



## **ACADEMIC QUALITY ASSURANCE**

### **INFORMATION ON THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER SYSTEM**

**Academic Quality Unit**

# INFORMATION FOR SUBJECT EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

## Introduction

This booklet seeks to assist newly appointed academic external examiners in the execution of their duties and is produced by the Academic Quality Unit.

Please note that in line with QAA guidance, Course Teams will publish the name of the respective external examiner(s), their position and home institution together with a statement advising students that it is inappropriate for them to make direct contact with the external examiner. External examiners are asked to advise any student who does contact them directly, to contact the Academic Quality Unit at UCLan where they can obtain advice on the appropriate channels for taking forward their query.

Any comments and suggestions for improvement should be made to the Director of Academic Quality and Enhancement (Email: [eeexaminers@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:eeexaminers@uclan.ac.uk)).

The University's external examiner system is an integral and essential part of institutional quality assurance.

The University is responsible for the quality and standards of all academic awards made in its name. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the University can effectively discharge its responsibilities for the academic standards of awards and the quality of learning opportunities provided for students/apprentices, thereby ensuring that the programmes offered by the University are comparable to cognate provision offered elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The function of external examiners is to assist the University in discharging this responsibility. This document details the Institutional Policy on external examining and outlines related procedure. This document takes account of and aligns with the expectations of the Quality Assurance Agency's [UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024](#). Particular regard has been given to the principles for effective external examining agreed by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assurance (UKSCQA) in August 2022 [External Examining Principles](#); [External Examining - putting the principles into practice](#).

The External Examining Policy has been designed to ensure that the University's external examining arrangements are optimised to contribute to providing assurance of compliance with the [Office for Students ongoing conditions of registration](#), particularly B1, B2, B3, B4 and B5.

The policy and procedure will be kept under regular review to ensure it continues to function efficiently and effectively and is aligned with external reference points.

## **1. The Role of the External Examiner**

The Subject External Examiner is appointed to a course or cognate courses to provide assurance that standards and student achievement are in line with national frameworks and comparable to those at other UK Higher Education Institutions with which they are familiar. Subject External Examiners are primarily focused on the quality and standards of the courses they are appointed to. Subject External Examiners are required to verify assessment and moderate work, and to sign off marks prior to the Course Assessment Board. They have the opportunity to feed into the Course Assessment Board or raise concerns directly with the Chief External Examiner ahead of the Board.

## **2. The Duties of an External Examiner**

- a) To approve the form and content of all proposed examination and re-assessment examination papers and for this to be recorded.
- b) To review a sample of briefs for course work/practical assignments/dissertation proposals selected from all briefs made available electronically by the School;  
[NB: External examiners are entitled to review an amended assessment brief on request if substantial changes were suggested in external verification.]
- c) To scrutinise a representative sample of examination scripts, coursework/dissertations, and where applicable practical work, and provide confirmation of whether marking is in accordance with the stated criteria and weightings and identifying any issues
- d) To sign off marks prior to the Course Assessment Board or raise concerns directly with the Chief External Examiner ahead of the Board;
- e) To provide assurance that the assessment process is consistently applied and measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the university's policies and regulations and in line with OfS Condition of Registration B4;
- f) To comment on the quality and standards of the courses in relation to the national standards and frameworks, with particular reference to OfS Condition of Registration B5, and comment on the reasonable comparability of standards set at other UK providers with whom the examiner has experience;
- g) To provide assurance that the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK degree awarding bodies of which the external examiner has experience;
- h) As appropriate to the programme participate in clinical and/or practical-based assessments.
- i) To engage with course teams to ensure that the content and context of teaching and assessment is appropriately inclusive and responsive to the needs of the cohort;
- j) To engage with students to enable them to understand the value and purpose of external examining, and to attain their views, as mediated and arranged by the institution in such a way as to protect impartiality;
- k) To comment on good practice and make recommendations for enhancement to inform the continuous improvement of courses.
- l) To submit written reports to the University at least on an annual basis in line with UCLan policy. If the examiner is appointed to both undergraduate and postgraduate courses, the external examiner will be required to submit two separate reports following the relevant Assessment

Boards);

- m) To advise the course team, when requested, on proposals for module and course amendments for the modules and courses to which they are appointed;
- n) To undertake other reasonable duties negotiated with the School, including but not limited to review of Recognition of Prior Learning and review of proposed articulation arrangements.

