

University of Aberdeen
Academic Quality Handbook

Roles and Responsibilities of External Examiners

1. In line with the expectations of the QAA Quality Code, the primary role of an external examiner is to:
 - verify that the academic standards of the University's programmes and awards are appropriate and are being maintained, and that standards and student performance are comparable with that of other institutions;
 - the standards set for the University's awards and a programme's constituent courses are appropriate by reference to relevant national subject benchmark statements, the National Qualifications Frameworks, the relevant programme specification and, where appropriate, the requirements of relevant professional and statutory bodies;
 - that the assessment process is appropriate, fair and in line with institutional policies and practice;
 - that the assessment process is properly designed and applied, and is carried out in a manner that is fair and equitable to all students concerned as well as supportive of achieving the intended outcomes;
 - provide comment and recommendations on good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment and on opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided.
2. Schools and external examiners should use the opportunity afforded by the visits of external examiners to discuss the design, content and structure of the degree programme and its component courses. There should be an evaluation of the soundness of the assessment policies and procedures and their development as well as an evaluation of the standards of achievement. Feedback from external examiners on existing programmes should be gathered by all Schools, who should ensure that the matter is a standing item on their agendas for Examiners' Meetings. Schools should also discuss with external examiners the setting of their own standards, including any associated with professional and statutory bodies and how these standards are maintained and verified. Any comments or suggestions made by the external examiner should be discussed by the School and an explicit decision made about whether or not to introduce change, subject to approval by the University, where applicable.
3. Specifically, Schools should ask external examiners to comment on:
 - the design, structure and content of the degree programme and its constituent courses;
 - proposals for amendments to courses or programmes, including proposed revisions to the assessment procedures, before submitting these to the University's central committees for approval. (This would be particularly appropriate where changes were being proposed in response to comments from an external examiner);
 - the soundness and appropriateness of the assessment policies and procedures, and their development, and that the assessment processes are carried out in accordance with institutional regulations and procedures; external examiners should be encouraged to comment on the assessment process and the schemes for marking and classification. In some subjects participation in the devising of such schemes is essential.
 - the appropriateness of types of assessment for the subject, the students, the respective level of study;

- that the marking scheme/grading criteria have been properly and consistently applied, and whether internal marking is therefore of an appropriate standard, fair and reliable;
 - 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;
 - an evaluation of the standards of achievement.
4. External examiners may engage in discussions with schools at any stage during their appointment. Ideally, if time permitted, it would be appropriate to set aside a formal period for such discussions when an external examiner visited the University to attend an examiners' meeting.
 5. External examiners may often be able to give valuable advice to internal examiners, especially the inexperienced, either direct or through the Head of School. Any comments or suggestions made by an external examiner either informally during a visit to the University or in formal examiner meetings should be discussed by the School. The outcomes of such discussions should be included in the School's response to the external examiner's formal annual report, and should include whether or not the School has decided to introduce any changes (after approval by the University, where appropriate), and should give reasons if any suggestions will not be adopted.
 6. External examiners should inform the relevant Head of School immediately if any conflict of interest arises at any point during their appointment.
 7. External examiners are required to submit an annual report to the University.
 8. In order to fulfil these roles, external examiners should:
 - be familiar with the national subject benchmark statements for their subject and, where appropriate, the requirements of relevant professional and statutory bodies;
 - be provided with information on course and programme content and the University's assessment policies;
 - participate in the setting of summative assessments;
 - review a sufficient number and range of assessments to allow them to confirm the marks to be awarded to students;
 - moderate internal marks where appropriate;
 - participate in other assessment activities (e.g. clinical and oral examinations), where relevant;
 - comment and give advice on course and programme content, balance and structure, and on assessment processes;
 - formally comment on the appropriateness of the standards of the University's awards by completing annually an external examiner's report.
 9. In undertaking 1-8 above, external examiners, in conjunction with internal examiners, are required to approve the overall CGS Grades for courses and recommend the degree classification or postgraduate taught award, as appropriate. External examiners are expected to endorse the outcomes of the assessment *prior* to the confirmation of mark lists, pass lists or similar documents.
 10. External examiners are not necessarily involved in the award of non-honours degrees or diplomas or certificates that are purely governed by the University's regulations (i.e. those that are awarded on the achievement of the requisite number and level of credits following confirmation that a candidate has satisfied the regulatory requirements for the award of the qualification concerned). However, external examiners assure the overall standards of these awards by approving the overall CGS grades for the constituent courses, thereby confirming that a student has achieved the

requisite number of credits towards an award consistent with the National Qualifications Framework.

11. Normally, no degree of the University will be awarded without participation in the examining process by at least one external examiner, who should be a full member at the final examiners' meeting. At least one external examiner must be present at all final examiners' meetings.
12. Where an external examiner has a serious concern relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme or programmes and has exhausted all published applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the head of the degree-awarding body, he/she may invoke QAA's concerns scheme or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.