



University of
St Andrews

External Examining (UG & PGT)

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Purpose	This policy outlines processes and procedures relating to the role of External Examiners for taught programmes. Guidance on external examining for Postgraduate Research students is available via the Assessment of Postgraduate Research students policy.

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7.0	Updates to align with QAA's External Examining Principles	Pending publication	Academic Policy Officer (Quality)	May 2024

UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

POLICY ON EXTERNAL EXAMINING (UG & PGT)

1. 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.

The primary purpose of the External Examining system is 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, Regulatory and Statutory Bodies.
- 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.
- 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.

2. Selection, qualifications, appointment and period of service

a. 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 satisfied themselves that the External Examiner has met the requirements set out in relation to qualifications/expertise and conflicts of interest. In addition, the School will ascertain 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 Registry at least one month before the appointment is due to start. Registry checks that the nomination is completed in full prior to liaising with the External Examiner regarding the appointment.

Heads of Schools should consider diversity when nominating External Examiners. A suitably diverse external examiner pool will contribute to the inclusiveness of the School's teaching, learning and assessment processes.

External Examiners appointed to review a proposal for a new programme can be appointed as the External Examiner for that programme.

External Examiners will be asked to complete the University's standard equal opportunities monitoring form and Academic Monitoring Group will have oversight of the data annually.

External Examiners should normally be resident in the United Kingdom.

If the External Examiner is resident abroad, and the School expects that they will attend activities

in-person, it should explicitly state, as part of the nomination process, that it is willing to pay the cost of travel to St Andrews.

If all activities for the External Examiner are to be completed online, the School should explain the arrangements in place for consultation with the External Examiner.

b. Qualifications/expertise

Only persons of sufficient standing and experience in the relevant subject area who can 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:

- I. Knowledge and understanding of the UK sector and 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).
- II. Relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate.
- III. Competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject, and operating assessment procedures.
- IV. Awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula.
- V. Familiarity with the standard that students would be expected to reach in order to achieve the relevant award.
- VI. Fluency in English and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s).
- VII. Competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.
- VIII. Fulfilment of applicable criteria as set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.
- IX. Awareness of inclusive practice in teaching, learning and assessment.

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 or industry. In these instances, the appointee should not be the sole External Examiner but have their expertise complemented by other External Examiners who do satisfy the criteria.

Schools (including the School of Medicine) wishing to make exceptions to the appointment criteria are required to make a case for approval in writing to the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching) and Provost.

c. Conflicts of interest

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

- I. Members of the University Court, University employees or employees of collaborative partners.
- II. Anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved in the programme of study.
- III. Anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study.
- IV. Anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the

- future of students on the programme of study.
- V. 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.
 - VI. Former staff (including honorary staff) or students of the institution unless a period of five years has elapsed.
 - VII. An External Examiner from another institution when that institution appoints one from the first institution in a cognate course in return (known as a reciprocal arrangement).
 - VIII. Where the succession of the External Examiner would be a colleague from the same institution on more than two consecutive occasions.
 - IX. Where the appointment of more than one External Examiner would be from the same School/Department of the same institution.

d. 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 usually 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.

e. 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 (e.g. interdisciplinary 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.

f. Notification of appointment

Once a nomination has been approved, Registry issues an External Examiner Agreement 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 agreement will state the type of modules and/or programmes (UG/PGT/both) to which the External Examiner is being appointed. A Personal Details Form, requesting information such as bank details, is issued with the External Examiner Agreement for completion and return to

Registry.

g. 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 their 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 and relevant assessment policies and regulations. Details of payment of fees and expenses will be provided in the External Examiner Agreement issued by Registry. On completion of the appointment process, External Examiners will receive automated emails with instructions on how to set up their University account (one contains their username and the other, their activation key). This will allow Schools to arrange electronic access to online materials through the Module Management System (MMS) and/or the University's VLE, Moodle, and will allow access to the online tool for completion of annual reports.

A short guide to External Examining is available via <link to be inserted once guidance published> and the Associate Deans (Education) and Associate Provost (Education) host an annual Q&A session with External Examiners in October.

