

# External Examiner Procedures

This document relates to external examining of taught programmes.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document is intended to clarify the role of external examiners at the University of Southampton. It sets out the University's expectations, provides further information on policies and procedures, signposts relevant University ordinances and regulations, and indicates the kind of support external examiners may expect. It is also designed to ensure that external examiners appointed by the University are appropriately qualified and in a position to provide informative comment and recommendations in line with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)'s UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Advice and Guidance, [External Expertise](#).

## 2. Contacting the University

- 2.1 Administration of external examining (taught programmes) is overseen by the Quality Standards and Accreditation Team (QSAT) in the Office of the Academic Registrar. Queries relating to the University's quality management framework, external examiner appointments and terms of contract should be addressed in the first instance to:

Quality, Standards and Accreditation Team

University of Southampton

Highfield Campus, Building 37

Southampton, SO17 1BJ

Email: [external.examiners@soton.ac.uk](mailto:external.examiners@soton.ac.uk)

- 2.2 Queries about academic issues, examination papers, dates of Board of Examiners meetings, accessing online systems and payment of fees and expenses, should be addressed to the nominated contact in the School.

### **3. The role of an external examiner**

- 3.1 External examiners are responsible, through the appropriate School Programmes Committee (SPC) and Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee (AQSS), to Senate. All external examiners must be formally appointed to the role and sign an appointment letter prior to the commencement of their role.
- 3.2 The primary role of an external examiner is:
- 3.2.1 to assist the University in ensuring that the standard of its awards is maintained at the appropriate level in accordance with the framework for higher education qualifications and the relevant national subject benchmarks;
  - 3.2.2 to assist the University in ensuring that its assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in accordance with the University's policies and regulations;
  - 3.2.3 to assist the University in ensuring that the academic standards and achievement of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which the external examiner has experience;
  - 3.2.4 to assist the University in enhancing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by advising on good practice identified within the University and beyond.

3.3 External examiners' reports are an important aspect of the quality assurance and enhancement processes operated by the University. The University views the external examiner system in general and external examiners' reports in particular as key mechanisms for the management of academic standards and reflection on the quality of the student learning experience.

#### 4. Programmes requiring external examiners

4.1 The University requires that an external examiner is appointed for every programme which leads to an award of the University (including education partnerships). An external examiner is not required for any provision which does not contribute to an award.

4.2 No credit bearing degree, diploma or certificate of the University may be awarded without participation in the examining process by at least one external examiner, who is a full member of the relevant [Board of Examiners](#).

4.3 In making recommendations for the appointment of external examiners, Schools should ensure that the number and subject expertise of the external examiners is sufficient to cover the volume and range of the programmes being examined and the associated assessments. It may in certain and exceptional circumstances be appropriate to appoint an *Adviser to the External Examiner* for a particular module – see paragraph 4.7 for more information.

4.4 The size of the external examining team should be such that each external examiner has a reasonable and broadly equitable workload in terms of modules/subject areas covered and student numbers for each. Occasionally the appointment of one external examiner to a subject area will be sufficient. When considering an external examiner's module allocation, the Deputy Head of School (Education)/Director of Programmes should ensure that the number of modules allocated, and the potential number of students is not too

onerous. In order to determine an external examiner's workload for the University's flat fee of £700, the amount of moderation that is required to be undertaken by each external examiner should also be taken into account.

4.5 The following factors are likely to influence the amount of moderation required:

- credit rating of the module/student assessment workload;
- the typical number of students enrolled for a module in any one cohort;
- the number of times (occurrences) per academic year in which a module is delivered;
- the extent of the education partnership(s).

4.6 The maximum number of examinable modules that will typically be allocated to a single external examiner will be 24 modules (assuming 15 (CATS) credit modules i.e. 360 credits in total).

4.7 In certain and exceptional circumstances, it may be appropriate to appoint an *Adviser to the External Examiner*. This will be in addition to a programme external examiner(s) to assure a particular part of a programme. For instance, where a specialist module falls outside what can reasonably be expected to be within the expertise of the external examiner or a standalone module used across a range of other programmes. Examples include credit-bearing language modules, Service Teaching modules or a module with a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) accreditation e.g. Advance HE accreditation.

## 5. Education Partnership requirements

5.1 All [external partnerships](#) must be the subject of scrutiny by an external examiner(s). The University is responsible for the appointment of external examiners for all credit bearing programmes leading to its awards, even where these programmes are delivered by a partner; the University will determine in discussion with such partners the extent to which they will be involved in aspects of the external examining process (for example, nominations and induction). For joint awards the arrangements for such appointments will be set out in the Memorandum of Agreement.

