aims;
- intended learning outcomes, curriculum and teaching and assessment strategies of the programme and modules;
- the link between particular modules and the programme as a whole.

They should also familiarise themselves with key internal and external reference points, such as the University's academic regulations and qualification descriptors, QAA subject benchmarks, and the requirements of accrediting bodies, if relevant

Assessment

External Examiners are expected to:

- Comment on whether assessments are of an appropriate standard for the task, level and nature of the module
- Confirm that assessment tasks enable achievement of the specified learning outcomes
- Review the standard of academic awards and student performance with regard to the University's regulations, and external reference points (e.g. Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, subject benchmark statements, Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body requirements)
- Confirm that the internal marking / moderation is fair, consistent and with appropriate feedback to students

Reviewing Student Work

- External Examiners are expected to moderate an agreed proportion of candidates' written work, which will normally include a sample of work from all levels of performance, including fails.
- The guiding principle is that External Examiners should have enough evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and are consistent.
- The task is one of moderation. Schools have documented procedures for resolving differences between 1st and 2nd markers; the External Examiner should not be asked to adjudicate.
- **External Examiners may not change individual marks.** However, as a result of moderation, it may be appropriate to recommend a review of all the grades for a particular assessment.

Board of Examiners

External Examiners are full members of the relevant Board of Examiners and are expected to attend the Board of Examiners meetings pertinent to their appointment.

The role of a Board of Examiners is to:

- consider the academic performance of individual students;
- agree awards and classifications, in accordance with regulations;
- consider borderline cases in accordance with regulations;
- agree progression decisions, including recommendations for re-assessment or termination of studies;
- ensure the appropriateness of assessment and marking practices
- consider the External Examiners' feedback

External Examiner's Report

The annual report provides an independent and objective appraisal of the standard and quality of the University's provision

Reports **must** be completed using the pro forma provided. This contains sections on:

- academic standards
- the programme
- assessment, including assessment strategy
- professional placements, if relevant
- the Board of Examiners meeting

Reports must be submitted within one month following the Board of Examiners meeting

What happens to the External Examiners' Reports? 1

- No individuals should be named in the Report
- Quality Enhancement Unit reads each External Examiner report on arrival.
- Copies are sent to the Head of School.
- Reports made available to Programme Directors
- Reports considered within School-level committees
- Reports are made available to students

What happens to the External Examiners' Reports? 2

- All reports are summarised and presented to the T&L Strategy Group
- Reports with major issues are considered individually by the T&L Strategy Group
- Schools must respond to academic issues raised by External Examiners in the programme Annual Review and Development Plan
- The Quality Enhancement Group ensures closure on all matters for Bangor programmes.
- For programmes delivered by partner institutions, the annual reviews are considered by the Collaborative Provision Sub Group
- Response sent to External Examiners detailing the actions taken
- Some Schools will send their Annual Review and Development Plan to the External Examiner

Serious Concerns

If an External Examiner raises serious concerns in their report:

- The report is forwarded to the Head of the Quality Enhancement, for immediate consideration.
- A meeting is held with the Head and other senior staff in the School to agree an action plan to address the issues raised.
- The External Examiner's report and a report of the meeting are considered by the Teaching & Learning Strategy Group.
- The Head of Quality Enhancement will write to the External Examiner explaining the actions that have been agreed.

External Examiners have the right to submit a confidential written report directly to the Vice-Chancellor.

Professional Practice

- The most important role of an external examiner is to confirm threshold standards, rigorous process and comparability of standards
- Opting to be a critical friend may feel more rewarding and easier, but it is not more important than overseeing academic standards
- To be confident about overseeing standards you need to be confident that the academic standards you use are representative of the subject community to which you belong
- As the only check on outputs, the job of External Examiner holds a lot of responsibility for stakeholders and UK standards
- It is important for examiners to be well informed about the evidence around effective assessment rather than just relying on their own experience of assessment
- Given the complexity of clarifying academic standards it is important for External Examiners to be able to evaluate the relevance of factors in that complexity

Useful Resources



Bangor University External Examiner Handbook:
https://www.bangor.ac.uk/quality/ext_exam.php.en

Bangor University Quality and Standards webpages:
<https://www.bangor.ac.uk/quality/index.php.en>

QAA UK Quality Code:
<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/external-expertise>

Advance-HE External Examiner Handbook:
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/HE_Academy_External_Examiners_Handbook_2012.pdf