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 Boards and specific attendance requirements. Schools should also send the External Examiner the following information:

- I. School, programme or module handbooks containing details of programme structures and specifications, programme and module aims and requirements, and intended learning outcomes.
- II. Details of assessment methods, marking criteria, marking scales and specific marking practices, for example, the use of blind double marking.
- III. Dates of meetings for Module Boards and confirmation of whether these will be in person, online or hybrid. While many External Examiners appreciate the opportunity to visit the University in person, Heads of Schools should be mindful of the need for flexibility as a way of encouraging the diversity of External Examiners.
- IV. Access to copies of examination papers from the previous two years.
- V. Where appropriate, copies of relevant professional policies, e.g. Fitness to Practise Medicine.
- VI. Timetable for the vetting and approval of examination papers.
- VII. 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 Module Board 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 Boards.

h. Termination of appointment

The University can terminate an External Examiner's appointment prematurely if the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education requires universities to conform to other arrangements for External Examinerships and such arrangements are to be introduced before the end date of the appointment. The University can also terminate an External Examiner's appointment if the External Examiner has failed to fulfil their 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 their contract and for notifying the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching) and Provost 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 Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching) and Provost with a one month period of notice. The Vice-Principal (Proctor) and Provost and Registry must also be notified of any early terminations to contracts.

i. Change of circumstances

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 will review the position to ensure that there is no new conflict of interest. The Head of School should notify Registry of the change of circumstances.

The External Examiner would normally be expected to step down on retirement. As such, the External Examiner's contracted appointment period should not extend beyond the External's anticipated retirement date. However, in exceptional circumstances and with the agreement of the School, the period of office may be extended for one year post-retirement provided it does not exceed the maximum five year duration.

j. Contingency

In the event of an External Examiner withdrawing from their duties due to industrial action, illness or for any other reason, the Head of School should seek to appoint another External Examiner in time for the Module Board(s). If this is not possible in time, the Head of School should invite one of the other External Examiners appointed in the School to carry out the duties of the absent External Examiner. As a last resort, a suitably qualified colleague from a cognate discipline within the University should be appointed to act as an "internal external examiner" as a short-term solution.

3. Participation of external examiners in assessment and examination procedures

An External Examiner is a full member of the relevant Module Board. 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:

a. Curriculum approval/setting assessments

- Scrutinise and comment on new module and programme proposals.
- Review and provide written advice and approval on significant module and programme amendments.

- 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).

If Schools are considering any significant developments in relation to the curriculum or assessment, they are encouraged to proactively use External Examiners as a critical friend to give external view on the proposals.

b. 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, e.g. 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.

c. Role of External Examiners at Module Boards

The essential input of the External Examiner as monitor and bench marker 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 anomalous marks and discuss with Schools the reasons why these might have occurred.
- Monitor any adjustment of the distribution of grades in modules.
- Advise on problematic cases that cannot be resolved within the School.

d. Degree classifications

Data showing overall classification outcomes (with historical data for context) is provided along with a letter from the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching) and Provost to External Examiners with the email from Registry referred to in section f. below.

Externals are asked to reflect on the distribution patterns of the classification data provided in their annual report.

e. Meeting members of the student body.

Schools should offer External Examiners a formal opportunity (in person, online or hybrid) to meet with students. This meeting should help students understand the value of the external examining system, how outcomes are reached and how they reflect achievements, as well as allowing students to discuss their learning experiences with the external examiner. This may include suggestions for enhancement of the curriculum but should not include discussion of individual assessment outcomes. Meetings should be arranged at an appropriate time to facilitate these purposes.

f. External Examiners' reports

Submission of 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 ['External Expertise'](#) section of the UK Quality Code.

External Examiners are required to submit their annual report using the University's online tool, MySaint. Registry will email External Examiners one month before reports are due, requesting that they complete the online annual report no later than 30 July (undergraduate) and no later than 4 November (postgraduate). Two reminder emails will be sent to External Examiners before the annual report is due. External Examiners who reach the end of their period of office should complete the end of term section of the online form.

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. External Examiners are also encouraged to highlight any examples of promising practice and innovation and, where appropriate, recommend ways to enhance the quality of learning opportunities for students.

Action in response to External Examiner reports

On submission of the annual reports by External Examiners, confirmation of the submission will be emailed to Registry, Heads of School and any other relevant member of staff within Schools.