## **6. Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) requirements**

6.1 The Deputy Head of School (Education) is responsible for ensuring that specific requirements in relation to external examining which may be stipulated by relevant Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) are satisfied.

## **7. Period of appointment**

7.1 External examiners are normally appointed for a period of four years but may be appointed for shorter periods as recommended by the School. Appointments for one year or less are discouraged as it is important to have continuity over a number of years.

7.2 Exceptionally, for example where a programme has closed and an external examiner is required for one further year only, a case may be made for the appointment to be extended to an absolute maximum of five years.

## **8. Criteria for appointment of external examiners**

8.1 The University applies the following criteria for the appointment of external examiners, informed by the [QAA Quality Code's Advice and Guidance: External Expertise](#). In accordance with the criteria for appointment:

## Person specification

- a. External examiners should normally be able to show evidence of the following:
  - (i) knowledge and understanding of UK Higher Education sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
  - (ii) competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study or parts thereof;
  - (iii) relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate;
  - (iv) competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures;
  - (v) 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;
  - (vi) familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award which is to be assessed;
  - (vii) fluency in English, and, where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, 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);
  - (viii) meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies;

- (ix) awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula;
- (x) competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

### **Conflicts of interest**

- b. The University does not appoint as an external examiner anyone in the following categories or circumstances:
  - (i) a member of a governing body or committee of the University, or a current employee of the University;
  - (ii) a member of a governing body of a partner, or a current employee of a partner who has responsibility in the same (or a closely cognate) disciplinary area as the partnership arrangement;
  - (iii) anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study;
  - (iv) anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study;
  - (v) anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study;
  - (vi) 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;

- (vii) former staff or students of the institution unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s);
- (viii) a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution;
- (ix) the succession of an external examiner by a colleague from the external examiner's home department and institution;
- (x) the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution.

### **Terms of office**

- c. 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.
  - d. External examiners should normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes at any one point in time.
- 8.2 In exceptional cases, arrangements can be made to allow external examiners to suspend their term of office for up to one year, for example for health or maternity reasons. The maximum term of office includes any periods of suspension.
- 8.3 It is a requirement that the team of external examiners for a programme collectively has the full range of qualifications, experience and expertise specified in the [QAA Quality Code's Advice and Guidance](#). External examiners from outside the higher education system, for example, from industry or the professions, may be appointed where their knowledge and/or experience is appropriate to their programme of study and ensuring that they are provided with a detailed induction and support.



- 8.4 An external examiner who has no previous experience as an external examiner for any institution will normally be appointed to serve as a member of a team of external examiners. Where such an arrangement is not feasible, the first-time external examiner will normally be mentored by an experienced external examiner from the same School.
- 8.5 In cases where an external examiner does not fulfil all the relevant criteria, they will be provided with an enhanced induction by the relevant School.
- 8.6 The University does not consider that the prior involvement of an external examiner in the development or approval of a programme necessarily involves a conflict of interest; however, in such instances, consideration should be given to whether there are grounds for believing that their independence has been compromised.

## **9. Nomination and appointment of external examiners**

- 9.1 Ordinance 7.3 paragraph 4 states that 'External Examiners shall be appointed by the Senate on the recommendation of the School concerned'. Senate has delegated this responsibility to SPCs, with annual reporting to AQSS.
- 9.2 The approval of external examiner(s) for new programmes should take place in the academic year prior to the start of the programme. For existing programmes, it should take place in the year prior to the current external examiner completing his/her term of office. External examiners should normally be in post for the annual start of the programmes they are responsible for. Wherever possible a short crossover period at the end of the current examiner's appointment and start of the new examiner's appointment is encouraged to support the new external examiner in the role.

