

External Examiner Procedures

This document relates to external examining of taught programmes.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 The University's Ordinance 3.4 (paragraph 3.4.4) states that 'Senate shall appoint, suspend or remove external and other examiners as appropriate'. Senate has delegated this responsibility to Schools via the School Programmes Committee with oversight and annual reporting to the Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee.
- 1.3 This document sets out to:
 - 1.3.1 describe the procedures and requirements for appointment and operation of external examiner processes and ensure that these align with the expectations described by the [Quality Assurance Agency \(QAA\)'s UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Advice and Guidance, External Expertise](#).
 - 1.3.2 support external examiners to fully understand and appropriately fulfil their role.
- 1.4 The University requires that an external examiner is appointed for every programme which leads to credit or an Award of the University. This includes programmes taught via Education Partnerships, and programmes taught across multiple locations or modes of delivery.
- 1.5 Where a programme is delivered across multiple locations and/or different modes of delivery, the University requires that a chief external examiner is appointed to provide a judgement on the comparability of standards across the delivery locations/modes of delivery, as well as ensuring the consistency of practice and performance.

- 1.6 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. An external examiner is not required for any education provision which does not contribute to an Award.

2. Contacting the University

- 2.1 Administration of external examining (for taught programmes) is overseen by the Office of the Academic Registrar. Queries should be addressed to: external.examiners@soton.ac.uk.
- 2.2 Queries about academic issues, including examination scripts, programme details and assessment queries should be addressed to the nominated academic contact(s). For programmes delivered across more than one location or mode, the Programme Lead for each should be listed as an academic contact. Details will be included in the appointment letter.
- 2.3 Queries about the operation of the Board of Examiners meetings, accessing online systems and other administrative/operational issues should be addressed to the nominated professional services contact, details will be included in the appointment letter.

3. Duties of the External Examiner

The role of an external examiner

- 3.1 The primary role of an external examiner is:
- 3.1.1 to assist the University in ensuring that the standard of its awards is maintained at the appropriate level in accordance with national qualification frameworks and other requirements such as Characteristics Statements and Subject Benchmark Statements;

- 3.1.2 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 Assessment Policies and Regulations;
 - 3.1.3 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;
 - 3.1.4 to assist the University in enhancing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by advising on good practice identified within the University and beyond.
- 3.2 External examiners should normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes at any one point in time.
- 3.3 External examiners are full members of Boards of Examiners. 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.
- 3.4 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.

Duties outside of the EE responsibility

- 3.5 External examiners must not be directly involved in marking. External examiners may not change marks or degree classifications for individual candidates as this would not be fair on other students whose work the External Examiner has not seen. Rather their role is to

confirm that marking criteria and marking standards are appropriate and are being applied appropriately and consistently.

- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 External examiners do not have any role in individual student cases involving Special Considerations or breaches of Academic Responsibility and Conduct. However, they can also expect to be informed of any decisions or outcomes affecting a module result or a progression/award decision.
- 3.8 External examiners may not change marks or degree classifications for individual candidates.
- 3.9 University policy is that internal marking standards are scrutinised and monitored by means of review 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.
- 3.10 The marking and moderation process is an internal concern only, but if the external examiner has concerns about the marking standards of the sample, the marking and moderation process, or the standards of marking arrangements more generally, they may request further action such as:
 - 3.10.1 additional marking of all the student work within the group;
or
 - 3.10.2 additional marking of the work of all students taking the affected examination or piece of work; or

- 3.10.3 review of marks of all the work for the specific assessment item; or
 - 3.10.4 moderation of the marks of all the students taking the affected examination or piece of work; or
 - 3.10.5 adjustment of marks for all students taking the affected examination or piece of work.
- 3.11 Where this occurs the outcome should be documented and communicated to the Boards of Examiners for Taught Programmes.

4. Duties of the Chief External Examiner

- 4.1 The University requires that a chief external examiner is appointed when programmes are delivered in multiple locations and/or in different modes of delivery. Where appointed, a chief external examiner will:
- 4.1.1 comment on different versions of a programme including curriculum, structure, assessment, and quality of provision.
 - 4.1.2 identify versions of a programme where there are disparities, areas of concern or good practice.
 - 4.1.3 review assessment outputs (marks/classification, the distribution of marks and other summary statistics) and if considered necessary, scrutinise samples of student work from all locations/modes to ensure consistent standards.
 - 4.1.4 confirm, by negotiation with other external examiners in the team, that a consistent and acceptable standard is being maintained across the programme.
 - 4.1.5 comment on the effectiveness of the team of external examiners.