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 within four weeks of the External Examiner submitting the report using the online form. The Head of School must indicate any action taken in response to the report and/or reasons for not accepting recommendations or actions. Any reports that raise concerns at institutional level will be automatically forwarded to Academic Monitoring/the Associate Deans (Education)/Associate Provost Education on receipt of the report. An institutional response will be provided to the External Examiner.

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). In accordance with the ['External Expertise'](#) section of the UK Quality Code, the University 'must demonstrate that feedback from External Examiners has been acted upon'. The Head of School (or delegate) must also ensure that reports are uploaded to Moodle and that students and staff are notified when these become available. Please refer to the [External Examining guidance](#) for further information.

A clear mechanism should be in place within Schools to enable the sharing of External Examiners reports between partner institutes involved in collaborative/ joint degrees. The requirement for this should be expressed in the Memorandum of Agreement prepared by the Global Office and the mechanism/responsibility for sharing reports should be agreed by the Head of School and his/her equivalent(s) at the partner institute(s).

External Examiner feedback is reviewed at an institutional level by the Associate Deans (Education) and the Associate Provost Education. Reports summarising areas of good practice, opportunities to enhance the learning experience, issues raised at an institutional level and key themes emerging from External Examiner feedback are considered on an annual basis by the

Academic Monitoring Group. Areas of good practice and innovation, and key themes are shared with the University's Learning and Teaching Committee.

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

All External Examiners receive an annual letter from the Vice-Principal Education (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

System generated reminder emails will be issued to External Examiners during the submission period. Registry will then send one further reminder to those External Examiners who have not submitted their annual report 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 from the External Examiner and a response provided by the Head of School.

g. 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 July for UG and November for PGT) and the response by the Head of School, 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.

h. Personal data and confidentiality

Module Boards: confidentiality of proceedings

The business of Module Boards is confidential: consideration of individual academic performance, and the recording of decisions reached concerning academic awards and/or progression are private matters for those concerned. However, owing to provision from the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018 ("the DPA 2018"), an External Examiner should be aware of the following:

- An individual has the right to obtain from the University a copy of their personal data, and any available information as to their source. The University will normally provide upon request marks and comments made on examination scripts and other assessed work about an individual; and/or commentary/assessment from minutes of Module Boards, and unless otherwise apparent from the information, details of the source – unless an exemption from the DPA 2018 applies. The relevant DPA 2018 exemption ‘Exam scripts and exam marks’ does not provide a complete bar on the release of personal data; it establishes an embargo as to when personal data cannot be released, so the prevent results being known in advance of publication.
- It is vital that the University has full and accurate records of key decisions – in that respect personal data should be accurate, relevant and not excessive for the purpose in hand.

External Examiner reports: personal data and confidentiality

External Examiner reports should not identify any student or students; reports will be screened by Schools with the External Examiners to ensure that commentary does not breach the privacy or confidentiality of any student. The views and assessment of an External Examiner are important, and therefore the identities of External Examiners will feature in reports.

i. 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](#).

The University may seek input from External Examiners where required to support investigations initiated under the Policy on [Student Academic Appeals](#).

j. Causes for concern

The External Examiner can note within their report any issues of concern to be addressed at institutional level. This feedback will be followed up by the relevant Associate Dean (Education) or the Associate Provost Education.

External Examiners can also write directly to the Vice-Principal (Proctor) regarding 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), they can invoke [QAA’s Concerns Scheme](#) or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and school / unit	Date

2.0	Minor refreshes and introduction of new practice – sharing reports with students via Moodle	Updated	Ros Campbell, Academic Policy Officer, Proctor's Office	2019/20
3.0	Add link to External Examiner Guidance	Updated	Proctor's Office	2020/21
4.0	Changes to titles/contact details to reflect decanal restructuring	Updated	-	February 2021
5.0	Addition of paragraph re sharing of classification data with External Examiners and amendment to submission dates	Updated	Proctor's Office	August 2021
6.0	Addition of paragraph re contingency (section 2.j)	Updated	Academic Policy Officer (Quality), Education Policy & Quality	April 2023
7.0	Updates to align with QAA's External Examining Principles	Pending publication	Academic Policy Officer (Quality)	May 2024