- 9.3 The Programme Lead or Director of Programmes is responsible for identifying a preferred nominee to act as external examiner and arranges for a [Nomination Form](#) to be completed as follows:
- 9.3.1 **Part I** (boxes 1-5) to be completed by the Curriculum and Quality Assurance (CQA) Team with the Programme Lead or Director of Programmes.
  - 9.3.2 **Part II** (boxes 6-15) to be completed by the proposed external examiner.
  - 9.3.3 **Part III** (boxes 16-18) to be completed by the Programme Lead or Director of Programmes.
- 9.4 The Programme Lead or Director of Programmes should forward the *Nomination Form* to the Deputy Head of School (Education) for approval. Nominations are considered in relation to the selection criteria listed above. If the nomination is to be approved **Part IV** should be completed by the Deputy Head of School (Education) on behalf of the SPC.
- 9.5 Occasionally, the Programme Lead or Director of Programmes may wish to nominate an individual who may not fully meet the selection criteria. In these instances, the Programme Lead or Director of Programmes should set out clearly the rationale for doing so in box 17 on the [Nomination Form](#). Information must be provided on the [Nomination Form](#) about the additional induction and support which will be put in place as required. The nomination will not be processed unless this information has been provided.
- 9.6 Where a School can provide evidence that the pool of potential external examiners is restricted, exceptions may, very occasionally, become unavoidable. Any case requiring exceptional approval must be made in box 17 of the [Nomination Form](#). The exception will require approval by the Vice President (Education).

9.7 The Deputy Head of School (Education), on behalf of SPC, will inform the Programme Lead or Director of Programmes if the nomination has been approved by the School and forward to the CQA Team. The CQA Team will complete the checklist at the end of the form and send to QSAT. QSAT will review the nomination on behalf of the Chair of AQSS, request any outstanding information from the CQA Team and complete **Part V**. Once approved QSAT will verify eligibility to work in the UK, where applicable (see next section), and issue a letter of appointment on behalf of Senate. No work can be undertaken by an external examiner prior to the receipt of the signed letter of appointment by the University. The signed letter of appointment constitutes the formal contract between the University and the external examiner. All approved external examiner appointments are reported to SPC by the Deputy Head of School (Education).

## 10. Right to Work in the UK

10.1 There are commitments on employers to ensure that staff are eligible to work in the UK [Preventing illegal working: guidance for employers](#). All external examiners who are appointed to undergraduate programmes must provide proof of their eligibility to work in the UK and this will be verified prior to appointment. The HMRC currently places no requirements on external examiners of postgraduate programmes (taught or research). All new UG external examiners will need to undertake a right to work check prior to a letter of appointment being sent and any work being undertaken on behalf of the University.

10.2 These checks can be done in two ways;

### Remote digital check

10.3 If you have a current passport or Irish passport card, you have the option to have a remote digital check, removing the need for you to have your original documents checked in-person. If you choose this

option, you will be sent a secure link for you to verify your document. Once you have completed your steps, you will be invited to attend a mandatory Teams video call to confirm identity, which completes the check.

### **In-person check**

- 10.4 You will need to bring in your original right to work document(s) and have these checked in-person by a University member of staff. This will normally be your passport but you can explore all acceptable documents via the GOV.UK Right to work checklist (copies will not be accepted).
- 10.5 International visa/permission holders can undertake a Home Office Online right to work check. Further information is available on the [University website](#).

## **11. University induction**

- 11.1 University induction is via an online [External Examiner Information site](#) which is where external examiners will find all the initial information required at an institutional level.
- 11.2 The following documents are provided via the [External Examiner Information](#) site:
- all course description documents/programmes specifications;
  - level and classification descriptors;
  - the University's examination, progression and classification regulations;
  - the University's Assessment Framework;
  - information about completing the external examiner's report, and a link to the report [template](#);

- 11.3 New external examiners will be sent a link to the site in their letter of appointment and asked to familiarise themselves with the content. The site includes a section on support for new and first-time external examiners.

## **12. Preparing external examiners to undertake the role**

- 12.1 QSAT will inform the Deputy Head of School (Education) or their nominee as soon as the appointment has been confirmed, and request that they arrange for the Programme Lead/Director of Programmes to induct the external examiner.
- 12.2 The Programme Lead/Director of Programmes are responsible for ensuring that external examiners are briefed on:
- the relevant reference points for the programmes they are examining;
  - the assessment procedures and the requirements of the programmes;
  - the evidence that can be made available to enable the necessary oversight;
  - the arrangements for communication with internal examiners and others involved in teaching and learning (including placement providers/assessors);
  - the arrangements for the provision of samples of student work;
  - the arrangements for moderation;
  - the arrangements for external examiners' to confirm marking criteria and standards are appropriate and applied consistently.

