

**University of Aberdeen  
Academic Quality Handbook**

**Nomination and Appointment of External Examiners**

External examiners are appointed by the University Court specifically to ensure that standards are maintained on a comparable level with universities throughout the UK and that the system of assessment is seen to be transparent and fair to all students. This is in accordance with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) 'UK Quality Code for Higher Education' and in particular the 'assessment' and external expertise' themes.

Schools wishing to appoint an external examiner should first contact individuals informally to confirm that they would be willing to take on the role.

Note that for examiners required for the start of an academic year (ie September), nomination forms<sup>1</sup> should be submitted to Academic Services no later than the end of the previous year (31 December).

Should the nomination be approved by the Vice-Principal (Education), Academic Services will send an offer of appointment to the external examiner. The offer is conditional on receipt of proof of appropriate right to work in the UK.

### **Nomination**

1. Heads of School are responsible for nominating external examiners for first degrees, including those components of joint degrees which are the responsibility of their School, awards provided by our Transnational Education (TNE) Delivery Partners, and for taught postgraduate programmes under their School's purview. Examiners should be nominated using the External Examiners' Nomination Proforma.
2. For the degrees of MBChB External Examiners are nominated by the Phase Co-ordinators.
3. For validated degrees, the head of the relevant academic unit is responsible for nominating external examiners to his/her head of institution, who should then submit the nomination to the University for consideration: nominees must be external both to the associate institution and to the University.
4. The number of external examiners for any particular degree programme must be sufficient to cover the full range of studies and the quantity of assessed material to be examined. More than one external examiner may be needed where there is a large number of students or where the degree programme covers a wide range of content and is academically diverse.
5. Only persons of seniority and experience in the relevant subject area and who are able to command authority and the respect of colleagues should be nominated. The UK-wide criteria for the appointment of External Examiners, as set out in the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

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• <sup>1</sup> [Nomination Form for External Examiners \(Undergraduate or Postgraduate Taught\)](#)

## Criteria for External Examiners

6. The University will appoint external examiners who can show appropriate evidence of the following:
  - substantial experience in teaching and examining in the UK higher education sector and holding an academic appointment of at least senior lecturer level;
  - notwithstanding the above, those from outside the higher education system (e.g. from industry or the professions) are appropriate in certain circumstances. Well-qualified candidates should not be excluded on the grounds that they have no previous experience as external examiners. If such candidates are appointed, Heads of School are responsible for providing the necessary support to allow them to fully understand the role of External Examiners and the University's expectations;
  - knowledge and understanding of the reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality in the UK higher education sector;
  - competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study;
  - relevant academic or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being examined or extensive practitioner experience;
  - competence and experience of designing and operating a variety of appropriate assessment methods;
  - sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic and professional peers;
  - familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award being assessed;
  - fluency in English;
  - where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s) as well as fluency in English;
  - meeting the criteria set by any professional, statutory or regulatory bodies;
  - awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula;
  - competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.
7. A special case must be made on the nomination form for any nominee who does not fulfil the above criteria.
8. The University will not appoint as external examiners:
  - anyone who is a member of a governing body or committee of the University;
  - anyone who is a current employee of the University;
  - anyone who is from a cognate discipline in one of the University's collaborative partners;
  - anyone who has a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study;
  - anyone who is a colleague of persons 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 required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study;
  - anyone involved in recent or current collaborative activities with a member of staff involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme of study;

- 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 of study;
- anyone who is from an institution where a member of staff at Aberdeen is an external examiner for a cognate programme (e.g. a reciprocal arrangement);
- a colleague of an outgoing external examiner;
- more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution.

## Period of Service

9. Terms of office:
  - All appointments should normally be for four years, thus allowing external examiners to gain some familiarity with the programme and to participate in the assessment at all levels of at least one cohort of students.
  - An external examiner's appointment may be extended in exceptional circumstances for one year only to allow continuity.
  - An external examiner may be reappointed, but only in exceptional circumstances and only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.
  - External examiners should not hold more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes at any point in time.
10. Those responsible for nominating external examiners should contact the proposed examiner to obtain his/her willingness to act before submitting a formal nomination. External examiners should not indicate a willingness to be appointed if there is any conflict of interest.
11. Where more than one external examiner is being nominated, Heads of School may wish to seek the phasing of appointments, where practicable, so that at least one existing external examiner is involved with the assessment process with a newly appointed external examiner, to provide a degree of continuity.
12. Nominations<sup>1</sup> should be submitted to Academic Service ([extexam@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:extexam@abdn.ac.uk)) by 31 December for appointment in the following academic year (i.e. approximately nine months in advance of the academic year in which they would first serve. Nominations should be submitted on the appropriate proforma, and should be accompanied in all cases by a brief CV (2–3 pages) for the nominee.
13. If an external examiner's appointment is terminated prematurely, for whatever reason, before the end of the appointment, the Head of School must immediately nominate a replacement examiner.

## Appointment

14. Nominations for the appointment of external examiners submitted by Heads of School are scrutinised by the Dean of Quality Enhancement and Assurance. In approving or rejecting nominations, the Dean will monitor that the criteria for external examiners (*section 6 above*) are applied. Should nominations progress without all criteria being satisfied these will be reviewed by the Vice-Principal Education.
15. External examiners are appointed by the University Court.

16. Upon approval, Academic Services will send an offer of appointment to the external examiner. The offer is conditional on receipt of proof of appropriate right to work in the UK.
17. Examiners are sent information on their role by Academic Services.

### Fees and Expenses

18. Fees are paid after receipt of the Annual Report. Fees are subject to income tax and are paid by BACS to a nominated bank account on the last working day of the month. A payslip will also be sent by post.
19. All reasonable out-of-pocket expenses, including those incurred in relation to essential visits to the University, will be paid on production of a completed expenses claim form and the appropriate receipts. Expenses are not subject to income tax.
20. Examiners should refer to the [University's Expenses and Benefits Policy](#) for guidance on what constitutes 'reasonable expenses'.
21. The External Examiner Expenses Claim form can be downloaded from the University's [External Examining](#) webpages.

### Termination

22. In accordance with the requirements of the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the Senate has the power to recommend to the University Court that an external examiner's contract be terminated prematurely at any time if he/she does not fulfil the University's requirements. Reasons for termination might include: failure to return students' assessed work with comments within an acceptable period of time; unreasonable refusal to attend examiners' meetings or to participate by phone or video-conference when due notice has been given; persistent failure to provide written reports when requested by the University; failure to maintain appropriate levels of confidentiality regarding students and assessed material reviewed. In such circumstances, Heads of School should try to resolve the issue informally to ensure that the external examiner understands what is expected and to allow the appointment to continue to the benefit of all parties. If no resolution is possible, the Head of School should recommend in writing to the Vice-Principal Education that the appointment should be terminated, given reasons for the recommendation. If the recommendation is endorsed by the Vice-Principal Education, he/she will recommend to the Senate that the appointment be terminated. If the Senate endorses the recommendation, Senate will recommend termination of appointment to the University Court.

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• <sup>i</sup> [Nomination Form for External Examiners \(Undergraduate or Postgraduate Taught\)](#)