## POLICY ON EXTERNAL EXAMINING (UG & PGT)

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POLICY ON EXTERNAL EXAMINING (UG & PGT)

Purpose and Function of External Examining

The External Examining system is a crucial element of the University’s quality assurance and enhancement structure, providing a means to ensure the quality and standards of awards, the standards of student performance and the validity of assessment processes.

Specifically, the primary purposes of the External Examining system are to ensure:

- that the standards set for the University’s awards, or award elements, are appropriate by reference to relevant national subject benchmark statements, the national qualifications frameworks, the UK Quality Code, and, where appropriate, the requirements of relevant Professional and Statutory Bodies;
- that the standards of student performance in a programme and its constituent modules are appropriate and comparable with those of similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions;
- that the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are sound and have been conducted fairly.

The University recognises the importance and mutual benefit of the work undertaken by staff as External Examiners for other institutions. It is expected that staff agree with their Head of School the time they will need to fulfil their duties as External Examiners.

Selection, Qualifications, Appointment and Period of Service

Appointment

The appointment of External Examiners is the responsibility of Heads of Schools. In October, Registry will notify Schools of any External Examiner appointments that will need to be renewed or replaced in the year ahead. Schools submit nominations to Registry having ascertained that the External Examiner is willing to accept the appointment and is satisfied with the proposed fee level.

Nomination forms along with a one page CV must be submitted to the Registry at least one month before the appointment is due to start. The information contained in the nomination form allows Registry to ascertain whether the External Examiner has met the requirements set out in relation to qualifications/expertise, conflicts of interest and terms of office.

External Examiners should normally be resident in the United Kingdom. If the External Examiner is resident abroad, the School should explicitly state, as part of the nomination process, that it is willing to pay the cost of travel to St Andrews or should indicate what other arrangements have been made for consultation with the External Examiner, for example, videoconferencing or contact by email/phone.

Under the UKVI requirements, the University is legally required to ensure that employees are eligible to work in the UK and retain proof of eligibility on record. Prior to the issuing an appointment (or re-appointment) letter, Schools are responsible for ensuring that all External Examiners provide proof of eligibility to work in the UK regardless of their nationality. Further information about the UKVI requirements and verification of
documentation is available from Human Resources.

Qualifications/Expertise

Only persons of sufficient standing and experience in the relevant subject area and who are able to command authority and the respect of academic peers should be nominated. The following criteria should therefore be taken into consideration by those responsible for nominating a candidate to act as an External Examiner:

- Knowledge and understanding of the UK sector; agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality (including the UK Quality Code, subject benchmarks and the national qualifications framework).
- Relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate.
- Competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject, and operating assessment procedures.
- Awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula.
- Familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed.
- Fluency in English and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s).
- Competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.
- Fulfilment of applicable criteria as set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

In exceptional circumstances an External Examiner may be appointed who does not meet the criteria with respect to standing and/or experience, (e.g. Externals drawn from business, industry or the professions). In these instances, the appointee should not be the sole External Examiner but have his or her expertise complemented by other External Examiners who do satisfy the criteria.

Conflicts of Interest

The University will not appoint as External Examiners anyone in the following categories or circumstances:

- Members of the University Court, University employees or employees of collaborative partners.
- Anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved in the programme of study.
- Anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study.
- Anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study.
- Anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaboration research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the development, management or assessment of the programme or modules in question.
- Former staff (including honorary staff) or students of the institution unless a period of five years has elapsed.
• Anyone from a University with which there is a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes.
• Where the succession of the External Examiner would be a colleague from the Examiner’s home School/Department and institution.
• Where the appointment of more than one External Examiner would be from the same School/Department of the same institution.

**Term of Office**

The duration of an External Examiner’s appointment will normally be for four years with an exceptional extension of one year to ensure continuity.

No External Examiner may act for longer than five years, and normally an External Examiner cannot be re-appointed until at least five years has elapsed after any previous appointment.

External Examiners should not hold more than two undergraduate/taught postgraduate Examinerships at any one time.

If a taught postgraduate programme is not offered in a particular session then that year will be discounted from the External Examiner’s period of appointment.

The normal period of office for External Examiners will normally be 1 October to 30 September of the relevant years. This allows outgoing undergraduate External Examiners to participate in the decision making process for the reassessment examination diet and new External Examiners to approve draft examination papers for the coming session. These dates also allow the taught postgraduate External Examiners to participate in the decision making process following the submission of dissertations and projects at the end of August.

**Other Considerations**

In cases where a single integrated programme is taught across two or more Schools agreement on all nominations must be obtained from the lead School or equivalent prior to submission to Registry.

Where modules are shared across more than one School (eg inter-disciplinary Dissertation modules), Heads of Schools must ensure that there is clarity on which External Examiner(s) is responsible for the module.

Heads of Schools must ensure that any potential intellectual property difficulties, such as might arise from the need for commercial confidentiality, are resolved prior to appointment.

Schools wishing to make exceptions to the appointment criteria are required to make a case for approval in writing to the relevant Dean. In the case of the Head of School of Medicine, the case should be made to the Dean of Science.

