



Royal  
Agricultural  
University

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**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S  
HANDBOOK**

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## 1. Introduction

The [Royal Agricultural University Policy for External Examination of Taught Programmes](#) summarises the University's expectations for the conduct of external examining of taught programmes. The Policy can be found on the virtual learning environment, Gateway, and on the RAU Website.

This handbook sets out the regulations and procedures that relate to External Examiners (EEs) for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes as well as for the Institution External Examiner (IEE) appointed to the University Examinations Committee (UEC). It is designed as a guide and may be subject to change following appropriate academic debate and decision making within the University's QA structure.

## 2. Regulations

### Status of External Examiners

External Examiners are non-voting members of the relevant Programme Board, except where Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) require them to be full voting members. If the opinion of the Board is equally divided, the Chair of the Board (normally the Head of School) shall have the final casting vote (in addition to the Chair's original vote as a member of the Board). In all other cases it will be the majority decision of the members present at the Board that will be upheld. The IEE is a non-voting member of the UEC.

### Your duties as an External Examiner

External Examiners provide impartial and independent advice on academic standards and on student achievement. At least one External Examiner must be appointed for each programme leading to an award of the University. In exceptional circumstances an external may be appointed to two programmes.

### Institutional External Examiner (IEE)

The IEE is appointed to attend and oversee the University Examinations Committee (UEC) meetings in June and September. The role of the IEE is to assure the University's approach to the process of ratification of the results from the School

Programme Boards and to participate, as required, in reviews of decisions made about individual student's awards; especially at the September UEC. The IEE should sign the Student Degree Classification List to endorse the results.

The IEE report to Academic Board is submitted via the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) and comments on the effectiveness and fairness of the process to ratify the results awarded at the Programme Boards and to confirm that all circumstances relating to individual candidates, or groups of candidates, have been considered.

### Quality Assurance

Your main responsibility as an External Examiner is to assure the maintenance of standards rather than the third-marking of individual grades. You will assure that:

- The University is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and subject benchmark statements;
- the assessment process measures students' achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme and is conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations;
- the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which you have an experience of.

Where applicable you will be asked to ensure that any additional PSRB requirements are reflected and satisfied by the programme.

The University expects its External Examiners to carry out this responsibility and that you shall:

- be able to judge impartially on the basis of the work submitted for assessment, without being influenced by previous association with the programme, the University, the staff, or any of the students;
- be able to compare the performance of students with that of your peers on comparable courses of higher education elsewhere;
- be able to comment on the appropriateness of all assessments that count towards the award, in order to ensure that all students will be assessed fairly in relation to the programme syllabus and regulations and in such a way that the you will be able to judge whether the students have fulfilled the objectives of the programme and reached the required standard;
- be consulted about minor changes to programmes for which you have responsibility;
- attend examiners' meetings as required;
- review samples of the work of students proposed for each category of the award, in order to ensure that each student is fairly placed in relation to the

rest of the cohort. To this should be added all remaining work in the fail category;

- not change individual grades but rather provide commentary on standards achieved by students and whether the standards applied are appropriate;
- have the opportunity to meet students on the programmes you are examining (and to visit collaborative partners where the programme is not delivered directly by the University);
- ensure that the assessments are conducted in accordance with the regulations for the programme of study;
- attend the Programme Board at which decisions on recommendations for awards are made and ensure that those recommendations are reached by means according with the University's requirements and normal practice in higher education;
- participate as required in reviews of decisions about individual students' awards;
- report to the Academic Board through the AQSC on the effectiveness of the assessments and any lessons to be drawn from them;
- report to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor on any matters of serious concern arising from the assessment(s), which put at risk the standard of the University's award(s).

## Appointment

Appointment of External Examiners is made by Academic Board following recommendation by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC).

### Term of Office

The normal period of appointment for External Examiners for taught programmes is four years. This does not preclude appointing External Examiners for shorter periods if that is desirable for both parties.

The appointment may be exceptionally extended for a further one year period to ensure continuity, for example when a programme is coming to an end, with approval from AQSC.

If you start to examine another programme during your appointment the end date of the contract for both programmes will be after the initial four years.

