

Code of Practice for External Examiners: Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Courses



PRIFYSGOL
BANGOR
UNIVERSITY

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Date	Supersedes	Description of Change
1 February 2021	2019 Version 1.1	Minor amendment to reflect changes to committee structure and changes due to leaving the EU.
1 February 2020.	2019 Version 01	Minor amendment to wording to include reference to travel insurance.

Document Owner	Approved By	Date Approved	Review Frequency
Quality Assurance and Validation Unit.	Senate Regulations and Special Cases Committee.	26 June 2019.	Every three years.

Note: In exceptional circumstances, and subject to approval by the Chair of the Senate Regulations and Special Cases Committee, responsibilities assigned to Schools, Heads, of School, School Officers or School Committees in these Regulations may be assumed by the College, Head of College, College Officers or College Committees respectively, as appropriate.

Code of Practice for External Examiners: Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Courses



In this document the term 'External Examiners' refers to External Examiners for all taught programmes, including undergraduate certificate and diplomas, initial degrees, postgraduate certificates and diplomas, taught Masters programmes, and partnership provision (see paragraphs 68-70).

Introduction

1. All External Examiners are responsible to the Bangor University's Senate.
2. In the UK's system of higher education, institutions are responsible for the quality of the education they provide and the academic standards of the awards they offer. External examining provides one of the principal means for maintaining nationally comparable standards within autonomous higher education institutions.
3. The University, through the Quality Assurance and Validation Unit, will appoint one or more External Examiner(s) to carry out the role(s) defined in this Code of Practice for all provision that leads to a higher education award of the University.
4. The external examining function should help Bangor University to ensure that:
 - it is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements;
 - the assessment process measures student achievement appropriately against the intended outcomes of the programme, and is rigorous, fairly operated and in line with the University's policies, regulations, and codes of practice;
 - 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.
5. The University expects External Examiners to provide informative comment and recommendations on:
 - good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment observed by the External Examiners;
 - opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students.

Criteria for Appointment

6. Under the constraints of the Law on Preventing Illegal Working, nominees must be eligible to work in the UK. Nominees must have a UK postal address and hold a UK bank account, in order to be registered on the Casual Worker system for payroll and IT access.

7. In approving any nominations the Teaching & Learning Strategy Group will take into account evidence of the following:
 - knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
 - competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof;
 - relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate;
 - competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures;
 - sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers;
 - familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed;
 - awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula;
 - competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.
8. Normally, a nominee will be of Senior Lecturer status or above, or the equivalent. If a School can provide robust evidence of sufficient expertise, experience and seniority of their nomination, such criteria will take precedence over the formal job status and/or academic qualifications.
9. Nominees who are retired may be appointed up to 6 years following their retirement.
10. Nominees should have fluency in English or Welsh, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English or Welsh, fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that External Examiners are provided with the information to make their judgements).
11. External Examiners must meet any applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (e.g. HCPC). The External Examiners in such cases will be appointed as defined by this Code of Practice. The Quality Assurance and Validation Unit will be responsible for liaising with the Professional Body, or equivalent, where necessary.
12. An External Examiner may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.
13. External Examiners should normally hold no more than two External Examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time.

14. To avoid conflicts of interest, anyone in the following categories or circumstances cannot normally be appointed as an External Examiner:
- member of a governing body or committee of the University or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the University or one of its collaborative partners;
 - anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study;
 - anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study;
 - anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study;
 - anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme(s) or modules in question;
 - former staff or students of the University unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the External Examiner have completed their programme(s);
 - a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution;
 - the succession of an External Examiner from an institution by a colleague from the same department in the same institution;
 - the appointment of more than one External Examiner from the same department of the same institution.
15. The number of External Examiners per programme of study is based on the requirements of a discipline and cohort numbers. For undergraduate programmes, the norm is 1 Examiner to 200 students per subject of examination.
16. Where a part of a programme covers a specialist subject area, and student numbers would not justify the appointment of an additional Examiner, the School may consider appointing an Associate Examiner, using the normal nomination process.

Welsh-medium work

17. For programmes where a substantial proportion of the course is delivered and assessed through the medium of Welsh, then a full External Examiner should be appointed. Such Examiners may also be invited to examine cognate programmes taught and assessed through the medium of English, where appropriate.
18. Where a small proportion of students are taught or examined through the medium of Welsh, an Associate Examiner should be appointed.

Nomination Procedure

19. The appointment period for an External Examiner to a School is 4 years. An extension of one year may be permitted in exceptional circumstances, to ensure continuity.
20. Nominations for External Examiners should be made in the School at the recommendation of the Head of School, and with the approval of the appropriate Teaching and Learning or other designated School Committee or Board of Studies.