- 4.1.6 act as mentor for new and/or inexperienced external examiners appointed to programmes they oversee.

5. Education Partnerships

- 5.1 All [education partnerships](#) must be the subject of scrutiny by an external examiner(s).
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 The University will determine in discussion with such partners the extent to which they will be involved in aspects of the external examining process, the arrangements for such appointments will be set out in the Memorandum of Agreement.

6. Programmes delivered across multiple delivery locations.

- 6.1 If programmes are delivered across multiple locations, the School must appoint an external examiner for each programme and a chief external examiner to provide oversight and ensure the comparability of standards and performance.
- 6.2 External examiners appointed to programmes delivered across multiple locations will be offered the opportunity to visit the location of delivery at least once during their period of appointment.

7. Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies

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

8. Considerations when appointing external examiners

- 8.1 External examiners are appointed to Programmes. Schools that select to appoint to specific modules must maintain appropriate records and have systems in place to monitor this complexity.
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 The appointment of one external examiner to a programme is normally sufficient however, 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).
- 8.4 The following factors are likely to influence the amount of work required:
- credit rating of the module/student assessment workload;
 - the typical number of students enrolled on a programme/module in any one cohort;
 - the number of times (occurrences) per academic year in which a module is delivered;
 - whether programmes are delivered in multiple locations;
 - the extent of the Education Partnership(s) or PRSB input.
- 8.5 Where more than one external examiner is appointed to a programme, it may be necessary to allocate external examiners to modules. 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.

- 8.6 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.
- 8.7 In order to determine an external examiner's workload for the University's flat fee of £700, the amount of work that is required to be undertaken by each external examiner should also be taken into account.

Adviser to the External Examiner

- 8.8 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 PSRB accreditation e.g. Advance HE accreditation.

Chief External Examiner

- 8.9 A chief external examiner will be appointed to take an overview and review outcomes from programmes delivered across multiple locations/modes of delivery. This will be in addition to the programme external examiner(s).
- 8.10 The chief external examiner should be an experienced external examiner with suitable experience to assure standards of Awards, and the quality of the provision across multiple delivery locations/modes.

- 8.11 An existing external examiner that has completed their four-year term, can be invited to take up the role of chief external examiner for a further two-year term, but cannot be extended further.
- 8.12 The chief external examiner may be selected from the existing programme external examiners and may act as both the chief external examiner and an external examiner for one of the delivery locations/modes.
- 8.13 The Deputy Head of School (Education)/Director of Programmes will monitor when appointments are made to chief and programme external examiner roles to ensure that the workload of the chief external examiner does not become too onerous.

Appointing an External Examiner (Chief External Examiners and Advisers to External Examiners) - Ensuring appropriate oversight

- 8.14 External examiners are responsible, through the appropriate School Programmes Committee and Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee, to Senate.
- 8.15 All external examiners must be formally appointed to the role and sign an appointment letter prior to the commencement of their role.
- 8.16 External examiners must meet the criteria described in the Person Specification and avoid the conflicts described in the Conflicts of Interest below.
- 8.17 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 an enhanced induction and support.
- 8.18 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.

Criteria for appointment of external examiners

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

Person specification

- a. External examiners should be drawn from a variety of institutional or professional contexts and traditions in order that programmes benefit from wide-ranging external scrutiny. External examiners should normally be able to show evidence of the following:
 - (i) good knowledge and understanding of UK Higher Education sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
 - (ii) high degree of competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study or parts thereof and familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award which is to be assessed;
 - (iii) relevant academic experience, subject knowledge 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 course design and student assessment at the level of the award, appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures and the enhancement of the student learning experience;

- (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) have sufficient experience in quality assurance to enable them to discharge their role effectively
- (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 PRSBs;

8.20 It is a requirement that the team of external examiners for a programme collectively has the full range of qualifications, experience and expertise.