**Notification of Appointment**

Once a nomination has been approved, Registry issues a letter of appointment confirming the period of appointment, the approximate fee level and methodology for the fee calculation and the requirement for an annual report to be submitted before fees are released. The letter will state the modules and/or programmes to which the External
Examiner is being appointed.

Termination of Appointment

The University can terminate an External Examiner’s contract prematurely if the External Examiner has failed to fulfil his/her obligations and/or if there is a conflict of interest. An appointment can also be terminated if the External Examiner is found to have behaved inappropriately towards staff or students, in a way that would infringe the University’s guidelines for its own staff.

The Head of School is responsible for monitoring the External Examiner’s compliance with his/her contract and to notify the relevant Dean of non-compliance. If the situation cannot be resolved through discussion, then the Head of School will write to the External Examiner to terminate the appointment. If an External Examiner seeks early termination of his/her contract, the reasons for the request should be submitted in writing to the Head of School and then submitted to the Dean. The Vice-Principal (Proctor) and Registry must also be notified of any early terminations to contracts.

If the circumstances of the External Examiner change, for example, the External Examiner moves to another University, then the External Examiner must notify the Head of School who in turn should notify Registry. Registry will review the position to ensure that there is no new conflict of interest.

Information required on Appointment

All External Examiners will be provided with sufficient information and support to enable them to carry out their duties effectively. External Examiners must become familiar with the programme structure, learning and teaching methods and assessment techniques in his/her assigned programmes and modules, provide advice and comment on such matters and recommended change where appropriate.

Registry will direct all new External Examiners to this policy, relevant assessment policies and regulations, retiring External’s final report and University’s response to any issues raised; details of payment of fees and expenses. Registry and Schools can arrange electronic access to online materials through the Module Management System (MMS) and/or the University’s VLE, Moodle.

It is the Head of School’s responsibility to ensure that an External Examiner receives information about the various roles, powers and responsibilities assigned to them including the extent of their authority at Module and Degree Classification Boards and specific attendance requirements for each. Schools should also send the External Examiner the following information:-

- School, programme or module handbooks containing details of programme structures and specifications, programme and module aims and requirements; intended learning outcomes;
- Details of assessment methods, marking criteria, marking scales and specific marking practices, for example, the use of blind double marking;
- Dates of meetings for Boards of Examiners;
- Access to copies of examination papers from the previous two years;
- Where appropriate, copies of relevant professional policies eg Fitness to Practice Medicine;
• Timetable for the vetting and approval of examination papers;
• Names and contact details of key personnel involved in the teaching, assessment and administration of the module/programme.

In addition to providing the External Examiner with the information detailed above, the Head of School will have responsibility for arranging an appropriate briefing in advance of the External Examiner’s attendance at the first Board of Examiners and clarifying the role of the External Examiner in assessment and examination procedures. The Head of School will also be responsible for ensuring that External Examiners are reminded about their duties when sending out assessments for moderation and just prior to attendance at Module and Classification Boards.

**Participation of External Examiners in Assessment and Examination Procedures**

An External Examiner is a full member of the relevant Board of Examiners. No University qualification (other than honorary degrees) should be awarded without participation in the examining process by at least one External Examiner. This includes participation in the following:

**Curriculum Approval/Setting Assessments**

• Scrutinise and comment on new module and programme proposals.
• Approve the final versions of all end-of-module examination question papers.
• Review the totality of the set assessment for a module (examinations and coursework).

**Marking Examination Scripts and other Assessment**

• Review grade/mark descriptors for each level of study and type of assessment.
• Review samples of continuous assessment and examination scripts.
• Review consistency and standards of marks and grades.
• Comment on School marking strategies.
• Approve grade conversion procedures.
• Review the method for assessing dissertations and projects.
• Review exceptional cases, eg where a student’s final module grade is awarded on the basis of a single individual’s marking of all elements.
• Approve the procedures employed for student peer (summative) assessment.

**Role of External Examiners at Module Boards**

The essential input of the External Examiner as monitor and benchmarker of standards takes place at modular level. The External Examiner’s primary role is as a moderator of grades rather than proposing actual adjustments to grades.

• Monitor the standard of assessment, marking and feedback procedures.
• Feedback on the assessment outcomes and procedures and on wider issues of quality assurance and enhancement.
• Identify any outlying marks and discuss with Schools the reasons why these might have occurred.
• Monitor any adjustment of the distribution of grades in modules.
• Advise on particular problematic cases that cannot be resolved within the School.

**Role of External Examiners at Degree Classification Boards**
External Examiners do not have a role in determining final degree classifications. Instead, the External Examiner’s role at the Classification Board is to:-

- Provide comments on the spread of degree results and performance of students.
- Comment on the degree programme as a whole, ie balance, breadth and depth.
- Comment on the assessment outcomes and procedures and on wider issues of quality assurance and enhancement.
- Offer comparison of academic standards at St Andrews with those in other institutions, identifying models of best practice.
- Prior to the submission of module grades to Registry, the External Examiner must endorse the outcomes of the assessment processes they have been appointed to scrutinise.

