

Guidance IG(v)

Rights and Responsibilities of External Examiners

The audit of assessed work

- 1 External examiners are provided with a sample of work placed by the internal examiner in each classification (including borderlines and marginal fails) and representing all sites of delivery.
- 2 The percentage of work shall reflect the number of students completing a particular assessment but in all cases shall meet the minimum of 10%. The minimum sample size is normally 6 and the maximum sample size 30, this amount may need to be exceeded where provision is franchised to multiple partners to ensure the sample meets the requirements above. The guiding principle should be that external examiners have sufficient assessments to assure themselves that internal marking and the resultant classification of awards are of an appropriate and consistent standard.
- 3 The University recognises that there are practical considerations relating to collection of in-course assessments and making some types of assessment accessible to external examiners and Faculties will agree such arrangements with External Examiners as appropriate. In some instances it is expected that external examiners will meet individual students during their audit (eg. in professional practice, shows of student work, etc.). Discussion should normally be related to the particular assessment being audited.
- 4 As part of the audit of assessment and associated procedures an external examiner may request a more general meeting with groups of students. There should normally be a good reason for such a meeting relating to standards and assessment procedures and its agenda should be restricted to such matters and discussed with appropriate academic staff. Normally a member of academic staff should attend such a meeting.
- 5 When new fields commence, external examiners are appointed to them. External examiners are expected to audit each module/level/year of new fields as they are introduced. For established fields, external examiners are expected to audit each module/level/year, where those modules contribute towards classification, for example, levels 5 and 6 for degree programmes and levels 4 and 5 for Foundation Degree programmes.

Note: Where assessment boards are established to consider levels (progression and intermediate awards) that do not contribute directly to the final award, they are subsidiary to the programme assessment board and report to it for confirmation of all recommendations. Thus external examiners are formally involved with all decisions.

Approval of assessments

- 6 External examiners are not required to approve any assessments, including examinations. However, in their audit role external examiners have the right to comment on all aspects of assessment set and it is expected that they would receive details about them at an appropriate point in time. In order to plan ahead the audit and sampling of student assessed work, it will normally

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be necessary to provide external examiners with details of assessments and discuss them. Precise arrangements will depend on the assessment scheme and it is recognised that field teams might wish to seek the advice of external examiners on drafts of assessments including examination papers (in which case it will be the responsibility of the field team to liaise directly with the external examiner).

- 7 The University takes the view that it is the responsibility of internal examiners to scrutinise assessments for balance, standard, content, wording etc., and to ensure that they are consistent with the scheme of assessment approved in the definitive course document and published in student handbooks. It is for external examiners, in an advisory role, during the preparation of assessments (should this be deemed appropriate), and as a result of their audit, to advise the University as to whether internal examiners have performed their tasks satisfactorily.

Viva-voce examinations

- 8 Where fields/programmes include viva-voce examinations as part of the assessment programme for all students, external examiners have the right to audit them in the same way as they might any other aspect of assessment.
- 9 Where *viva-voce* examinations are considered necessary as an additional or substitute form of assessment for some students the external examiner(s) have the right to audit them. Whilst staff of the University might seek the views of an external examiner as to whether a *viva voce* examination is appropriate in a particular circumstance, or an external examiner might advise that a *viva voce* examination should be carried out, it is for the internal staff to take the final decision whether to hold one. Internal examiners may invite an external examiner to take part in the viva voce examination and may seek the advice of the external examiner on the mark or grade but, as with all other assessments, it is the responsibility of the internal examiners to award the mark or grade.

Responsibility for agreeing marks and grades

- 10 The University has agreed that it is the responsibility of its academic staff, who are fulfilling the stated responsibility for maintaining the standards of awards, to determine the marks/grades to be awarded for assessed work. The University expects external examiners, in their independent auditor role, to advise the University on whether the standards set are appropriate, that the conclusions reached by internal examiners are fair and equitable, and that approved procedures have been followed. Consequently, the University does not expect external examiners to act as second or third 'markers', to arbitrate between unresolved internal marking differences, or to approve or agree marks. As noted in paragraph 6, external examiners are normally able to audit (sample) some of the work of some students and it is clearly inequitable to consequently change marks relating only to a sample or to special cases presented by internal examiners.