- 12.3 The induction should include:

- a meeting or conversation between the external examiner and the Programme Lead/Director of Programmes (which can be done via email, an online meeting or in person) to set out:

### **Programme Specific Information**

- an introduction to Faculty/School procedures related to the programmes being examined;
- any School/programme-specific regulations where exemptions/variations from the University standard regulations have been approved;
- context and philosophy of the programme(s)
- assessment criteria and procedures
- content and structure of the programme and constituent modules;
- the relevant [course description documents/programmes specifications](#) and module profiles;
- relevant national subject benchmarks
- the implementation of the University's [marking and moderation policies](#) (see 13.8);

### **Administrative Information**

- the [previous external examiner's last report](#) (in the first year only);
- confirmation of dates of Board of Examiners' meetings;
- a timetable/schedule of the examining process;

- any other quality assurance materials that the external examiner may request;
- confirmation that the external examiner has access to systems required for the conduct of external examining duties<sup>1</sup>.

## **Mentoring and Shadowing**

12.4 Mentors, if appointed, will offer guidance on any aspect of the role of external examiner, depending on the needs of the individual including:

- external and internal reference points in making a judgement about the appropriateness of academic standards and student achievement;
- feedback on draft examination papers and other forms of assessment e.g. coursework;
- reviewing samples of student work;
- providing advice and feedback to the programme team and the Board of Examiners, as appropriate;
- reporting requirements and guidance on writing an annual report;
- general information and advice about current issues in HE that are relevant to external examining.

12.5 There is no requirement for face-to-face meetings between a mentor and mentee although, where appropriate, the external examiners

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<sup>1</sup> Responsibility for facilitating access to systems will be coordinated across Professional Services colleagues, but normally undertaken by the SAAA Administration and Assessment Team.

concerned are encouraged to use the opportunity provided by attendance at the Board of Examiners for this purpose.

### **13. Overview of external examiner responsibilities**

#### **Draft examination papers**

- 13.1 External examiners should approve the form and content of draft examination papers, coursework and other assignments that count towards the award in order to ensure that all students will be assessed fairly in relation to the objectives, syllabus and regulations for the programme and will reach the required standard. The external examiner may also ask to be involved in the approval of any other assessment tasks.
- 13.2 In some subjects, it may be essential for model answers to be provided and scrutinised by the external examiner. The external examiner should be given feedback as to how their comments on draft assessment material have been taken into consideration, and whether changes have been made as a result.

#### **Review of student work**

- 13.3 An external examiner has the right to see all assignments, examination scripts, projects, dissertations and other student work that contributes to an award, including seminar/ presentation work.
- 13.4 The Programme Team must agree at an early stage with the external examiner the basis on which the selection of the students' work will be made and provided. The guiding principle should be that external examiners must have enough evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and are consistent. The sample should include a range of work awarded the highest marks, fail marks, and work in each class of the award and may include some of the work of borderline candidates. It must be



agreed with the external examiner how they will engage with assessment such as practice-based learning, performance, presentations etc. For clarity these arrangements should be confirmed in writing by the School and should be re-visited with the external examiner annually.

- 13.5 Samples of students' work being sent to the external examiner must be shared using a secure method of transmission. The University's recommended method for sending documents securely is SafeSend - <https://safesend.soton.ac.uk/>. Email should not be used to share students' work with external examiners.
- 13.6 External examiners should compare the performance of students with that of students on comparable programmes elsewhere of which they have experience.
- 13.7 External examiners must not be directly involved in marking. All Schools are required to have in place documented mechanisms to resolve cases of disagreement between internal markers, and these should be followed. If, exceptionally, the external examiner is asked to comment on an individual case where these mechanisms have not led to a resolution, the final decision in such cases must remain with the Board of Examiners.

### **Duties outside of the EE responsibility**

- 13.8 External examiners are asked to note that University policy is that internal marking standards are scrutinised and monitored by means of moderation of a sample (independent academic scrutiny of marks awarded, on a sample basis, to verify that the marks awarded are appropriate and consistent in relation to the relevant assessment criteria) rather than by [double marking](#). If the moderator has concerns about the marking standards of the sample, arrangements should be made for the marks for all the work for the specific assessment item to be reviewed. Where this occurs the outcome should be documented

and communicated to the [Boards of Examiners for Taught Programmes](#).

13.9 External examiners may not change marks or degree classifications for individual candidates. Rather their role is to confirm that marking criteria and marking standards are appropriate and are being applied appropriately and consistently. If an external examiner disagrees with the standards of marking for assessed work within a sample, they may request further action such as:

- additional marking of all the student work within the group; or
- additional marking of the work of all students taking the affected examination or piece of work; or
- moderation of the marks of all the students taking the affected examination or piece of work; or
- adjustment of marks for all students taking the affected examination or piece of work.