## **2.1. Approving forms of assessment (verification of assessment)**

The Subject External Examiner(s) must verify the form and content of all examination papers for every module which contributes to an award, and this must be recorded. External Examiner verification of examination papers and re- assessment examination papers should be undertaken at the same time and must be completed before the examination is sat.

All briefs for coursework/practical assignments for modules which contribute to an award must be made available for review by the subject external examiner. Subject external examiners should comment on and approve all class tests, practical assessments and coursework elements that contribute 40% or more to the mark for any module of study contributing to the final award. Schools should provide a response to external examiners on any suggested amendments to papers or other assessments.

In undertaking their duties it is recommended that external examiners should seek to ensure that:

- Assessments are appropriate to the level of study.
- They enable learners to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes.
- They cover the subject content appropriately.
- They are accessible and fair, so that all learners have equal opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes.

## **2.2. External moderation**

External moderation is normally required for all assessments at level five or above contributing to classification of an award, based upon a representative sample of work as outlined below. External approval is not normally required for level three/foundation year assessments, or assessments that do not contribute to the classification of an award.

The Academic Quality Unit may however determine that external moderation is required from levels 3 or 4 based on assessment of risk in which case this will be communicated clearly to the subject external examiner and the School in writing on appointment or should such a judgement be made during their tenure.

Such circumstances may include:--

- Provision at a new collaborative partner (International/UK)
- A new subject domain for UCLan
- A new subject domain for a partner institution
- Delivery in foreign language
- Provision at a new UCLan campus
- Where an interim review raises concerns/recommendations
- All Degree apprenticeships
- Where required by a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body
- If significant concerns have been raised by the external examiner
- By request of the School

External moderation should consist of a confirmation that the assessment criteria for every element of assessment have been correctly and accurately applied to a representative sample.

## **2.3 Sampling requirements**

The minimum requirement for moderation samples for both internal and external moderation purposes is set at 10% of all work submitted for a particular element of assessment and the sample must include all fails, all firsts and at least 3 pieces of work from each of the other classification boundaries. If there are fewer than 3 pieces of work within a classification boundary all work within that boundary should be made available.

Where work has been submitted at multiple delivery sites (e.g. at a UCLan campus and a partner institution), at least 3 pieces of work from each classification boundary produced at each delivery site must be included in the sample in addition to all firsts and fails. If there are fewer than 3 pieces of work within a classification boundary produced from one site of delivery all work within that boundary produced at the site of delivery should be made available as part of the overall sample.

Where student numbers are 10 or below all work should be made available.

The minimum requirement for moderation samples is set to enable the moderator to assure themselves that marking is robust and appropriate. There is no expectation that all work made available is reviewed but scrutiny should ensure that

- a) Grade banding is appropriate
- b) Fails are genuine fails
- c) Firsts are genuine firsts
- d) Judgements on borderline marks are appropriate
- e) Marking is consistent and appropriate between delivery sites (work should be viewed from each site and compared to others)

The subject External Examiner must be given access to all work if requested.

External examiners may recommend reconsideration of the level of marking across student cohorts or across individual assessment components. Should this be the case, the Chief External Examiner should be informed and may advise. External examiners should not be required or invited to make recommendations on, or change the marks of individual students/apprentices.

Should the Subject External Examiner identify significant concerns with the assessment process that are not remedied fully and promptly by the School, they should inform the Chief External Examiner. The Chief External Examiner has the right to request access to moderation samples across the school/subject area in order to undertake their own scrutiny and raise issues as appropriate.

## **3. External Examiners Appointed to Collaborative Awards**

Collaborative provision denotes educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award, of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation.

A subject external examiner appointed to a course (or a cognate group of courses) is responsible for it at all sites of delivery. One report is required by the subject external examiner covering all sites of delivery although the report should make clear where comments relate to a particular site of delivery.

The external examiner appointed to a course operating at the University campus will automatically assume responsibility for the course franchised to partner institutions both in the UK and overseas. No formal extension is therefore required to cover newly franchised courses.