21. Nomination forms for Examiners for schemes of study beginning in September should be submitted to the Quality Assurance and Validation Unit, at the latest by the beginning of the preceding February.
22. Following approval by the Teaching & Learning Strategy Group, invitation letters are sent from the Quality Assurance and Validation Unit. Confirmation of the appointment is given to Schools once nominees have accepted the position, and provided evidence of their eligibility to work in the UK. The Quality Assurance and Validation Unit will communicate clearly in writing to all concerned the modules, programmes or award(s) to which each External Examiner is appointed.
23. In cases where a nominated External Examiner does not meet all the criteria for appointment in paragraphs 8-14, a detailed explanation and a curriculum vitae is required from the nominating School at the time of the nomination. Such a submission should include a list of all alternative names that were considered with their current post and institutional affiliation.

Outcomes

24. In cases where the Teaching & Learning Strategy Group has a reservation (including following detailed written explanation), either an alternative nomination will be requested or a School representative will be required to attend a meeting of the Strategy Group.
25. In cases where the Teaching & Learning Strategy Group rejects a nominated External Examiner for failing to meet the criteria for appointment, an alternative nomination will be required. Schools may appeal to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching) on the rejection of an External Examiner by the Strategy Group.

Responsibilities

26. External Examiners' fees shall be set, reviewed and amended by the Teaching & Learning Strategy Group, upon the recommendation of the Head of Quality Assurance and Validation.
27. The University is responsible, through the Quality Assurance and Validation Unit, for ensuring that its External Examiners are provided on appointment with an induction briefing, including details of institutional policies, regulations and codes of practice relating to assessment procedures and terms of appointment.
28. Heads of Schools are responsible for ensuring that External Examiners receive appropriate induction and briefing material to enable them to appreciate the aims and philosophies of the programme with which they will be associated and contribute in an effective manner to the assessment process. This will include a copy of the programme specification and scheme of study with a schedule of assessment. The Head of School will also be responsible for ensuring that External Examiners are apprised of the learning outcomes for individual modules and the programme. Full details of School assessment practices and procedures should also be provided. Where academic standards have been defined explicitly, these should be made clear to the External Examiner.
29. Heads of School are responsible to ensuring that an agreed timetable for the dispatch of examination papers, assessment and examination scripts should be made between the School and the External Examiner. External Examiners must be notified

of the proposed dates of meetings of the Board of Examiners for programmes at the beginning of an academic session, and kept informed of any changes.

30. Heads of Schools are responsible for informing students on Masters' courses if there is any delay in the examination process beyond 3 months. If External Examiners are unable to moderate dissertations within 3 months of submission, an alternate Examiner should be appointed for this purpose. Schools should inform the Quality Assurance and Validation Unit of any such delay.
31. Heads of Schools are responsible for including the name, position and institution of their External Examiners in module or programme information provided to students. This must be accompanied by clear warnings that attempting to contact the External Examiner directly is inappropriate and any such incidences will be investigated by the University.
32. The University is responsible, through the Quality Assurance and Validation Unit, for informing External Examiners, in writing at the beginning of their term of office, that they have a right to raise any matter of serious concern with the Vice-Chancellor, if necessary by means of a separate confidential written report. The University will provide a considered and timely response to any confidential report received, outlining any actions they will be taking as a result.

Roles of the External Examiner

33. The main function of the External Examiner is to report on the standards of student performance in those programmes or parts of programmes which they have been appointed to examine, and on the comparability of the standards with those of similar programmes or parts of programmes in other UK higher education institutions. For Foundation degree, HE Certificate and HE Diploma programmes, this includes work at level 4. All External Examiners, including those appointed for collaborative provision, are required to submit an annual report using the pro forma provided.
34. External Examiners should determine whether the standards are appropriate for the awards, or award elements, by reference to published national subject benchmarks, national qualifications frameworks, institutional programme specifications and other relevant information.
35. External Examiners must be notified of the proposed dates of meetings of the Board of Examiners for programmes at the beginning of an academic session. External Examiners as full members of the relevant Board of Examiners should be present at all Examiners' meetings at which significant decisions are taken in regard to the subject specialism of appointment, and should have the right to be present at all Examiners' meetings in the subject(s) in which they have been involved. If External Examiners exceptionally cannot attend a meeting where their presence is formally required, they should be available for consultation by telephone.
36. For cohorts of 10 students or less, the views of the External Examiner may be sought by post, e-mail, telephone and/or video link. The examining process must still be followed, decisions formally minuted, and the Confirmation of Results Process Form (CORP) and Notification of Results (NORF) must be signed by the Chair, the Internal and External Examiners as applicable.
37. All draft examination papers which contribute to the final award should be sent to the External Examiner for approval in good time. External Examiners should also see

all or a representative sample of draft assignments which contribute to the final award. This is particularly important in programmes where the majority of the assessment is by continuous assessment rather than examination. At the beginning of each academic session an agreed timetable for the dispatch of examination papers, assessment and examination scripts should be made between the School and the External Examiner.