13.10 External examiners do not have any role in individual student cases involving Special Considerations or breaches of academic integrity; their role in such cases is to ensure that the [Regulations Governing Academic Responsibility and Conduct](#) and the [Regulations Governing Special Consideration](#) are applied fairly and consistently. As such decisions affect the remit of an examination board, external examiners can expect to be informed of any applicable regulations or procedures. They can also expect to be informed of any decisions affecting a module result or a progression/award decision.

### **Attendance at Boards of Examiners**

13.11 External examiners are required to be present at all relevant Boards of Examiners' meetings at which decisions on recommendations for awards are made on the programme(s) in which they are involved.

Virtual attendance by the external examiner, using a University of Southampton approved platform such as Microsoft Teams, is considered as being 'in attendance' at the Board of Examiners meeting. See Section 14 Participation in Boards of Examiners' meetings for further information.

- 13.12 External examiners are usually expected to visit the relevant University campus for their programme annually. This will normally be to attend the meeting of the Board of Examiners but may be at other times during the year if they attend the Board of Examiners meeting virtually. During these visits, external examiners will be asked to consider samples of assessment, meet students and the programme team.

#### **14. Participation in Boards of Examiners' meetings**

- 14.1 The University's Policy and Procedures for [Boards of Examiners for Taught Programmes](#) sets out the University's policy on the membership, attendance, responsibilities and operation of Boards of Examiners for taught programmes. It includes information about the key roles involved in the operation of the Board, the standard agenda to be followed and issues to be considered by all Boards of Examiners. Virtual attendance by the external examiner, using a University of Southampton approved platform such as Microsoft Teams, is considered as being 'in attendance' at the Board of Examiners meeting.
- 14.2 As a key part of the process for monitoring standards of performance the external examiner will have a role in commenting on module assessment data. This is facilitated through the use of a standard agenda for Boards of Examiners and programme statistical information that will be considered by Boards of Examiners.
- 14.3 If an external examiner **exceptionally** cannot attend a meeting of the Board of Examiners in person or virtually, this shall be reported in

advance to Faculty Education and Student Experience Subcommittee and the Committee shall agree and note the alternative arrangements through which the external examiner will exercise their responsibilities to the Board – for example by submission of a written report in advance of the meeting. In cases of emergency, or where there is not a Faculty Education and Student Experience Subcommittee scheduled before the Board of Examiners, the arrangements may be agreed by the Associate Dean (Education) as Chair of the Faculty Education and Student Experience Subcommittee. In those **exceptional** cases where it has been agreed that the external examiner will exercise their responsibilities at the Board through other means, the Board of Examiners must receive, and record in the minutes, clear evidence of the views of the external examiner on the appropriateness of marking standards. The minutes should also record when the Faculty Education and Student Experience Subcommittee/Associate Dean (Education) agreed the alternative arrangements for the external examiner

- 14.4 If a programme is delivered in partnership with a partner or at different campuses, external examiners should specifically highlight if they have any issues or concerns related to comparability of student performance or experience arising specifically from this delivery.

## **15. Fees and expenses**

- 15.1 The fee paid to all external examiners appointed to undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes is a flat fee of £700. The fee will be paid on receipt of the annual report(s).
- 15.2 External examiners are normally appointed to programmes or groups of programmes, and there are no additional payments to the flat fee. Schools should undertake an annual review of work allocation which aims to ensure a reasonable and fair distribution of work and

as a result, the responsibilities of an external examiner may change from year to year.

- 15.3 The fee to be paid to an external examiner is set out in the letter of appointment. The Faculty/School will remind external examiners to submit their claim for their fee and any expenses incurred each year. The appropriate claim form for fees and expenses should be completed and returned as soon as possible after the Board of Examiners' meeting, and no later than three months after the date of the meeting.
- 15.4 Different payment methods are in place for undergraduate and postgraduate taught external examiners due to HM Revenue & Customs' requirements and this is explained in the letter of appointment. The undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes claim forms are available on the [External Examiner Information site](#).
- 15.5 External examiners can reclaim fees and the costs of travelling or out of pocket expenses where they were agreed by the University in advance of the expenditure being incurred. All travelling and out of pocket expenses must be in line with the University's [Finance Regulations, Policies and Procedures](#). Information on common areas of spend relating to travel and expenses is available on the [allowable expenses page](#). It includes guidance about the information, original itemised receipts and supporting documents required when making a claim. It is the responsibility of the CQA Team or the Assessment and Admin Team to make sure that the external examiner has all of the information that they require before expenditure is made.
- 15.6 Details of these costs and subsistence and other expenses should be shown on the claim form provided; subsistence expenses will be reimbursed provided details are shown and receipts submitted.