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- 11 The University has adopted the term moderation and moderator for procedures used by staff within the University to verify assessment standards. The terms are used in the same way as in the QAA Code of Practice in that a moderator is one who samples and/or advises. For example, draft assessments should be moderated and student assessed work may be moderated. In the latter case this is only one method for verifying academic standards, others include double marking, double blind marking etc. and are used where appropriate.
- 12 However, the guidance above does not mean that the advice of external examiners resulting from their audit samples should not be considered with great care or acted upon. Because of the role and responsibility of external examiners, it is expected that internal examiners and boards of examiners will take serious note of advice received and would need good reason for not acting upon it. Nonetheless it is the responsibility of internal examiners to prepare agreed marks for consideration by external examiners and assessment boards and it is the collective responsibility of the assessment board to take decisions concerning pass and fail, progression, awards, classification etc. The consensus view of an assessment board must prevail. The external examiner has a full opportunity to comment on decisions made by an assessment board in his/her report. In addition, the minutes of assessment boards record the commentaries of external examiners. As part of its quality assurance procedures, the University requires field teams to respond formally to the reports of external examiners and their minuted comments.

Assessment Boards and external examiners

- 13 External examiners are full members of the assessment boards to which they relate. As full members they are expected to attend the module/programme assessment board(s) relating to their responsibilities.
- 14 Assessment boards are normally deemed quorate if all designated internal and external examiners are present (details of the procedures for non-attendance by an external examiner are given in the Undergraduate Modular Scheme (UMS) and Postgraduate Credit Framework (PCF) and it is important that an external examiner is able to make an appropriate contribution to the decision making process regardless of presence at the assessment board).
- 15 All formal decisions relating to awards, progression, and other aspects of student performance must be made at assessment board meetings. All information necessary to reach decisions must be available at assessment boards and full minutes must record such evidence and the resulting judgements. External examiners will, therefore, be able to audit the work of the assessment board because of their full membership of them. Provided these requirements are satisfied, informal preparatory meetings may be held.

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- 16 Assessment boards have the authority to establish subsidiary boards, for example to deal with reassessments. External examiners have the right to attend such meetings, if they so wish, in order to complete their audit.

Assessment Boards

- 17 The University's fields of study are modular and credit based. Assessment board arrangements can be complex in modular schemes, particularly where there are interdisciplinary fields and significant numbers of combined fields. The University has adopted a two tiered system of Module Assessment Boards (MABs) which report to Programme Assessment Boards (PABs). A MAB handles a defined group of modules and a PAB handles one or more fields. There are clear rules for the responsibilities of each of these types of board, primarily agreeing module marks and the reassessment recommendations for modules at MABs and recommending awards and progression at PABs (clear routines are in place for dealing with mitigating circumstances, compensation etc. to ensure that double counting does not take place and full details are provided in the scheme documents).
- 18 In all cases at least one external examiner is appointed to a MAB. Where several MABs in related subjects report to a PAB either all of the MAB external examiners may be appointed to the PAB or experienced representatives from the group of MAB external examiners may be appointed to the PAB.
- 19 It is therefore possible for an external examiner to be appointed to a MAB only or to both a MAB and a PAB. This will be explained further during induction of newly appointed external examiners and the external examiner report form allows for the possibility of two types of appointment, MAB only or MAB and PAB.

Note: the University does not appoint external examiners to PABs alone, all are involved in the work of MABs.

- 20 In some instances there is no overlap of fields and the MAB and PAB both map directly onto the same group of modules. This may often be the case in professionally accredited fields. In such cases at least two external examiners are appointed to the field. The field will still be governed by either UMS or PCF regulations and the assessment board is managed in two parts, firstly as a MAB to agree module marks and subsequently as a PAB to consider awards and progression (further details will be provided locally).
- 21 The arrangements described above are designed to ensure that all the students who take a module are considered at the same MAB with the same standards applied to them all and audited by the same external examiner(s). Where two external examiners are associated with a MAB they may each take responsibility for a separate sub-group of modules or they may co-audit some or all of the modules.