Conflicts of interest

- b. External examiners are impartial in judgement and wholly independent of the University and its staff (including the governing body), and any relevant partners. 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 who is currently acting as an External Adviser for the programme of study.
- (vii) anyone that may personally benefit from any student outcomes, nor have any connection to any student being assessed
- (viii) 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;
- (ix) 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);
- (x) a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution;
- (xi) the succession of an external examiner by a colleague from the external examiner's home department and institution;
- (xii) the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution.

- 8.21 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.
- 8.22 External examiners are expected to comply with all relevant employment legislation, including safeguarding, as appropriate.

Period of appointment

- 8.23 All External examiner appointments will start on 1 September each year.
- 8.23.1 A period of appointment for an undergraduate external examiner will start on 1 September each academic year and will end four years later on 31 August.
- 8.23.2 A period of appointment for a postgraduate external examiner will start on 1 September each academic year and will end four years and four months later, on 31 December.
- 8.23.3 A period of appointment for an external examiner appointed to both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes will start on 1 September each academic year and will end four years and four months later, on 31 December.
- 8.24 Schools may decide to appoint for shorter periods, but appointments for one year or less are discouraged as it is important to have continuity over a number of years, and appointments must start on 1 September each year.

Extensions beyond the normal period of appointment

- 8.25 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.
- 8.26 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 (and 5 years and 3 months for postgraduate programmes). Such extensions require the approval of the Chair of Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee.

Resignations by the external examiner

- 8.27 Where an external examiner wishes to resign before the end of their period of appointment, they are requested to provide reasonable notice (at least three months) and complete their duties for the current year of appointment where possible.
- 8.28 An external examiner's contract may be terminated by the University.

Requirements for in-experienced external examiners

- 8.29 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. 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.
- 8.30 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 and spend time shadowing a more experienced external examiner.

- 8.31 Where such an arrangement is not feasible, the first-time external examiner should be mentored by an experienced external examiner from the same School.

9. Procedure for the nomination of external examiners

- 9.1 The process for approval of external examiner nominations is summarised in the [*Process for the approval of new external examiner nominations flow chart*](#).
- 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 their period of appointment.
- 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:

Part I – completed by Faculty CQA Team and Programme Lead

- 9.4 The Curriculum and Quality Assurance (CQA) Team, will, at the request for the Programme Lead/Team, begin a nomination form and enter the required information (provided by the Programme Lead or Director of Programmes) into part one. At the same time, issues regarding reciprocity should be considered.

Part II – completion by external examiner

- 9.5 The CQA Team will then send the nomination form to the proposed external examiner (the details of which will have been provided by the Programme Lead or Director of Programmes), with a request for them to complete part two.

- 9.6 The External examiner will respond, with part two complete. The CQA Team and will support the Programme Lead or Director of Programmes complete Part three of the nomination form.

**Part III – completion by Programme Lead/Director of Programmes
In these instances**

Checking Reciprocity

- 9.7 The University does not maintain a central record of the External examiner appointments held by its staff and there is no expectation that Schools should maintain one.
- 9.8 Reciprocity is checked by the Programme Lead or Director of Programmes who will have a verbal discussion with members of the relevant Board of Examiners, School Programmes Committee or other relevant forum.
- 9.9 Once all reasonable checks have been completed with peers (i.e. no members of the School currently act as an external examiner in the nominee's own institution and disciplinary area) reciprocity will be deemed to be checked and the box completed.

Exceptional Arrangements

- 9.10 In these instances, the Programme Lead or Director of Programmes should set out clearly the rationale for doing so by completing one or more of the fields 17.1, 17.2 or 17.3. These are a condition of appointment, and the appointment will not be processed unless this section is completed. Notification of exceptional arrangements require approval by the Chair of Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee

Managing nominees that do not meet the selection criteria (17.1).

- 9.11 If a School wishes to nominate an individual that does not fully meet the criteria, the Schools should articulate the rationale for the appointment in field 17.1 of the nomination form. Additional information may be attached and, if required, advice may be obtained from QSAT.

Managing Nominees with no previous experience (17.2).

- 9.12 If the nominee does not possess previous external examining experience the School must provide additional support. The support proposed by the School (e.g. mentoring arrangements, shadowing and plans for an enhanced induction) should be described in field 17.2.