Further guidance on claiming for travel and other expenses incurred is available on the [External Examiner Information site](#).

- 15.7 Claim forms can be sent in hard copy or electronically to the CQA Team in the Faculty who will arrange payment. The University requires external examiners to submit original, scanned or electronic receipts to support their claim for any travel and/or subsistence costs.
- 15.8 Payment of undergraduate external examiner claims for fees and expenses will be paid on the last working day of each month through the University's payroll into the external examiner's bank account. Following receipt of fully completed claim forms by the CQA Team, the deadline for completed claims to be approved by the Faculty and sent to Payroll are published under [Payroll and HR pay timetables](#). Due to the cut off dates, external examiners may have to wait up to two months before receiving payment.
- 15.9 Payment of postgraduate taught external examiner claims will be made following receipt into Accounts Payable of a fully completed and approved claim form. Payment runs are completed weekly and will be processed in order of receipt. Standard Payment terms are 30 days from date of claim.

## **16. External examiners' reports**

- 16.1 External examiners are required to submit an annual written report, using the approved [University template](#).
- 16.2 External examiners are asked to write one report for the cluster of programmes at the same level for which they examine and to highlight where comments relate to a specific programme within that cluster. Separate reports for undergraduate and postgraduate level programmes are required.

- 16.3 Reports are normally submitted between June and September for undergraduate programmes following the Board of Examiners' meetings held in the Summer or between November and January for postgraduate taught programmes following the Board of Examiners' meetings held in the Winter.
- 16.4 The report must be submitted electronically to the Vice-President (Education) via QSAT ([external.examiners@soton.ac.uk](mailto:external.examiners@soton.ac.uk)), no later than **four weeks** after the Board of Examiners meeting for the academic year of the report. Payment of fees will be conditional upon the receipt of this report. External examiners who fail to submit a report will not normally be eligible to continue with their appointment.
- 16.5 Where a report is seriously deficient in respect of the information provided, the external examiner may be asked for additional comment or the matter may be referred to the Vice-President (Education). An external examiner who submits a seriously deficient report may have their appointment terminated by the University.
- 16.6 The University requires all its external examiners, in their expert judgement, to report on:
- whether the academic standards set for its awards, or part thereof, are appropriate;
  - the extent to which its assessment methods and processes are appropriate for the subject, rigorous, ensure equity of treatment for students and have been fairly conducted within University regulations and guidance (including the application of procedures covering [Special Consideration](#) and [Academic Responsibility and Conduct](#));
  - whether the marking scheme and assessment criteria are set at the right level and have been applied appropriately;

- the standards of student performance in those programmes or parts of programmes which they have been appointed to examine;
- where appropriate, the comparability of the standards and student achievements with those in other higher education institutions;
- the consistency of standards and achievement in cases where programmes are delivered by different partners (education partnerships);
- innovation and good practice that they have identified.

16.7 The final report submitted at the end of the external examiner's term of office, should contain retrospective comments on his/her experience as an external examiner at the University and should draw attention to any significant changes in standards or procedures observed during the period.

16.8 An external examiner may make a separate report directly and confidentially to the President and Vice-Chancellor on any matter of serious concern arising from the assessments that may put at risk the standard of the University's awards. Should an external examiner choose to make a confidential report, the President and Vice-Chancellor will ask the Vice- President (Education & Student Experience) to follow up the issues raised and coordinate a response on his/her behalf. A report on the issues and response will be made to AQSS. The Deputy Head of School (Education) from the relevant School will be responsible for ensuring this is communicated to the relevant Programme Lead or Director of Programmes, SPC and more widely in the School as appropriate.

16.9 If the external examiner is not satisfied with the response they receive, they may, if they so wish, may [raise a notification with the Office for Students](#). This option will be drawn to the attention of the



external examiner in the response letter from the President and Vice-Chancellor and details are also set out in Section 20.