38. There is a process for verification of marks for work submitted for assessment by students (course-work, dissertations, examinations) which contributes to the final award. A policy of verifying the marks of a sample of assessed work is permissible if not all work is verified, (details can be found in Section 7.4 of the Regulations for Taught Programmes). On appointment External Examiners should be informed of individual School policy on verification of marks.
39. External Examiners shall moderate all, or an agreed proportion of candidates' written work, which shall normally include a sample of work from all levels of performance. Where the External Examiner(s) are moderating an agreed proportion, they should normally see work assessed internally as borderline, first class, distinction, or failures. Many External Examiners wish to see scripts from the top, the middle and the bottom of the range. 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. They should inspect a sufficient amount of the work of the candidates to enable them to arrive at a judgement that can be applied to the examination as a whole. All work that counts towards the final award (including Level 4 where appropriate) should be verified by the External Examiner at the end of the academic year in which the module(s) has been delivered and assessed.
40. The responsibility for agreeing and awarding the final mark and degree classification lies with the Board of Examiners. Disagreement on marks should normally be resolved before the Board of Examiners meeting.
41. For Masters' courses External Examiners are required to moderate dissertations. A system of sampling of dissertations is permissible, within the following guidelines:
 - [a] that External Examiners see all dissertations which are (i) within the category of distinction, (ii) within +/- 5% of the minimum pass mark, (iii) within the failure band, (iv) resubmissions and (v) marked by persons other than members of the University's academic staff;
 - [b] that External Examiners retain the right to select other dissertations at random;
 - [c] that all dissertations **not** seen by the External Examiner should be independently double marked internally; and
 - [d] that at least 20% of dissertations or a minimum of 10 – whichever is the higher figure – be seen by External Examiners. (If the total number is less than 10, all dissertations should continue to be externally examined).
42. Within a School, and providing they have the appropriate expertise, undergraduate External Examiners may moderate a Master's dissertation, if the dissertation is outside the expertise of the External Examiner appointed to the Master's degree.

43. Prior to the confirmation of results, the University expects External Examiners to endorse the outcomes of the assessment processes they have been appointed to scrutinize.
44. External Examiners should sign Confirmation of Results Process Form (CORP) which is sent to the Quality Assurance and Validation Unit.
45. Where the Board of Examiners is involved in the assessment of multi-disciplinary degrees and Joint Honours courses, arrangements should be made for the appropriate External Examiner(s) to be involved in the assessment and degree classification process.
46. Where External Examiners have a serious concern relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme or programmes and have exhausted all published applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor, they may invoke QAA's concerns scheme or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.

Guidelines on the use of *viva voce* examinations

47. The aim of these guidelines is to ensure that all students are treated fairly, without some being advantaged or disadvantaged by the selective use of *viva voce* examinations.
48. The guidelines do not apply to instances where *viva voce* examinations are a formal part of the assessment structure for a programme. Such examinations must be agreed as when a programme is validated and must relate to the learning outcomes of the programme. Such use of *viva voce* examinations should also be consistent with the Regulations for Taught Programmes.
49. *Viva voce* examinations may be conducted by External Examiners on all or a sample of students. The purpose of such examinations is to assist an External Examiner to moderate a programme. Evidence from such examinations should not be used as part of an Examining Board's consideration of individual candidates. However, evidence from such examinations can be used by External Examiners to inform their judgement about the general standards of the programme. Where appropriate, External Examiners may use evidence from such examinations to recommend adjustments to the marks of all students within a cohort – such adjustments can only be applied at a module level. For example, an External Examiner, based on an examination of assessed work and a *viva voce* examination, may conclude that marks allocated to specific modules are too low and may recommend a re-evaluation of the marks or that the marks for all students on those modules be raised. Such a recommendation must then be considered by the Examining Board.
50. The allocation of borderline candidates to degree classes should be based on the criteria that form part of the Regulations for Taught Programmes as appropriate. *Viva voce* examinations should not be used by Examining Boards to assist in the classification of borderline candidates except for evidence obtained from *viva voce* examinations that form part of the assessment structure for a programme.
51. A *viva voce* examination should not be used as the basis for reducing an individual student's mark or an individual student's degree classification under any circumstances.