Managing potential Conflicts of Interest (17.3)

- 9.13 Where a School can provide evidence that the pool of potential external examiners is restricted, exceptions may, very occasionally, become unavoidable. If the School considers there to be an exceptional reason why the proposed external examiner should be appointed a rationale should be provided in field 17.3. The rationale should be reviewed and approved by the Deputy Head of School (Education) in Part IV. This will usually take place following a discussion with the Programme Lead or Director of Programmes. Exceptions of this sort requires approval by the Chair of Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee and is undertaken by QSAT.
- 9.14 The Programme Lead or Director of Programmes will forward the Nomination Form to the Deputy Head of School (Education) for approval.

Part IV - Approval by School Programmes Committee via Deputy Head of School (Education)

- 9.15 The Deputy Head of School (Education) will reassure themselves that the nomination form has been fully completed and due consideration has been given to reciprocity, induction and support, and sign on behalf of the School Programmes Committee.
- 9.16 Once approved, the Deputy Head of School (Education), will inform the Programme Lead or Director of Programmes and forward to the CQA Team.
- 9.17 Once the nomination form is finalised the CQA Team will send to QSAT. QSAT will review the nomination on behalf of the Chair of Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee.
- 9.18 All approved external examiner appointments are reported to School Programmes Committee by the Deputy Head of School (Education).
- 9.19 The signed letter of appointment constitutes the formal contract between the University and the external examiner.

10. Procedures for the appointment of External Examiners

- 10.1 No work can be undertaken by an external examiner prior to the receipt of the signed letter of appointment by the University.
- 10.2 Following receipt of an approved nomination form, the external examiner will follow one of 2 routes to full appointment.
 - 10.2.1 External examiners appointed to first degree programmes will be required to complete a Right to Work check. Following completion of these procedures, a Letter of Appointment will be published.

- 10.2.2 External examiners appointed to Postgraduate programmes only are not required to complete a Right to Work check and can expect to receive a Letter of Appointment more quickly.

Right to Work in the UK

- 10.3 There are commitments on employers to ensure that staff are eligible to work in the United Kingdom [Preventing illegal working: guidance for employers](#).
- 10.4 All external examiners who are appointed to first degree (undergraduate) programmes must provide proof of their eligibility to work in the UK and this will be verified prior to appointment.
- 10.5 QSAT will verify eligibility to work in the UK, where applicable, and issue a letter of appointment on behalf of Senate. Right to Work checks can be done in two ways;

Remote digital check

- 10.5.1 If the external examiner has a current passport or Irish passport card, a remote digital check can be undertaken (removing the need for original documents to be checked in-person). If you choose this option, a secure site will be used to verify your document including attendance at a mandatory Teams video call.

In-person check

- 10.5.2 If the external examiner wishes to bring their original right to work document(s) and have these checked in-person by a University member of staff, this option is also available. Acceptable documents can be located via the GOV.UK Right to work checklist (copies cannot not be accepted).

Payment of Tax and National Insurance

- 10.6 All external examiners who are appointed to first degree (undergraduate) programmes and must reside in the United Kingdom for tax purposes.
- 10.7 The HM Revenue and Customs' currently places no requirements regarding Right to Work or residency for tax purposes on external examiners of postgraduate programmes (taught or research).
- 10.8 International visa/permission holders can undertake a Home Office Online right to work check and further information is available on the [University website](#).
- 10.9 No work should be sent to an External examiner until a signed appointment letter has been signed by the External examiner and received by the University (this includes requests to review pieces of assessment and student work).

11. Preparing external examiners to undertake the role

- 11.1 It is important that external examiners receive the information that they need to undertake their role, early in their appointment and at regular intervals during their appointment.

Institutional Information

- 11.2 Institutional resources and more general advice is provided via an [External Examiner Information website](#). New external examiners receive a link to the website in their letter of appointment and are asked to familiarise themselves with the content early in their appointment.
- 11.3 The website includes guidance on:

- 11.3.1 the University structure and the roles colleagues that they may be asked to work with during their appointment.
- 11.3.2 the University strategy
- 11.3.3 the role of the external examiner, and those duties that are excluded from the role.
- 11.3.4 the expectations regarding reporting, and the reporting template (including an example of good practice)
- 11.3.5 the Fees, expenses and how to submit these to the University.
- 11.3.6 relevant Regulations, Policies and Procedures relating to the assessment of students, with a short description of each.
- 11.3.7 useful external resources published by institutions outside of the University of Southampton.

