

External Examiners Code of Practice

Academic Governance Approval

Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC)

Academic Sponsor

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students)

Professional Services Owner

Assistant Registrar (Quality, Assessment and Partnerships)

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1. Aims and Scope

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This Code of Practice summarises the roles, requirements and expectations for External Examiner arrangements at the Royal Agricultural University.
- 1.1.2 External Examiners are appointed to oversee and comment on the quality and standards of all RAU validated provision at both module and programme level as well as those which lead to University awards at approved collaborative partner institutions.
- 1.1.3 The University considers its arrangements for external examining an integral and important part of its quality assurance mechanism. The appointment of external examiners provides an independent external measure of the University's academic processes and ensures comparability of Royal Agricultural University awards with those of other Higher Education institutions in the United Kingdom.
- 1.1.4 This code of practice applies to all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes validated and delivered by the Royal Agricultural University including those delivered by approved collaborative partner institutions.

2. The Role and Responsibilities of External Examiners

2.1 The Purpose of External Examiners

2.1.1 External examiners are appointed by the University in order to:

- Provide assurance to the University that the programmes and modules within their remit meet the standards described in the [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#).
- Provide assurance to the University that programmes and modules within their remit are aligned to the relevant [Subject Benchmark Statements](#), developed by the sector and published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.
- Provide assurance to the University that assessments for the modules within their remit are appropriate for the subject and enable students to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes at the relevant level.
- Make recommendations to the University regarding areas of development for the programmes and modules within their remit, with particular attention to the learning and teaching methods and assessment methods used to deliver those programmes and modules.
- Provide assurance to the University that our policies, procedures, and practices are in alignment with sector best practice, as set out in the [Advice and Guidance](#) published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.
- Provide support to the University by sharing best practice.
- Provide challenge 'as critical friends' via recommendations for key areas of development for academic programmes/modules

2.2 The Remit of External Examiners

2.2.1 One external examiner must be appointed to each programme of study. Where there is a strong rationale to do so, a number of external examiners may be appointed to a programme to ensure full coverage of the subject.

2.2.2 One external examiner must be appointed to each module. Where a module is shared across a number of programmes, only one of the relevant external examiners should be asked to oversee that module.

2.3 The Responsibilities of External Examiners

2.3.1 External Examiners are expected to:

- Review and approve draft examination papers that contribute to final awards, ensuring assessment criteria, marking schemes and classifications are set at appropriate levels;

- Agree with programme teams, processes for the scrutiny of assessment items and assessment criteria as part of the external moderation process; this may be carried out electronically;
- Comment on the continued currency, appropriateness and coherence of the programme(s) to which they are appointed, and provide feedback regarding proposed changes to curriculum content, structure or outcomes; or any other advice and guidance as deemed necessary;
- Attend Progression and Award Boards. Where attendance is not possible, provide written comments in advance of the examination boards to the Chair of the Board;
- External Examiners will be invited to attend Semester 1 and Semester 2 module boards which they may wish to attend.
- Submit an annual report within four weeks of the examination board which addresses their responsibilities as an external examiner as set out above;
- Raise any issues or concerns regarding academic standards, assessment or student performance;
- Raise, where appropriate, any issues or concerns in relation to collaborative arrangements or Professional, Regulatory or Statutory Body (PSRB) accreditation and/or requirements.
- Confirm via endorsement of examination board outcomes, the integrity and equity of the University's processes for conferring awards.
- Handle all assessment and any other personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018) and the University's [Information Handling Policy and Information Security Policy](#);

3. Nomination and Appointment

3.1 Nomination of External Examiners

- 3.1.1 All External Examiners for programmes leading to Royal Agricultural University awards, including collaborative arrangements, must be formally approved by the University.
- 3.1.2 The Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) has delegated authority from Academic Board to approve the appointment of External Examiners.
- 3.1.3 External Examiners are nominated by Programme Leaders and require the support of the relevant Head of School prior to submission to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) for approval.
- 3.1.4 The tenure of appointment for External Examiners shall be for a period of four academic year and one term, allowing for a handover period between the outgoing and incoming External Examiners. Appointments will start in September of year one.
- 3.1.5 In exceptional circumstances, an appointment may be extended by up to one year (12 months) by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee.
- 3.1.6 Where a programme or course has been discontinued and is in teach-out, exceptional External Examiner arrangements may be approved by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee.
- 3.1.7 Outgoing External Examiners will not be replaced where sufficient External Examiner coverage remains on the programme or it can be reallocated to an existing External Examiner. Programme teams should contact Academic Services to ascertain whether a new External Examiner is required prior to approaching anyone in their professional networks.
- 3.1.8 Nominees for external examiner should not hold more than two additional External Examiner appointments.
- 3.1.9 Nominees who have been employed as an external panel member in the approval of a programme are not automatically debarred from immediate appointment as an External Examiner to that programme. However, Schools should balance the benefits of engaging someone who is familiar with the programme and its rationale with any risk to their ability to provide a fully independent perspective;
- 3.1.10 Reciprocal External Examining arrangements between cognate programmes in two institutions are not permitted.