### Criteria for the appointment of an External Examiner.

The University will require appropriate evidence of the following:

- The right to work in the United Kingdom;
- Knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for academic standards and of the assurance and enhancement of quality;

- Relevant academic qualifications or, where appropriate, professional qualifications and/or extensive practitioner experience;
- Breadth of knowledge and standing within the subject to demonstrate credibility to peers;
- Competence and experience in the areas covered by the programme (or parts thereof) and of designing and operating a variety of assessment methods appropriate to the subject;
- Competence and experience of the standards expected of students to achieve the award and of the enhancement of the student learning experience;
- Awareness of current developments in curricula design and delivery;
- Fluency in English, and for programmes that are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s); and
- Where appropriate, any additional criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

### Conflicts of Interest

Any conflicts of interest that needs due consideration before appointment should be declared on the Nomination Form, or at the earliest opportunity in writing to the Head of School if they arise during term of office. Conflicts of interest may include:

- Significant involvement in recent or current, substantive, collaborative research or knowledge exchange activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme(s) or modules in question
- Having a near relative as a student or member of staff at the University
- Personal association with sponsorship of students in the School
- Involvement in assessing colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme
- Holding a position which may have significant influence on the future of students on the programme
- Employment with one of the University's collaborative partners
- Holding the position of Governor at the University
- Being a current member of staff at the University.

### Engagement

Once an External Examiner's offer has been confirmed by approval at Academic Board:

- You will receive a letter of confirmation from the Academic Registry. This letter will define the terms and duration of the appointment and will enclose formal details of the remit of the appointment.
- You will be provided with the appropriate documentation to facilitate your task. This will include this handbook as well as details of the programme or course to be examined.

- You will be invited to complete an online induction via Gateway. This will be an introduction to the University regulatory framework for external examining.
- If you have either limited or no previous experience of acting as an External Examiner you will normally be appointed a mentor to support you during your first semester or year of appointment, unless you are working within a team of experienced examiners. The mentor is likely to be an experienced current Royal Agricultural University External Examiner from a similar programme/subject area of expertise.
- You will receive advance notification of all Programme Boards. When you are first appointed you will be directed to a copy of the Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the previous year on Gateway (VLE), together with a copy of your predecessor's final Report. Agenda papers for forthcoming Boards will be circulated no less than 10 working days beforehand

No Royal Agricultural University Award will be recommended or conferred without the assent of the External Examiner, unless otherwise agreed by the Vice-Chancellor as Chair of the Academic Board. External Examiners are normally expected to be present at all Programme Boards where Awards are due to be made, and will be required to sign the completed student degree classification list.

Any External Examiner who is not attending a Programme Board where Awards are to be made will be required:

- to provide, in advance, written confirmation of full involvement in the examining process;
- to sign a confirmatory statement after the Board, in assent to the decisions made in their absence. No results will be published to students until the signatures of all relevant External Examiners have been obtained.

### Annual External Examiners' Reports

External Examiners are required to report annually to the Academic Board on the conduct of the assessments just concluded and on issues relating to assessment. Additionally you are asked to highlight and comment on examples of good practice, innovation and enhancement opportunities provided to students. The report should be completed in English on the External Examiner's report form. The purpose of the report is to enable the University to judge whether the programme is meeting its stated objectives and to make any necessary improvements, either immediately or at the next review of the programme, as appropriate.

Annual reports, together with the response from the University, will be uploaded to Gateway (VLE). You are asked to keep this in mind as you draft your report, please do not name, or otherwise identify, individual students or members of staff. If you

feel it appropriate to report on specific issues relating to individual candidates or staff, please include these comments in a separate report, marked "Strictly Confidential": although we cannot guarantee that this separate report will not be more widely circulated, we will contact you specifically should such a request occur under either data protection or freedom of information legislation.

You have the authority and the responsibility to report directly to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University when there is concern about standards and performance, particularly if you believe that assessments are being conducted in a way that jeopardises either the fair treatment of individual students or the standards of the University's awards.

When submitting the Report for the final year of your period of appointment you have the opportunity to write an overview of your experience at the University. The Report should include commentary of the University's academic standards in the relevant subject and in particular any significant changes in standards and quality over the period of appointment.