School and Programme Induction

- 11.4 The School may structure the induction of their external examiners in such a way that it meets the requirements of the discipline and individual timescales. The preparation of the external examiner to work with the School can take place via email, an online meeting or in person.

Deputy Head of School (Education)/ Director of Programmes

- 11.5 External examiners should be provided with sufficient information and context about the programme as well as its position within the wider School and University. The School must ensure that the external examiner is provided with the necessary School and Department context including:

- provision of information on student numbers, the mix of student characteristics;
- curriculum structure, module provision, inter-relationships between or across modules;
- School/departmental approaches to teaching and learning, and assessment;
- the teaching methods used on the programme, how marking and moderation is undertaken in the department;
- any School specific procedures related to the programmes being examined which are outside of the Policies and procedures provided on the External Examiner Information site;
- the timeline of the academic year highlighting important dates. Including when external examiner should to expect to receive assessment scripts and student work;
- the operation of the Boards of Examiners and the provision of statistics and documentation beforehand;
- appropriate expectations of the programme team(s);
- additional School level strategies, practices and policies that accompany University level requirements;
- who to approach with different questions.

Programme Lead/Programme Team

- 11.6 The Programme Lead must also ensure that the external examiner is prepared to undertake their role. Across the four-year appointment, the Programme Lead/Director of Programmes will meet regularly (at least annually) with their external examiner(s) to ensure that their understanding of the programme remains current.
- 11.7 This meeting will differ from the meeting that occurred with the Deputy Head of School (Education)/ Director of Programmes and will focus on the day-to-day operation of the programme. Including all some or all of the aspects listed below:

- the context and philosophy of the programme(s) including details of learning, teaching and assessment processes;
- the key internal and external reference points for the programme (e.g. programme mapping to subject benchmark statements etc);
- programme specific assessment criteria and procedures, marking schemes; process for dealing with borderline, unusual results or special circumstances.
- the assessment, marking and moderation procedures implemented by the Programme and any programme-specific regulations where exemptions/variations from the University standard regulations have been approved;
- programme structures and learning outcomes;
- differences between programmes delivered across multiple locations;
- draft exam papers, other forms of assessment and model answers;

11.8 The Programme Lead/Director of Programmes will confirm with the external examiner, their preference regarding the provision of:

- student work for review;
- samples of student feedback;
- examination scripts;
- assessment briefs/criteria;
- module descriptions;
- any other quality assurance materials that the external examiner deems necessary;
- other evidence that can be made available necessary to confirm marking criteria and standards are appropriate and applied consistently (e.g. moderation forms);
- opportunities to communicate with internal examiners and others involved in teaching and learning (including placement providers/assessors).

- 11.9 Depending on the nature of the conversation, the Programme Lead/Director of Programmes may wish to invite a member of the professional services to the meeting, but this must remain an academic led conversation.

Admin and Assessment Team

- 11.10 Operational aspects of the assessment process should be led by the Admin and Assessment Team. The following offers a flavour of the sort of information that they will discuss with the external examiner:

- Ascertain the preferred communication method.
- Ensure that the external examiner is advised of the dates of Board of Examiners' meetings;
- Provide the external examiner with a timetable/schedule of the examining process;
- Ensure that external examiners have an opportunity to meet with students (virtually or in person) in consultation with the Programme Lead and at a suitable time in the programme for maximum benefit for all stakeholders, which may not be at the same time as the Board of Examiners).

Examinations Officer

- 11.11 The Programme Lead (team) may find it useful to arrange for the external examiner to meet with the Examinations Officer, which depending on different School structures, can often provide overarching context regarding School specific assessment approaches, strategies and principles which may be of interest to the external examiner.

Enhanced Induction

- 11.12 In cases where an external examiner does not fulfil all the relevant selection criteria or does not possess previous external examining

experience, the Programme Lead must provide additional support and an enhanced induction.