## **17. Consideration of external examiners' reports and institutional oversight**

- 17.1 Discussions of external examiner reports are incorporated specifically within the processes of annual monitoring and also through Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) where they are formally discussed with student representatives.
- 17.2 Annual external examiner reports are addressed through a feedback process that aims to keep external examiners fully informed of action taken as a result of their reports. External examiners will receive a considered, written response from the School to issues raised within eight weeks of the School receiving the report. This will include any action to be taken, or a rationale for not taking any action, in response to the comments made. External examiner reports are considered at Faculty, School and institutional level. If an external examiner provides feedback or raises concerns relating to the University's approved regulations, these will be reported to AQSS by the School and considered when the University next reviews its regulations.
- 17.3 The process for the School to receive and respond to external examiners' reports is set out in the *External Examiner Reports - Receipt and Response* [flow charts](#). Schools will also provide a verbal update on the actions that were taken in response to external examiners' comments the previous year at the next meeting of the Board of Examiners.
- 17.4 The Deputy Head of School (Education), working with the CQA Team, is responsible for ensuring all external examiner reports are received and responded to. The Deputy Head of School (Education) and CQA Team are also responsible for ensuring that external examiner reports are made available to members of academic staff teaching on the

programme, students on the programme and any other appropriate parties for example PSRBs or education partnership partners.

- 17.5 At School level, the SPC maintains oversight of external examiner reports. Each School is required to produce a [School Summary Form - External Examiner Reports and Responses](#) for consideration by the External Examiner Scrutiny Group (EESG) and submitted to SPC to discuss appropriate action to deal with any issues arising from external examiner reports and responses. This will include matters to be addressed at School level which are added to the School Action Plan and any matters to be escalated to the Faculty or University for consideration. Where applicable, Schools ensure that any necessary information arising from external examiners' reports and/or the consideration of these reports is made available to relevant PSRBs, as required.
- 17.6 The process by which the University maintains oversight of its external examiners' reports is set out in the *Institutional oversight of External Examiner Reports and Responses* [flow charts](#). AQSS is responsible for institutional oversight and scrutiny of all external examiner reports. The EESG is established to report bi-annually to AQSS, via a report and action plan, with recommendations or actions arising from the feedback received from external examiners and the subsequent discussion at the meeting of the EESG.
- 17.7 Following approval of the institutional oversight report and action plan by AQSS, a letter outlining the actions the University is taking to address generic issues raised by its external examiners at an institutional level is sent from the Head of Quality, Standards and Accreditation to external examiners.

## **18. Information provided to students about external examiners**

- 18.1 External examiners' reports and responses are shared, in full with all students, via the University's portal [SUSSED](#) and with student

representatives at SSLC. Students will also be engaged through discussion at SPC and AQSS at which they are represented.

- 18.2 Students are advised that they must not contact external examiners directly. Should any external examiner be contacted by a student they are asked to forward the details to their main contact for the programme and they will respond. Similarly, if an external examiner is approached by a student or group of students in person with a request to discuss particular issues about a programme or module the external examiner should refer the student(s) to the main programme or module contact.
- 18.3 Where possible, and particularly if the external examiner requests it, arrangements should be made for external examiners to meet with students. Such meetings are not part of the assessment process but are seen as good practice and provide an opportunity for the external examiner to gain a better understanding of a programme and the way in which it operates from a student perspective. The meeting with students may be held in person or held virtually using a University of Southampton approved platform such as Microsoft Teams.

## **19. Revision, extension, resignation, interruption or termination of appointment**

### **Revision to appointment**

- 19.1 If a revision of an existing external examiner appointment is necessary, for example to add or remove programmes, the Programme Lead or Director of Programmes should complete a [\*Revisions to Appointment Form\*](#). Schools should ensure that any revisions are made prior to the start of the next academic year. If approved by the School, QSAT will send the external examiner an amended letter of appointment on behalf of Senate.

- 19.2 A Revisions to Appointment Form is not required for change in module allocations, for example if new modules come online or existing modules are not running for a particular academic year. In such cases the School should advise the external examiner by email of any changes to their module allocation for the year, with a copy to QSAT for information.

### **Extension to appointment**

- 19.3 Where the initial appointment was for a period shorter than the maximum, an external examiner's term of office may be extended up to the maximum of four years. The Programme Lead or Director of Programmes should complete an [Extension Form](#). If approved by the School, QSAT will send the external examiner an amended letter of appointment on behalf of Senate.
- 19.4 Requests for extensions should be submitted in good time before the end of original appointment. Failure to do so may result in the external examiners' personnel records being closed which can lead to delays in the payment of expenses and for external examiners for undergraduate programmes, the requirement for their eligibility to work in the UK to be re-verified.
- 19.5 Where a programme has closed and an external examiner is required for one further year only, a case may be made for an appointment to be extended to an **absolute maximum of five years**. Such extensions require the approval of the Chair of AQSS. The Programme Lead or Director of Programmes should complete an [Extension Form](#), and this must be accompanied by an email from the Deputy Head of School (Education) explaining why the extension is required. If approved by the Chair of AQSS, QSAT will send the external examiner an amended letter of appointment on behalf of Senate.