3.1.11 External examiners be located outside the University's government region where possible (Schools to contact Academic Services for additional advice where required).

3.1.12 Upon completion of an external examiner's period of tenure, replacements may not be appointed from the same subject area in the same teaching institution, unless it can be demonstrated to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee that no other external examiner with the appropriate subject expertise can be found.

3.2 Requirements for nomination

3.2.1 External examiner nominees must demonstrate:

- the Right to work in the UK;
- fluency in the English language. For programmes delivered and assessed in a language other than English, possess fluency in the relevant language;
- knowledge and understanding of UK Higher Education sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
- competence and experience in the field covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof;
- 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;
- meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies;
- 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;

3.3 Termination and Resignation

3.3.1 External examiner appointments can be terminated by the University in the event of unsatisfactory performance. This could include failure to attend appropriate examination boards without making alternative arrangements, failure to engage with external examiner processes, and the failure to submit completed reports.

3.3.2 Should an external examiner wish to resign, this would normally be after the submission of the external examiner report at the end of the annual cycle. The external examiner should inform the Head of School in writing before the end of the academic year.

- 3.3.3 Should an external examiner wish to resign during the academic year, this should occur in writing to the Head of School giving a three months' notice period, and inform quality@rau.ac.uk .
- 3.3.4 The University monitors and reviews the number and allocation of external examiners on an ongoing basis to ensure that the range of external examiners remains reflective of, and appropriate to, the breadth of its academic portfolio.

4. Reporting and Rights of External Examiners

4.1 External Examiner Reports

- 4.1.1 Academic Services will provide annually in April of each year an External Examiner Report template.
- 4.1.2 The University requires all External Examiners to complete an annual report on the External Examiner Report template provided, within four weeks from the date the examination board is held.
- 4.1.3 The annual report provides an overview of issues relating to award standards; alignment to FHEQ and subject benchmarks; comparability of student performance and achievement; academic currency of the curriculum; quality of teaching, learning and assessment; marking and moderation practice; recommendations for enhancements and sharing of good practice.
- 4.1.4 Where External Examiners are appointed to act as an External Examiner for a programme which is delivered by multiple partner organisations and/or multiple sites, the External Examiner should expect to see clearly identified samples for external scrutiny.
- 4.1.5 In such cases, the University expects the External Examiner to comment on both the comparability of standards and quality of the learning experience and consistency in assessment practice, as delivered at each partner site of delivery and any specific issues for the programmes as a whole throughout the report.
- 4.1.6 For External Examiners that complete their tenure, the report template also contains a section that allows them to reflect on their experience during this time, and any advice and guidance they may wish to provide to the University, the programme team or the incoming External Examiner.
- 4.1.7 Direct references to named staff and students within the report are to be avoided and will be redacted prior to publication to staff and students as appropriate and in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.
- 4.1.8 Upon receipt, reports are disseminated to Heads of School, Programme Leaders and Collaborative partners (as appropriate) for their consideration, and where required, a response to any issues or recommendations raised. It is expected that Heads of School / Programme Leaders provide an initial response within two weeks from the receipt of the report.

4.2 Rights of the External Examiner

- 4.2.1 External Examiners have the authority and responsibility to report directly to the Vice Chancellor of the University any case they believe there to be serious concerns about an award; if assessments are conducted in a way that jeopardises either the fair treatment of individual students or the standards of a University award; or any other issue of confidential nature, may also be referred in writing to the Vice Chancellor.
- 4.2.2 The University aims to address and resolve any issues notified in a speedy manner. Upon receipt of a report that raises any serious concerns, an investigation will be carried out by the Director of Academic Services, and a written response provided to the External Examiner within ten working days.
- 4.2.3 In the event of an External Examiner expressing serious concerns about systemic failings, following submission of a report to the Vice Chancellor, and having received a response, External Examiners may consider invoking the QAA's [Concerns Scheme](#).
- 4.2.4 In addition, External Examiners are able to
- Request a sample of all draft assessment items (including examination papers and coursework assessments) before they are given to students in consultation with the appropriate internal marker(s)
 - Inspect any material relating to the course including course handbooks, examination papers, scripts, coursework and project reports
 - Meet students
 - Discuss curriculum developments with academic staff
 - Withhold their endorsement for the recommendation of an award.

