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EXTERNAL EXAMINER POLICY (TAUGHT PROGRAMMES)

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Introduction

Our Strategy: [The Way Forward 2018-2023: Recast COVID-19](#)

Our vision is to be a world-leading, research-excellent, educationally outstanding university, driven by creativity and curiosity, which fulfils its social, cultural and economic obligations to Cardiff, Wales, the UK and the world. By fulfilling our vision, we expect to improve our standing as one of the top 100 universities in the world and the top 20 in the UK.

Our [Education and Students Sub-strategy](#) is predicated on the need for consistency and agility in the current fast-moving context of higher education provision. It is underpinned by a clear vision of what a Cardiff University education and student experience offers, and is focussed on key areas of activity, development and strength.

In this context the University attaches great importance to peer review from external examiners as a source of expert independent and impartial advice. We encourage external examiners to contribute to the ongoing enhancement of the quality of the University's provision through commenting and advising on the content, balance and structure of programmes and modules, the development of programmes/modules and on assessment strategies and processes.

Scope

This policy sets out the University's approach to the use of external examiners on taught programmes. The purpose of the policy is to ensure that Cardiff University can effectively discharge its responsibilities for the academic standards of awards and the quality of learning opportunities provided for students, thereby ensuring that the programmes offered by the University are comparable to cognate provision offered elsewhere.

Institutional Oversight

The External Examiner Policy is a supporting document of the revised [Assessment and Examining Board Regulations](#) approved by Senate. It incorporates information and guidance previously agreed by Senate as part of the former Assessment Regulations for Taught Programmes, setting out the role and duties of external examiners, information relating to their appointment, and reporting requirements.

An annual overview of issues and good practice raised by external examiners is included in the annual quality report prepared for consideration by the University's Academic Standards and Quality Committee. Feedback provided by external examiners is also be used to inform the University's [Annual Review and Enhancement](#) process.

The policy will be kept under regular review to ensure it continues both to support internal processes that function efficiently and effectively, and to fully meet the requirements of the [revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#), with the

expectations and practices noted in the supporting advice and guidance on [External Expertise](#) being particularly relevant:

Expectations for standards	Expectations for quality
The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.	Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.
The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.	
Core practices for standards	Core practices for quality
The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.	The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.
The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.	Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.
Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivered them.	
The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.	
Common practices for standards	Common practices for quality
The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.	The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise.

SECTION 1: Role and Duties

The Role of an External Examiner

External examiners are full and equal members of Examining Boards, and provide an important contribution to the Examining Board's responsibility to monitor the quality and standards of awards and to make recommendations relating to the enhancement of quality and standards. While external examiners do not have a right of veto on Board decisions, Examining Boards should pay careful attention to any recommendations made by them.

A key aspect of this role is the assurance of standards and processes, including analysis of data and reporting. The external examiners' role is to ensure that assessment processes are valid, reliable and explicit. They are expected to provide informative comment and recommendations on:

- The degree awarding body's standards and student performance in relation to those standards.
- The consistent and fair application of policies and procedures ensuring the integrity and rigour of academic practices.
- Good practice and possible enhancements.

[derived from [UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Advice and Guidance: External Expertise](#)]

Specific Duties of External Examiners

In relation to the programme(s) they are appointed to, external examiners are expected to undertake the following duties:

1. Consider, comment on, and approve all examination papers contributing to the final award, according to the programme specification.
2. Consider, comment on, and approve all class tests, practical-based assessments and coursework elements which contribute 50% or more to the mark for any module or unit of study assessment contributing to the final award, according to the programme specification.
3. Consider sufficient samples of examination scripts, class test scripts, outcomes of practical-based assessments and coursework to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard.
4. As appropriate to the programme participate in clinical and/or practical-based assessments.
5. Attend meetings of Examining Boards at which award classifications or specified elements of them are confirmed (either in person or by virtual means).
6. Submit written reports to the University annually.