11.13 The enhanced induction will include:

- 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.
- the opportunity to attend a Board of Examiners as an observer.

Provision of programme specific documentation.

11.14 In preparation for their role, and the introductory meetings with the Programme Lead/Director of Programmes, the External examiner can expect to have been provided with the following programme specific information:

11.14.1 the previous external examiner's last report (in the first year only);

11.14.2 relevant [course description documents/programmes specifications](#) and module profiles;

11.15 Information provided by access to Blackboard, should be tightly controlled and monitored to ensure that access is removed when the external examiners' period of appointment ends.

12. Arrangements for the selection/sampling of student work for review

- 12.1 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 and evidence of performance on placements which form an assessed part of the programme.
- 12.2 The Programme Lead should decide, in negotiation with the external examiner, the amount of student work they will receive to enable them to form a view as to student performance against the appropriate standards and that students are being treated fairly.
- 12.3 The sample should be agreed via discussion should take place at the earliest opportunity and the Programme Lead and the external examiner should work together to monitor the effectiveness of the arrangements. The arrangements should be confirmed in writing by the Programme team and should be re-visited annually.

Minimum requirements

- 12.4 The sample should be of sufficient size to enable external examiners to gain an understanding of the range of marks and to ensure they have sufficient evidence to determine internal marking, moderation and classification are of an appropriate standard and are consistent. This might mean that for very small cohorts, it is necessary to provide all student work. The sample will often mirror that which was marked internally, based on the University's Marking and Moderation Policy but it does not have to.
- 12.5 The sample should include:
 - 12.5.1 a range of assessment(s) marked highest overall/ first class marks/ Masters distinctions;

- 12.5.2 a selection of assessments from each classification band;
 - 12.5.3 assessments with borderline marks;
 - 12.5.4 a sample of fails, including all fails in final year dissertations/projects.
- 12.6 External examiners may select to review more work or larger sample sizes, via Blackboard, where access has been provided by the School.

Review of student work

- 12.7 The Programme Lead 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.
- 12.8 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.
- 12.9 External examiners should compare the performance of students with that of students on comparable programmes elsewhere of which they have experience.

Sharing student work

- 12.10 Once agreed, the Programme Lead (and other members of the Programme team as necessary) must work with professional services colleagues to curate the agreed student work and share with the external examiner.
- 12.11 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.
- 12.12 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/>.
- 12.13 Email should not be used to share students' work with external examiners.

13. Boards of Examiners' meetings

- 13.1 The University's Policy and Procedures for [Boards of Examiners for Taught Programmes](#) 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.
- 13.2 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.
- 13.3 If a programme is delivered in collaboration 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.

Draft examination papers

- 13.4 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.
- 13.5 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.

Attendance at Boards of Examiners

- 13.6 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.
- 13.7 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.

Participation in Boards of Examiners' meetings

- 13.8 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
- 13.9 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.

14. Fees and expenses

- 14.1 The fee paid to all external examiners appointed to undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes is a flat fee of £700 per year. The fee will be paid on receipt of the annual report(s).
- 14.2 The fees paid to the chief external examiner, where appointed is a flat fee of £700 per year (in addition to the standard flat fee if they also

hold a programme external examiner role). The fee will be paid on receipt of the chief external examiners' annual report.

- 14.3 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.
- 14.4 The fee to be paid to an external examiner is set out in the letter of appointment.
- 14.5 Different payment methods are in place for undergraduate and postgraduate taught external examiners due to HM Revenue and Customs' requirements and this is explained in the letter of appointment.
- 14.6 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](#).
- 14.7 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.
- 14.8 The undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes claim forms are available on the [External Examiner Information site](#).
- 14.9 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.

- 14.10 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](#).
- 14.11 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.
- 14.12 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.
- 14.13 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.

15. External examiners Reporting

- 15.1 External examiners are required to submit an annual written report, using the approved [University template](#) relating to the Programme(s) to which they have been appointed.
- 15.2 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.
- 15.3 External examiners will receive a considered, written response from the School to issues raised within eight weeks of the School receiving the report.
- 15.4 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.
- 15.5 Separate reports for undergraduate and postgraduate level programmes are required. Reports at the module level are not permitted.
- 15.6 The report must be submitted electronically to the Chair of Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee via QSAT (external.examiners@soton.ac.uk), no later than **four weeks** after the Board of Examiners meeting for the academic year of the report.
- 15.7 Payment of fees is 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.
- 15.8 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;
- 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.