## **4. The Responsibilities of the University**

### **Academic Quality Unit**

On appointment, the University's Academic Quality Unit will provide the external examiner with

- A copy of the Academic Regulations
- Details of their Fees and Expenses
- A copy of the Programme Specification
- The last Course Review Process action plan
- The last Annual Report from the previous external examiner

The Academic Quality Unit is also responsible for:

- Organising compulsory online induction training for External Examiners
- issuing annual guidelines for the content, structure and submission of reports
- issuing guidelines for the level and payment of fees and expenses.
- issuing revisions to University Academic regulations.
- drawing attention where appropriate to significant issues raised in external examiners' Annual Reports.
- Ensuring that all reasonable adjustments are made for external examiners where appropriate

The Academic Quality Unit will communicate to external examiners any significant changes to relevant policy and regulations. This may include further online modules which external examiners should access as part of their duties.

### **The UCLan School**

Schools should maintain regular contact with External Examiners throughout their appointment in order to ensure that they have everything required to complete their duties.

A clear timetable of activity should be agreed with the external examiner in advance including the external examiner's availability during assessment cycles.

The following should be provided at the beginning of each academic year:-

- a. Details of the timings when verification and moderation materials will be made available to external examiners;
- b. Details of marking schemes and assessment rubrics;
- c. Module information packs (where applicable);
- d. Details of opportunities to meet staff;
- e. Details of opportunities to meet with students/apprentices;
- f. Details of meetings with mentors/assessors where practice assessments are part of the course.

The following should be made available in a timely way, in line with the timescales indicated at the beginning of the academic year:-

- a. Verification materials.
- b. Moderation materials
- c. Any proposed changes to the assessment of any module or unit of study contributing to the final award, for comment.

The academic School is responsible for ensuring that verification and moderation materials are shared via an agreed and secure electronic platform.

The instructions accompanying batches of student work should always be clear and comprehensive and the format agreed with the external examiner in advance. The nature of the examination tasks should be clearly identified with specific details and timing of the action required of the external examiner at each stage.

## **5. Serious Concerns**

Should a subject external examiner have serious concerns arising from the assessment process which put at risk the standards of the University or any relevant external awarding body, these should be raised with the Chief External Examiner in the first instance for further investigation and discussion with the School.

External examiners 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, including details of any action that will be taken as a result.

If 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 internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor, they may invoke QAA's concerns scheme or inform any relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/how-to-make-a-complaint>

The University has the right to reject the view of an external examiner, but will only proceed on this basis following careful consideration of the issues raised.

## **6. The External Examiner's Annual Report**

External Examiners are required to formalise their comments, to make an annual written report and to provide an evaluative overview of the module(s) and course(s).

The payment of fees to external examiners is conditional on the receipt of an annual report.

In the case of non-receipt by the deadline, the Academic Quality Unit will contact the external examiner. Non submission of a report may result in the termination of the external examiner's appointment in line with Section 10 of this document.

- a) Prior to the assessment period, the Academic Quality Unit will provide a link to the online proforma for the annual report, and other relevant information on claiming fees and expenses.
- b) It is the normal expectation that the online report be submitted within four weeks of the date of the main assessment board for the courses(s), in line with the following deadlines:
  - 15 July: Undergraduate
  - 30 September: Postgraduate
  - 30 April: Courses commencing in March with 52 weeks teaching

Advice should be sought from the Academic Quality Unit should a course run outside of standard academic calendar variants/start dates.

Fee/expense claim should be completed on the fee/expense claim form provided and submitted via e-mail to [eeexaminers@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:eeexaminers@uclan.ac.uk).

- c) The online report proforma, along with detailed guidance on completion of the report can be downloaded from the Academic Quality Unit website:  
<https://www.uclan.ac.uk/legal/academic-quality>

Please note that the University does not encourage the submission of joint reports from external examiners and prefers independent views to be expressed.

- d) In accordance with the recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, the full external examiner reports must be shared as a matter of course with students. In view of this, Schools will arrange for the full report and the good practice identified to be shared with students electronically, and that Schools will make it clear to students the mechanisms through which External Examiner reports are made available.
- e) Where an external examiner is appointed to both undergraduate and postgraduate courses, the University will require two separate reports to be completed following the relevant Assessment Boards.
- f) If external examiners make comments that are specific to a particular course at a particular Partner Institution/Campus, they must ensure that they clearly identify which Partner Institution/Campus and which course their comments relate to.
- g) When completing the report, external examiners must not identify individual students or staff by name in their reports, provide information or commentary that could reasonably lead to the identification of individuals, or alter the format of the report templates in any way.
- h) Under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2005 the University is required to publish all information (not covered by exemption) if requested. It may, therefore, be necessary for the institution to disclose the contents of the external examiner annual report.
- i) Students can request a copy of any comments made on their scripts or any reports made by external examiners on their work and if requested, the University will be required to provide this information. External examiner reports are sometimes requested by external organisations, professional bodies etc. and will be a standing item on the agenda of Assessment Boards.