7. Be consulted by Heads of Schools (or nominees) on changes to the forms of assessment for any module or unit of study contributing to the final assessment of an award.

Approving Forms of Assessment

Heads of School (or nominee) are responsible for informing external examiners, at the start of each academic year of procedures for approving forms of assessment, examination papers and coursework.

External examiners should be asked to comment on and approve all examination papers, as well as any class tests, practical assessments and coursework elements that contribute 50% or more to the mark for any module or unit of study assessment contributing to the final award. It is good practice for schools to provide a response to external examiners on any suggested amendments to papers or other assessments.

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

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

Heads of School (or nominee) are required to consult with external examiners on major changes to the methods of assessment for any module or unit of study contributing to the final award.

Marking and Moderation

Heads of School are required to put in place procedures to ensure that there is reliable and consistent moderation of marks. Schools should identify and publicise the processes and procedures used in this area to students and other relevant stakeholders. These may include second marking, moderation and other relevant processes. External examiners are invited to consider and comment upon procedures in this area, to ensure the reliability and consistency of marking and feedback.

External examiners must not be requested to arbitrate and/or 'third mark' assessments where two internal markers have arrived at substantially different marks. Where 'third marking' does take place, both of the original marks should be made available to external examiners to help illustrate standards.

External examiners may recommend reconsideration by the Examining Board of the level of marking across student cohorts or across individual assessment

components. External examiners should not be required or invited to make recommendations on, or change the marks of individual students.

External examiners should not be involved in marking, except in the case of clinical and/or practical-based assessments.

Sampling

External examiners should be provided with a sample of examination scripts, class test scripts, outcomes of practical assessments and coursework to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard. Schools are encouraged to enter into a dialogue with external examiners on arrangements for moderation and sampling. This should begin at the earliest possible opportunity.

A sample will normally include a selection of scripts from the top, middle and bottom of the range, of borderline candidates, and from those assessed internally as first class/distinction or fail. Scripts should be provided with the comments of the internal markers and the overall mark sheet covering all students.

Unfair Practice

If an external examiner suspects that an unfair practice has taken place, they should report this to the Chair of the Examining Board, who will invoke the University's Academic Misconduct Procedure. Examining Boards must not consider suspected cases of plagiarism/unfair practice outside of this Procedure.

Meeting of the Examining Board

Expectations for Attendance

External examiners appointed to undergraduate programmes are expected to attend the meeting of the Programme, Subject and Composite Examining Board where the final award for students is determined (either in person or by virtual means).

External examiners appointed to postgraduate taught programmes are expected to attend at least one meeting of the Examining Board per year (either in person or by virtual means) and the meeting(s) attended should be agreed, in advance, by the external examiner and the Chair of the Examining Board.

Schools should notify external examiners of the dates on which Examining Boards meet well in advance of the meeting. External examiners should seek to make every effort to attend meetings of the Examining Board.

If an external examiner is unable to attend a meeting, they should be available for consultation. In accordance with directions provided by the Chair of the Examining Board, the external examiner should provide all documents necessary for the conduct of the business of the meeting.

Information on the conduct of Examining Boards can be found in the [Assessment and Examining Board Regulations](#).

Meetings with Students

Senate encourages the provision of opportunities for external examiners and students to meet (either in person or by virtual means) to discuss the programme of study and its assessment. Such meetings may lead to the identification of possible programme enhancements and provide the external examiner with a rounded overview of the quality and standard of the student experience and enhance the external examiner's contribution to the consideration of such matters by the Examining Board. The annual reports of external examiners often usefully include headline issues raised in such meetings.

The Head of School (or nominee) is expected to confirm to external examiners, at the start of the academic year, the opportunities available to them to meet with students in the absence of members of staff.

It is anticipated that such meetings should normally include the opportunity to meet with student representatives in the later stages of the programme(s) in question. Such students should be well placed to provide informed views of the overall student experience.

Inappropriate Contact from Students

Except as indicated above, it is inappropriate for students to initiate direct contact with external examiners. Any direct contact received by external examiners should be referred to the Head of Quality and Academic Standards. External examiners should not respond to any direct contact initiated by students.