## Resignation

- 19.6 Where an external examiner wishes to resign before the end of their term of office, they are requested to provide reasonable notice (at least three months) and complete their duties for the current year of appointment where possible. Immediate steps should be taken by the Programme Lead or Director of Programmes to identify a replacement. The Programme Lead or Director of Programmes should complete a [Resignation Form](#) and QSAT will write to the external examiner to confirm their resignation on behalf of Senate.

## Interruption

- 19.7 Occasionally, circumstances may arise where an external examiner is unable to complete their duties for the current year of appointment or wishes to interrupt for a defined period of time, up to a maximum of twelve months. Such events are not regarded as a suspension and the usual term of an external examiner remains four years counted from the date of their first appointment. In such cases, the external examiner should give written notice, with reasonable notice when possible, to the School of their intention to interrupt their term of office, and the expected length of interruption. The School will then look to appoint an interim external examiner for this period. In these circumstances only, an interim external examiner may be appointed from the home institution of the substantive external examiner, and work under their advice and guidance. A [Nomination Form](#) should be completed in the normal way.
- 19.8 Although the School will attempt to make temporary arrangements, if a suitable interim external examiner cannot be appointed, the School may terminate the external examiner's appointment using the [Termination Form](#) and appoint a replacement external examiner.
- 19.9 If at the end of the period of interruption, the substantive external examiner is unable to return to their duties, the interim external

examiner may be appointed as the substantive external examiner. However, if they are from the same institution as the previous external examiner, their period of office will be adjusted to ensure that the maximum term of external examining support from that institution does not surpass four years.

- 19.10 During a defined period of interruption, the substantive external examiner will not be entitled to the fee for external examining. If more than one external examiner has undertaken duties over the course of an academic year, the fee will be split between the substantive and interim external examiner in a method determined by the Deputy Head of School (Education).
- 19.11 Schools should inform QSAT of any interruptions to appointments and the planned arrangements to cover the period. Once approved, QSAT will write to each external examiner concerned to confirm the interruption period and the temporary arrangements in place. If a new external examiner has been appointed, QSAT will send a letter of appointment on behalf of Senate.

### **Termination**

- 19.12 An external examiner's contract may be terminated by the University as a result of the following circumstances:
- a. in the event of a conflict of interest arising during the term of office. The external examiner's contract will be terminated from the point at which the conflict of interest arises;
  - b. in the event of a serious breach by the external examiner of the terms of their appointment, for example:
    - i. failure to attend Board of Examiners meetings without the prior agreement of the Associate Dean (Education) of

- the relevant Faculty and without arranging an alternative means to input to the meetings;
  - ii. failure to submit an annual report within the specified time;
  - iii. failure to carry out the duties outlined in this document.
- c. as a result of a failure of the external examiner's part to engage with the procedures for appointment, including fulfilling the University's statutory employment requirements;
  - d. withdrawal of, or non-recruitment to, the programme(s);
  - e. when only a full, rather than an interim, external examiner appointment can be made as a result of a request from the external examiner of an interruption in their term of office.

19.13 Recommendations for termination of appointment for non-performance of duties in line with the above must be made by the Dean of the Faculty concerned and approved by the President and Vice-Chancellor as specified in the Statement of the Senate's Primary Responsibilities and delegated and related matters. A [Termination Form](#) should be completed and forwarded to QSAT who will obtain the approval of the President and Vice-Chancellor and report the outcome to the School and Faculty. The School may also wish to discuss the potential upcoming termination with the external examiner, particular if termination is not as a result of any fault of the external examiner. If the termination is agreed, QSAT will arrange for a termination of appointment letter to be sent to the external examiner. At the discretion of the relevant Deputy Head of School (Education), a full or partial fee for the year of office may be paid to the external examiner. If an external examiner wishes to query the reason for termination, they should be directed to the Deputy Head of School (Education) in the first instance.

## 20. Procedures in the case of serious concerns

20.1 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 President and Vice-Chancellor, [raise a notification with the Office for Students](#) or inform the relevant PSRB. The University will inform an external examiner at the point when all internal procedures have been exhausted.

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