52. Interviews with candidates may be arranged at the request of the Chair of the Examination Board (or nominated Chair of a School's special circumstances committee or equivalent). Such interviews may be arranged to obtain further information from a student about matters such as unexpected results or extenuating circumstances. Such interviews should not be referred to as *viva voce* examinations. Following an interview, pertinent information should be relayed to the Examination Board so as to inform its consideration of a student's performance. No candidate shall be disadvantaged as a result of having been interviewed.

Role of the Associate Examiners

53. The function of the Associate Examiner is to report on the standards of student performance in those parts of programmes which they have been appointed to moderate, and on the comparability of the standards with those of similar programmes or parts of programmes in other UK higher education institutions.
54. All Associate Examiners, including those appointed for collaborative provision, are required to submit an annual report using the pro forma provided.
55. Associate Examiners are not required to attend the Board of Examiners meeting. Moderation work will be completed by post or electronically prior to the Board of Examiners meeting. The Head of School or the Examinations Officer shall correspond with the Associate Examiner prior to the Board of Examiners meeting to confirm marking standards etc.

Procedures for Considering External Examiners Reports

56. External Examiners' annual reports will be made available in full to students, with the sole exception of any confidential report made directly, and separately, to the Vice-Chancellor.
57. External Examiner(s) reports are returned to the Quality Assurance and Validation Unit. A copy is forwarded to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching) and the relevant Head of School. On receipt of the report form Examiners are paid their fee. All External Examiners are expected to return their Report Form within 1 month of the Examination Board meeting. Reports not received within 3 months will be brought to the attention of the Teaching and Learning Strategy Group and could result in the termination of an appointment.
58. Boards of Study (or relevant sub-committee) should also consider the reports as part of the Annual Review and Development Plan process (see QA1 form). Student representatives should be given the opportunity to be fully involved in this process, enabling them to understand all the issues raised and the University's response.
59. A summary of the comments made by Examiners are considered by the Teaching & Learning Strategy Group. A report to the Teaching & Learning Strategy Group will identify points that require School attention; and major issues which require institutional attention.
60. The Head of School is responsible for ensuring that any action on major points as a result of External Examiners' comments is carried out promptly and should report the action to the Quality Assurance and Validation Unit. The Head of School is also responsible for responding directly to the External Examiner, particularly on academic issues. Any such correspondence should be copied to the Quality Assurance

Manager. School comments on the review of reports are fed to the Quality Enhancement Group which agrees on any follow-up action if necessary.

61. The Quality Assurance and Validation Unit is responsible for contacting External Examiners on any issues arising out of reports requiring institutional consideration.
62. The Teaching & Learning Strategy Group is responsible for identifying good practice arising out of External Examiners' reports.

Termination

63. Reports not received within the 3 months will be brought to the attention of the Teaching and Learning Strategy Group and could result in the termination of an appointment.
64. Whilst it is hoped that such a situation will not arise, an External Examiner whose performance or general conduct is deemed to be unsatisfactory by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching) may be warned in writing in the first instance and, if necessary, be advised on appropriate remedial action(s) which need to be taken.
65. In exceptional circumstances, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching) can authorise a letter of premature termination to be sent to the External Examiner concerned without prior warning. This will have the effect of terminating the contract immediately.

A letter of premature termination may also be sent in respect of a less serious incident where an External Examiner has received previously a warning of the sort described in paragraph 64 above.

66. Should an External Examiner wish to terminate their appointment early, due to illness or other unforeseen circumstances, Examiners are asked to notify the Quality Assurance and Validation Unit in writing at the earliest opportunity.
67. If an External Examiner's circumstances should change during their appointment, such that they no longer meet the criteria for appointment, e.g. due to a conflict of interest (see paragraph 14), the External Examiner will be asked to step down from their appointment.

Collaborative Provision

68. Bangor University remains responsible for the academic standards on its programmes delivered in partnership with other organisations.
69. The University will appoint External Examiners to all appropriate programmes of such collaborative provision, using the procedures outlined above. The University will also be responsible for payment of fees and expenses.
70. The External Examiners will be responsible to the University and make their annual report to the University in the same manner as Examiners of programmes delivered at the University. Moderation of work and attendance at the Board of Examiners meeting will be negotiated through the relevant University School or the Quality Assurance and Validation Unit, as appropriate.
71. For the purposes of that specific External Examiner appointment, External Examiners required to travel overseas to attend a Board of Examiners meeting at a partner institution will be regarded as University staff. Accordingly, University Business Travel Insurance should be obtained for the period of travel.