Conflicts of Interest

External examiners are required to draw the attention of the Head of Quality and Academic Standards to any possible conflict of interest that might arise during their appointment.

Serious Concerns

External examiners have a right to raise any matter of serious concern with the Vice-Chancellor, if necessary by means of a separate confidential written report. The University will provide a considered and timely response to any confidential report received, including details of any action that will be taken as a result.

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

SECTION 2: Annual Reports

Submission of Reports

External examiners are required to submit an External Examiner's Report to the University on an annual basis. It is the normal expectation that this be submitted following the main awarding Examining Board for a programme, and in line with the following deadlines:

- **31 July:** Undergraduate, 9-month or 18-month postgraduate programmes
- **20 December:** 12-month or 24-month Postgraduate programmes

A report should be provided by the external examiner for each programme examined except where programmes are closely related, where a combined report may be accepted.

The University requires external examiners to report on:

- Whether the standards set are appropriate for its awards, or award elements, by reference to published national benchmarks and by reference to the University's programme specifications and the requirements of any relevant professional body.
- The standards of student performance in the programmes which they have been appointed to examine, and on the comparability of the standards with similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions.
- The extent to which its processes for assessment, examination, and the determination of awards are sound and have been fairly conducted.
- Any good and innovative practice in learning, teaching and assessment, as well as any opportunities for enhancement.
- The appropriateness of arrangements and information provided by the School to allow them to undertake their duties.
- Year-on-year comments on any issues raised, and whether these have been addressed to their satisfaction.
- An overview of their appointment following the completion of their term.

When confirming the academic standards of a final award in their reports, external examiners are also deemed to confirm endorsement of the level and standards of its component parts as appropriate to the structure of the award.

Templates

Registry will provide an annual report template to external examiners in advance of their attendance at the relevant Examining Board, which will invite comments for each of the above. The template will also be made available on the University [intranet](#).

Completed reports should be returned by external examiners to Registry at externalexaminers@cardiff.ac.uk.

Responding to Reports

External examiners' reports are received by Registry on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, who has delegated responsibility for responding to external examiners' reports to the Head of Quality and Academic Standards.

Upon receipt of an external examiner's report, Registry will identify any issues which require a detailed response. Unless the School has indicated a preference for an alternative arrangement, Registry will send the report along with a request for a School response to the issues raised to:

- The appropriate Head of School.
- The appropriate Chair of the Examining Board.
- The appropriate Chair of the Board of Studies, or equivalent.
- The appropriate member(s) of the School's senior administrative staff.

Once received the School's response will form the basis of the institutional response issued by the Head of Quality and Academic Standards, subject to any further dialogue with the School concerned.

Where no issues requiring a more detailed response are identified, the Head of Quality and Academic Standards will issue an institutional response to the external examiner without delay or further input from the School.

In all cases Registry will send a copy of the external examiner's report and the institutional response to the Head of School (or as otherwise instructed by the School).

Timescales

The normal expectation is that the School's response to any issues raised be returned to Registry within 10 working days so that a timely institutional response can be issued to the external examiner. Schools are asked to advise Registry if more time will be required.

Circulation of Reports

Within the School

Reports of external examiners should be considered by the relevant Board of Studies/School Board, who should ensure any actions or recommendations made in

the reports have been addressed, as part of the University procedures for Annual Review and Enhancement.

Where a report contains comment on the teaching or learning process in a programme the Head of School (or nominee) should make a copy available to the Chair of the School Education Committee, or equivalent body.

Schools should ensure mechanisms are in place for the sharing of external examiners' reports with their students (normally through student representatives on Boards of Studies).

Professional Bodies

The School will send a copy of the report to the relevant Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body where this is a requirement of that PSRB.