5. Fees and Expenses

5.1 External Examiner Fees

5.1.1 All External Examiners receive an annual fee payment that covers all duties that have been carried out on behalf of the University. In order to receive the annual, the University expects an External Examiner to complete the following:

- Attendance at the Programme and Award Board
- A visit to campus / collaborative partner each year to meet with programme staff, and where possible, with students
- Completion of the External Examiner Report
- Sign off examination papers and coursework briefs for the programmes they are appointed to
- Respond to consultation on material and non-material changes to programmes

5.1.2 The annual fee is £300 and payment is due upon receipt of the completed annual External Examiner Report. Fee payments are made through the University Payroll and are processed by Academic Services.

5.2 External Examiner Expenses

5.2.1 External Examiners will be reimbursed for expenses occurred while carrying out duties on behalf of the University or collaborative partner institutions. Receipts must be produced to ensure payments will be made and all expenses should be submitted to Academic Services via email to quality@rau.ac.uk . Expenses should be submitted at the time they incur.

6. Information and Support for External Examiners

6.1 Information for External Examiners

- 6.1.1 Upon confirmation of appointment, External Examiners will be provided with an appointment letter which confirms the rate of payment, period of tenure and institutional requirements.
- 6.2.2 The University will provide an annual External Examiner Induction Day, usually held in Spring of each year for External Examiners in their first year of tenure.
- 6.2.3 External Examiners will receive from programme teams programme specific documentation including programme and module specifications; details of PSRB information, key dates for the moderation of student assessment; module board; progression and award boards.
- 6.2.4 External Examiners appointed to provision with collaborative partners will receive a briefing from the programme team and link tutor on the nature and extend of the partnership, including expectations of annual visits to partner sites in the UK and overseas (where applicable).
- 6.2.5 Academic Services will provide incoming External Examiners with a copy of the previous years' outgoing External Examiner report, Annual Programme Monitoring Report and University regulations.

The below table provides an overview of information provided by the University:

Academic Services	Programme Leaders
Appointment letter	Programme specification
Induction day	Module specification
Previous years' report from outgoing External Examiners	PSRB information (where applicable)
Annual Programme Monitoring Report (action plan)	Link tutor briefing (for collaborative arrangements where appropriate)
University regulations (Academic Framework, marking criteria, APL regulations)	Key dates for academic year including dates for moderation, module boards, progression and award boards
	Assessment and Moderation schedule

A typical year in the life of a (newly appointed) external examiner

One way of sketching the role and responsibilities of an external examiner is to review the activities across an academic year. The activities described below relate to a traditional type of three-year undergraduate degree programme in an institution with a two-semester modular system of delivery and assessment, and an external examiner appointed to review a typical arts, science or humanities discipline.

Appointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nomination and appointment takes place prior to the start of the academic year • Role starts in September of academic year • Appointment process and External Examiner Guidance sets out the responsibilities and expectations • Right to Work check and completion of payroll information is completed upon appointment
Semester 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Leaders provide programme specification(s); assessment details; key dates including scheduled assessments, moderation schedule, visits to the University (or collaborative partner), Module Board and Progression & Award Board dates • Academic Services provide copies of two previous External Examiner reports • External Examiners will be asked to comment on examination papers and assessments
End of Semester 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Leader provides a selection of Semester 1 student assessments for moderation • Arrangements are made for one visit to the University to meet students (this may also be done online) • <i>(Module boards may be attended if so desired)</i> • Programme Leaders request comments on examination papers and assessments for Semester 2 • Academic Services will invite all External Examiners to attend an Induction Day in April (presentations include details of University expectations, academic regulations, the role of the External Examiner, examination boards)
Semester 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Leader provides a selection of Semester 2 student assessments for moderation • Arrangements are made for one visit to the University to meet students (if not already done so in Semester 1; this may also be done online) • Attend Progression & Award Board (online) • <i>(Module boards may be attended if so desired)</i>

End of Semester 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit External Examiner Report within 4 weeks after the Undergraduate Progression and Award Board in June • Submit External Examiner Report prior to Christmas following the Postgraduate Progression and Award Board in November • Programme Leaders will request comments on examination papers and assessments for next academic year
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Version Control

Version number	Purpose/change	Name and job title	Date
V1.0	Introduction of Code of Practice to reflect institutional operational and policy changes (this replaces the Policy for External Examination of Taught Programmes v1.0)	Susanne Wilson, Assistant Registrar – Quality, Assessment and Partnerships	12/01/2022
	Updates to exam board attendance	Susanne Wilson, Assistant Registrar – Quality, Assessment and Partnerships	28/09/2022