External Examiners’ Reports

All External Examiners are required to complete an annual report commenting on the appropriateness of the standards of the assessments that they have examined. The annual report form addresses the relevant sections of the UK Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining.

Registry officially requests that the External Examiners submit an annual report to external@st-andrews.ac.uk no later than 30 June (for undergraduate) or 31 October (for taught postgraduate) programmes. External Examiners who reach the end of their period of office, will be asked to provide an overview of their term of office.

External Examiners are asked to comment on the assessment processes and comparability of standards with other similar Universities of which the External Examiner has experience. An opportunity will also be given to highlight any examples of promising practice or areas of concern.

Action in response to External Examiner Reports

Once the Annual Reports have been submitted, Registry copies them to the relevant Head of School. Heads of Schools have responsibility for ensuring that mechanisms exist to handle reports and that appropriate action is taken on the comments received. Heads of Schools must respond to the reports no later than 31 August (for undergraduate) or 30 November (for taught postgraduate) programmes. The Head of School must indicate any action taken as a result of the report and/or reasons for not accepting particular recommendations or actions. Any reports which make particularly serious or important comments or which raise issues of wider significance for the University are immediately brought to the attention of the Deans and action is taken.

The Head of School (or delegate) must also ensure that a summary of the key commendations and recommendations raised by their External Examiners, and a summary of the actions to be taken in response to the reports, is presented to the School’s Student Staff Consultative Committee(s). Students may request copies of any reports from the Head of School.

A report summarising the key institutional themes arising from External Examiners’ comments, as well as School and Faculty level issues, is considered by the Academic Monitoring Group. The Academic Monitoring Group then agrees any examples of good practice and areas for development which will be considered by the Learning and Teaching
Committee.

External Examiner reports are also considered as part of the periodic internal review process for learning and teaching.

Before the start of each academic year, all External Examiners receive an annual letter from the Vice-Principal (Proctor) summarising any changes in policies that might affect them, together with any University-wide issues raised in their reports and resulting actions taken by the University at a Faculty and institutional level.

Non completion of Report

Registry will send reminders to those External Examiners who have not submitted by the given deadline. If the report is still not received within a reasonable timescale then the matter will be referred to the relevant Head of School. No fee payment will be released until the report has been received.

Expenses and Fees

Heads of School determine the fee for Undergraduate External Examiners at the time of the initial appointment. All examining fees are reviewed annually and confirmed by Heads of School to Registry in time for payment to be made on receipt of the Examiner’s report.

The fee for taught Postgraduate External Examiners is normally determined by means of a standard rate based on the number of students on the programme and the number of scripts and dissertations that would require to be sampled as part of the examination process. While the University recommends this formula, Heads of Schools are free to set an alternative flat fee if appropriate.

All expense claims for travel, accommodation and subsistence should be submitted by the External Examiner to the Head of School. All such claims should be made on the appropriate form, available on request from the School, and should be accompanied by receipts. The University will only meet the cost of expenses in line with its financial regulations.

Following receipt of the annual report in June or October respectively, Registry will authorise payment of the examining fee. Tax and national insurance are normally deducted at source at the basic rate. Payments are made into bank accounts and reports must be received by the 1st of the month for payment to be made by the end of that month. If an expense claim has not been submitted at the same time, Registry will require a claim form to be completed in order to confirm bank details.

Data Protection, Freedom of Information and Confidentiality

All External Examiner’s Reports and minutes of meetings of Boards of Examiners are treated confidentially. However owing to provision within the Data Protection Act 1998, which took full effect on 1 March 2000, an External Examiner should be aware of the following:

- students have the right to a copy of any personal information held about them by the University upon submitting in writing a subject access request, and the University will normally provide upon request marks and comments made on examination scripts;
• the minutes of meetings of Boards of Examiners may constitute personal data accessible by students making a subject access request. External Examiners are advised therefore that such data might well be disclosed if requested, and that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

External Examiners should also be aware of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA) which came into effect on 1 January 2005. It gives members of the public a statutory right to obtain, subject to certain exemptions, any recorded information held by the University regardless of when it was created or by whom. Under this legislation the University may be required to provide copies of any External Examiner’s report to any third party who makes a request for them. All requests for information under FOISA need to be considered on a case-by-case basis. Where a report focuses on an identifiable individual however, the report would not be released under FOISA since such information would fall under the terms of the Data Protection Act.

**Academic Appeals**

The University will investigate any academic complaint or appeal and may decide, if appropriate, to involve an External Examiner. An External Examiner will only be consulted about an appeal if the University feels this to be necessary or useful. Further information can be found in the [Policy on Student Academic Appeals](#).

**Causes for Concern**

The External Examiner also has the opportunity to write directly to the Vice-Principal (Proctor) if he/she wishes to raise any issues relating to assessment which may be particularly serious or important to the wider University.

Where an External Examiner has a serious concern relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme and has exhausted all published applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Vice-Principal (Proctor), he/she may invoke [QAA’s Concerns Scheme](#) or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.