15.9 The final report submitted at the end of the external examiner's period of appointment, 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.

15.10 All external examiners should note that reports may be made available for internal and external reviews, audits and accreditation events (at programme, School or institutional levels, the latter including international accreditation authorities).

15.11 All external examiners should note that their report may be released in response to a Freedom of Information request. Prior to release

they will be checked to ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act and the contact details of the external examiner, or any other reference to individuals has been removed.

Chief external examiner report

- 15.12 The chief external examiner (where appointed) shall submit an annual report giving an overview incorporating themes arising from the external examiner reports from the perspective of the chief external examiner role.
- 15.13 The chief external examiner will receive copies of the reports completed by the other programme external examiners.

Oversight of responses to external examiner reports

- 15.14 The Deputy Head of School (Education) is responsible for ensuring all external examiner reports are received and responded to.
- 15.15 External examiner reports for each delivery location/mode will be shared with staff at all campuses involved in the teaching of that programme, and where appropriate, colleagues at the delivery location will be involved in finalising the response returned to the external examiner and chief external examiner.
- 15.16 Should an external examiner choose to make a confidential report, the President and Vice-Chancellor will ask the Chair of Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee 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 Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee. 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, the School Programmes Committee and more widely in the School as appropriate.

- 15.17 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 Chair of Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee. An external examiner who resubmits a seriously deficient report may have their appointment terminated by the University.

Consideration of external examiners' reports and institutional oversight

- 15.18 The Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee is responsible for institutional oversight and scrutiny of all external examiner reports. The External Examiner Scrutiny Group is established to report bi-annually to Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee 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 External Examiner Scrutiny Group.
- 15.19 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.
- 15.20 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.
- 15.21 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 Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee by the

School and considered when the University next reviews its Regulations.

- 15.22 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.
- 15.23 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.
- 15.24 At School level, the School Programmes Committee 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 and submitted to the School Programmes Committee 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.

- 15.25 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](#).
- 15.26 Following approval of the institutional oversight report and action plan by Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee, 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.

16. Students and External examiners

Communicating with Students

- 16.1 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.
- 16.2 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.
- 16.3 External examiners' reports and responses are shared, in full with all students, via the University's portal [SUSSED](#) and with student representatives at SSLC.
- 16.4 Students will also be engaged through discussion at the School Programmes Committee and Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee at which they are represented.

Meetings with students

- 16.5 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.

17. Issues during the external examiner appointment

Reciprocal arrangements

- 17.1 These may arise during the engagement or tenure of an external expert if a reasonable person would interpret one service in exchange for another. For example, if one provider engages an expert from another provider and then provides an expert to the same or closely-related provision in return.

Conflicts of Interest

- 17.2 Conflicts may arise during engagement or tenure, where providers reasonably believe the interests of one party affect the motivations or impartiality of another. This might include close personal or professional relationships with staff, students, or previous experts involved in their area of responsibility, an excessive influence due to their standing in other roles, or because their inclusion in a team of experts creates an unbalanced view. A conflict of interest might build up over time because of an excessive engagement period or re-engagement by the same provider.

Revision to appointment

- 17.3 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.
- 17.4 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

- 17.5 Where the initial appointment was for a period shorter than the maximum, an external examiner's period of appointment 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.
- 17.6 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.
- 17.7 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 Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee, QSAT will send the external examiner an amended letter of appointment on behalf of Senate.

Resignation

- 17.8 Where an external examiner wishes to resign before the end of their period of appointment, 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

- 17.9 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 period of appointment, 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.

- 17.10 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.
- 17.11 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.
- 17.12 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).
- 17.13 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.

Suspension

- 17.14 In exceptional cases, arrangements can be made to allow external examiners to suspend their period of appointment for up to one year, for example for health or maternity reasons. The maximum period of appointment includes any periods of suspension.

Termination

17.15 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 period of appointment. 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 period of appointment.

17.16 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, particularly 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.

18. Procedures in the case of serious concerns

- 18.1 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.
- 18.2 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.
- 18.3 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.

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