## **7. University of Central Lancashire External Examiner Fees**

- a) The annual fee is determined according to approved University rates and will be advised to the external examiner upon appointment. The annual fee covers all the duties undertaken by an external examiner in that academic year but will be forfeited if an annual report is not submitted as requested.
- b) The University will reimburse the cost of travel and subsistence at the approved rates, notified annually, and will provide overnight accommodation, if required, at approved hotels. (Arrangements for overnight stays will be made by the appropriate School staff, normally Secretary to the Assessment Board.) It is expected that under normal circumstances examiners will be required to visit the University to attend the final assessment board and that other regular communication will occur remotely via appropriate online platforms, and correspondence.



**PLEASE NOTE:** External examiner fee payments are not automatically generated upon receipt of your report. Each year an Ad-Hoc claim form for your Fee and Expenses must be submitted to the Academic Quality Unit ([eeexaminers@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:eeexaminers@uclan.ac.uk)) within six months of submission of your annual report. A link to the Ad-hoc claim form can be found here <https://www.uclan.ac.uk/legal/academic-quality>.

## 8. Proposed Period of Tenure

- a) The period of tenure should allow the external examiner to be associated in all aspects of assessment, including the drafting of examination papers and involvement in resit examinations and will normally be for five years. Extensions by one year are approved by exception only to ensure continuity.
- b) For courses, which cover the normal academic year (September - August), appointments will commence in October and terminate in September. For courses, which have boards that take place after September but before December, appointments will commence in January and terminate in December.
- c) The periods of tenure will normally overlap where several external examiners have been appointed to the same programme to ensure continuity of standards.

## 9. Resignation

An external examiner may terminate their appointment for any reason, in which case they should write to the Director of Academic Quality and Enhancement ([eeexaminers@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:eeexaminers@uclan.ac.uk)), and Dean of School. The external examiner must give no less than three months' notice when terminating their appointment as specified in the External Examiner Contract. The University encourages external examiners, where appropriate, to provide a reason for their resignation so this can be monitored at an institutional level and any trends identified.

## 10. Termination of Contract

The contract of appointment for external examiners may be terminated on any of the following grounds:

- a. Where attendance is required - failure to attend a final Assessment Board without good cause. The University recognises that Schools must give sufficient advance warning of the dates of final Assessment Boards so that external examiners are able to confirm their attendance and carry out their responsibilities;
- b. the examiner fails to submit an annual report by the deadline determined by the University, or submits an incomplete report;
- c. an unresolvable conflict of interest develops. If the circumstances of an external examiner change after they have been appointed in such a way that a conflict of interest might arise (e.g. a change in employment), they should notify the University of this change where an assessment of the continuation of appointment will be undertaken;
- d. Where the University no longer requires the services of an External Examiner for academic reasons, for example, because of withdrawal/suspension of a course/lack of recruitment to the provision appointed to, or changes in programme structure which render the appointment no longer

applicable;

- e. Failure to maintain appropriate levels of confidentiality regarding students/apprentices and assessed material;
- f. Failure to undertake the external examiner duties to the satisfaction of the University by providing inadequate scrutiny of proposed assessment tools and/or assessment outcomes and/or an unacceptable delay in corresponding with Course/Subject Teams on matters concerning examinations and assessment;
- g. Conduct deemed unprofessional or inappropriate and/or meeting commonly understood grounds for gross misconduct;
- h. Irretrievable breakdown of the relationship with the course team such as to disadvantage students /apprentices on the course.

## **11. Privacy Notice**

The University recognises the importance of the protection of personal data. For information on how your data may be processed please see [the privacy notice](#).

## **12. Travelling to the University**

Detailed and up to date information on travelling to the University can be found on the University's web pages: [How to Find Us](#).