Verification of the recommendations of assessment boards

- 22 The agreed final recommendations of an assessment board are the collective, consensus views of the board members, including the external examiners. It is expected that the chair of the board will review all recommendations with the board to ensure that they are approved by the board and can be accurately recorded by the minuting secretary. The University does not additionally require the formality of the signature(s) of the external examiner(s) at this stage. It is subsequently the responsibility of the chair of the board and the secretary to the board to ensure that published results' lists accurately reflect the assessment board's deliberations. By receipt of minutes, including a full record of recommendations, external examiners are in a position to audit the accuracy of the procedures and, if it ever became necessary, to audit any aspect of the process in more detail.

Visits to Collaborative Partners

- 23 The nature and frequency of external examiner visits should be noted in the Liaison Document. As a guide, for validated provision there should normally be one external examiner visit in any one year (this would normally coincide with an assessment board). For franchised programmes, there should be an external examiner visit at least once every two years.

Involvement of external examiners in validation, review, approval of changes to fields and 'consultancy' related to fields

- 23 Current external examiners must not be involved in validation/internal subject reviews of the fields/programmes they are appointed to because they are part of the process being reviewed. Thus external examiners should not be involved in consultancy directly in response to issues arising from their audit role. Once advice has been offered, its consideration becomes the responsibility of the academic staff of the University. Neither should external examiners be involved in broad aspects of 'consultancy' not directly associated with assessment. The University is committed to a view that the independent audit role of external examiners must be protected. The integrity of the process is threatened if external examiners are required to audit and pass judgement on processes and procedures that they have helped to develop.
- 24 External examiners should be informed of all changes to regulations and assessment (including those affecting current cohorts) but are not required to approve them. Field teams may seek the advice of external examiners on proposed changes but are not required to do so. An important part of the role of external examiners is to comment on changes introduced by a field team (which are approved through the normal University procedures, in consultation with students who might be affected if necessary).
- 25 External examiners must be informed at the earliest possible date about changes to the curriculum. The University does not require that external examiners be consulted about such changes. However, field teams may wish

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to seek the advice of external examiners where changes arise directly out of the audit of assessment.

External examiner's reports

- 26 All external examiners, as part of their contract with the University, are required to submit an annual report. The University has adopted a standard report format which will be provided for all external examiners. In addition to responses to key questions about standards, processes and procedures, external examiners are given the opportunity to write unrestricted commentaries on any matters arising from their audit. They are also asked to complete a checklist relating to the general effectiveness and implementation of the University's procedures.
- 27 External examiners with responsibility for collaborative fields will be required to comment on each partner (as appropriate) that offers the field. This may take the form of subsections within one report or separate reports. The precise format will depend upon the nature of the collaboration and external examiner arrangements. The reporting requirements will be made clear at appointment and in the induction by the relevant Head of School or equivalent.
- 28 The University regards the external examiner's report as a critical part of its quality assurance procedures. It is part of the contract with external examiners that the required report is produced (normally annually). If an external examiner, following a reminder, does not submit a report within two months of the module/programme assessment board, or the report is considered to be too cursory to be of value and requests for amplification are not responded to, the contract may be terminated forthwith (see section I, paragraph 37). The report will be regarded as a public document within the University and form part of the documentation for Internal Subject review panels, professional bodies, QAA auditors and student representatives. If necessary, external examiners can supply a separate confidential annex to a report. Please note that under the Freedom of Information Act, the University may be required to release external examiners' reports to individuals upon request, but in this instance, the name of the external examiner will be removed from the report.

Feedback to external examiners

- 29 The University requires that external examiners should be provided with feedback following discussion of their reports at Boards of Study. This feedback should consist of an itemised response to the report using the University's response template. It is the responsibility of the Faculty to ensure that an appropriate response is made to the External Examiner. This should be done as soon as possible after receipt of the external examiner's report, although it is recognised that discussion of the report at a Board of Study should intervene.