Institutional Oversight

The Head of Quality and Academic Standards will report annually (via the Annual Quality Report) to the University Academic Standards and Quality Committee on:

- The operation of procedures for the treatment of external examiner reports.
- The compliance of Schools with the requirements of these procedures.
- Generic issues of concern and noteworthy practice identified in external examiner reports.

The Vice-Chancellor and/or Head of Quality and Academic Standards may refer any issue raised in an external examiner's report for the consideration of the ASQC or other appropriate committee. The Vice-Chancellor may also request an immediate response to an external examiner's report from the Head of the relevant School.

Availability to Students and Data Protection

In order to meet the expectations of the [QAA Quality Code](#), External Examiner Annual Reports and Institutional Responses are made available to all students and staff via our [SharePoint page](#).

External examiners are therefore asked not to make any reference to any individual students or members of staff in their reports in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (2018). Where references to individuals are included in reports, these will be appropriately redacted.

SECTION 3: Appointment

External examiners are appointed by the Head of Quality and Academic Standards on behalf of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and Senate.

Each Programme and Subject Examining Board which considers modules or units of study contributing towards the final award must have at least one external examiner appointed to it. The number of external examiners appointed is determined by the nature and size of the programme and subject to approval by the Head of Quality and Academic Standards on behalf of Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

An external examiner may be appointed to one or more Programme or Subject Examining Board(s).

Fees and Expenses

The budget available for the payment of external examiners and their expenses will be approved by the Senate and the University Council. The appointments of external examiners will be made within the limits imposed by the budget, and in accordance with the [fee schedule](#) agreed by Senate and Council.

Fees will be paid by Registry following receipt of an external examiner's annual report. External examiners are also able to claim reimbursement of reasonable expenses from Registry, in accordance with the staff allowances in the [University's Financial Regulations and Procedures](#).

Process for Appointment

Registry will contact the relevant officers in Schools no less than three months in advance of the expiry of the term of office of an external examiner so that replacements can be sought ahead of the start of the academic year.

Nominations for both new and replacement external examiners should be submitted by the appropriate Head of School (or nominee) for consideration by the Head of Quality and Academic Standards no later than the first meeting of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee in the session in which the appointment is to be made.

Registry will inform the Head of School (or nominee) of the outcome of nominations, and the Head of Quality and Academic Standards will send a letter of appointment to each external examiner following approval of the nomination.

Guidance and forms for the nomination and re-nomination of external examiners will be made available on the [staff intranet](#).

Eligibility to Work in the UK

Undergraduate External Examiners

For external examiners appointed to undergraduate programmes, each School will need to undertake appropriate 'Right to Work' checks before the external examiner can be approved.

Postgraduate External Examiners

Following a decision by HR Board, the University no longer requires right to work checks to be carried out for Postgraduate External Examiners.

Criteria for Appointment

Person Specification

Nominees will normally satisfy the following criteria:

1. Be at Senior Lecturer level or above (or at an appropriate level of seniority in the relevant profession).
2. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of UK-agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality.
3. Have a high degree of competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme, or parts thereof, in the design and operation of a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and in the operation of assessment procedures.
4. Possess relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate.
5. Be of 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.
6. Be familiar with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed.
7. Possess fluency in English and/or Welsh as appropriate to the programme, and where programmes are delivered and/or assessed in other languages, 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).
8. Meet any applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies, where appropriate.
9. Have an awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula.
10. Have competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

Conflicts of Interest

Nominees should not fall into the following categories:

11. A member of the University Court, Council or Senate or of any committee of the University or any relevant collaborative partners, or a current employee of the University or any relevant collaborative partners.
12. Anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the Programme.
13. Anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme.
14. Anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme.
15. 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 or modules in question.
16. Former staff or students of the University unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s).
17. A reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution.
18. The succession of an external examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home department and institution.
19. The appointment to an Examining Board of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution.

Terms of Office

20. The duration of an external examiner's appointment will normally be for four years, with an exceptional extension of one year at the request of the Head of School (or nominee). Extensions will be approved by the Head of Quality and Academic Standards on behalf of Academic Standards and Quality Committee.
21. An external examiner may be reappointed, but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.
22. External examiners will normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time.

Special Cases

The Head of Quality and Academic Standards, in consultation with the relevant College-Dean, may approve legitimate cases for making an appointment that does not fulfil all criteria.

External examiners from outside higher education institutions can be nominated, but if there are no other higher education based external examiners appointed to the Examining Board, then evidence will need to be provided that they have the relevant experience to meet the criteria.

Ending an Appointment

Early Termination

The appointment of an external examiner may, in exceptional circumstances, be ended early by the Head of Quality and Academic Standards on behalf of Academic Standards and Quality Committee following consultation with the Head of School (or nominee). This may occur under the following circumstances:

- Where it is perceived that the external examiner has not fulfilled his/her duties and responsibilities associated with the post.
- Following the discontinuation of, or non-recruitment to, the programme.
- Where a conflict of interest arises which cannot be satisfactorily resolved.

Resignation

An external examiner may resign by writing to the Head of Quality and Academic Standards, giving a period of 6 months' notice to allow the University to identify and appoint a suitable replacement.

SECTION 4: Support for External Examiners

Induction of External Examiners

It is the responsibility of the relevant Schools and Chairs of Examining Boards to ensure that external examiners are adequately prepared to undertake their role.

External examiners should be encouraged to visit the School prior to the Examining Board if they wish. Such opportunities can be used to allow external examiners to meet staff and students, to discuss programme learning and teaching strategies and to view previous examples of students' work.

Schools may wish to hold induction events for external examiners, and this is particularly recommended where an external examiner has no prior experience of the role.

Further advice on the range of topics that might be covered through training and induction events is available from Registry on request.

External examiners may claim fees and expenses associated with any induction or visit to the School from Registry.

Information Provided by Registry

Upon appointment the external examiner Administration team in Registry will provide external examiners with:

- The current External Examiner Handbook. This outlines University procedures and signposts relevant University ordinances, regulations and policies.
- Details of fees and expenses payable.
- Login information for access to the University intranet, and Learning Central.
- Information on where they can find relevant documents and guidance available online, including past external examiner reports.

During the term of their appointment, Registry will provide updated versions of the external examiner Handbook and details of fees and expenses on an annual basis, along with the annual report template and supporting guidance.

Information Provided by the School

A Specific Contact in the School

Following confirmation of their appointment external examiners should be given a specific contact within the School to ensure they have direct contact with an appropriate member of staff in the first instance. A full list of staff involved in the delivery and administration of the programme is useful however, a single point of contact should be used to ensure a consistent and timely response to any questions or queries.

Programme Information

The following information should be provided to external examiners in relation to the programmes they have been appointed to.

- Entry requirements for the programme(s).
- Programme specification.
- Structure of the programme(s).
- Module descriptions.
- Rules on assessment, progression and award.

Throughout the term of their appointment schools should also provide external examiners with the following information on at least an annual basis:

- Arrangements for the approval of draft examination papers and other assessments.
- Opportunities to meet with students (either in person or by virtual means).
- Any proposed changes to the assessment of any module or unit of study contributing to the final award, for comment.
- Any changes to procedures involving the external examiner.

Two-way Communication

To help ensure effective and efficient communication, open and effective communication strategies should be agreed with the external examiner. These should include the following:

- It should be clearly indicated who the external examiner should contact in relation to different matters, e.g. Examining Board, issue/receipt/return of material, etc.
- The instructions accompanying batches of student work should always be clear and comprehensive and the format agreed with the external examiner in advance. The nature of the examination tasks should be clearly identified with specific details and timing of the action required of the external examiner at each stage.
- A clear timetable of activity within the School that is agreed with the external examiner in advance including the external examiner's availability during the examination cycle.
- The date(s) of Examining Board(s) for initial and subsequent Sessions should be agreed with the external examiner in good time to ensure there are appropriate timescales for the external examiner to review and make comments on any work received.