As an External Examiners you will receive an annual fee (together with reimbursement of your expenses). This fee will not be released until the University has received the formal External Examiner's report for that year.

### External Examiners and Monitoring and Review

The Academic Board will determine what changes are necessary to programmes, following monitoring and review procedures. While the reports of External Examiners will provide an important source of information about standards, the processes of monitoring and review are separate and distinct from the processes of assessment.

### Termination of appointment

The appointment of an External Examiner may be discontinued by the University or by the individual examiner before the completion of the period of appointment.

If you wish to resign from your appointment this would normally be after submitting the External Examiner Report at the end of the annual cycle. You should inform the Head of School in writing before the end of the academic year, 31 July. If you wish to resign during the academic year you must do so in writing to the Head of School, giving a three month period of notice.

In the event of unsatisfactory performance the University reserves the right to terminate the appointment at any time. Unsatisfactory performance could cover a range of issues which include the failure to attend appropriate examination boards without making alternative arrangements and the failure to submit completed



Reports. Termination of appointment may also be necessary where a conflict of interest arises during the term of office.

## Data protection and commercial confidentiality

### Your data

The University collects and holds personal data about you for the specific purpose of facilitating and managing the external examination process. This includes your name, your contact details, your previous experience relating to your role and your current academic and/or professional credentials and affiliations. The University will share this information with appropriate staff within the University. The University will also share your name, and your current academic and/or professional credentials and affiliations with students, in line with national expectations relating to the transparency of the use of external examiners. Students, however, will be asked not to contact you in relation to your role as an External Examiner; and you should politely decline any requests to engage with them outside of the examination process.

As part of your duties, you are requested to submit an annual report to the University on the quality and standards of the taught programme of study, its assessment and the performance of students. In addition to circulating your report to the School and the Academic Board, via AQSC, the University may wish to make it available to a wider internal audience. There may also be circumstances where your report will be made available to groups external to the University for audit purposes, such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and PSRBs.

### Our data

In the course of your duties, you will receive information that can be considered the personal data of students of the University. You are expected to keep such information (including, for example, scripts, marks, and comments from other examiners) confidential and secure at all times as part of your data protection responsibilities. You should not share this information with people outside of the Board of Examiners without the express permission of the University (usually either the Chair of the Programme Board or a member of Academic Registry).

Upon the completion of your role as External Examiner, you should destroy all information relating to individual candidates. You may also be asked during your appointment to undertake this for specific cohorts, in line with any data retention policies provided to you.

### Commercial confidentiality

It is the responsibility of the Head of School to ensure that any potential intellectual property issues that may require commercial confidentiality agreements (ie industrial placements) be resolved prior to the appointment being made.

## 3. Procedures

### Selection

The programme team will have contacted you informally to discuss whether you would be willing to act as external examiner for a specified period (typically four years). You will normally be expected to be able to demonstrate evidence that you meet the criteria for appointment of an External Examiner as detailed on pages 5 and 6, you will preferably also be able to demonstrate:

- meeting applicable criteria set by PSRBs;
- awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula;
- competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

We recognise that you may not feel able to meet in full all of the criteria and you are invited to review these, and discuss any points, with the programme team or with Academic Registry. Please note that on occasion RAU appoints more than one External Examiner to ensure that all of the points are covered for the course.

### Avoiding reciprocal and long-standing arrangements

It is important for Schools to ensure that they do not put in place reciprocal arrangements between cognate programmes with another institution. Schools must refer to the list detailing where their own staff act as external examiners, to avoid this occurring. Academic Registry are responsible for ensuring an accurate record is kept of the institutions where School members of staff are currently acting as External Examiners. This list should be available upon request.

Where there is more than one External Examiner covering a programme, the incoming External Examiner should not be from the same department in the same institution as any other External Examiner covering the programme. The incoming External Examiner should not be from the same department in the same institution as the outgoing External Examiner

## Types of External Examiners

Although there is no division of External Examiners into formal categories, the examiners we appoint can broadly be defined as academic or practitioner examiners. Academic examiners have extensive experience of Higher Education in the UK or further afield and are expected to comment on all areas of provision. Practitioner examiners are professionals who work in a sector relevant to the subject area of the course and are expected to comment on some or all areas of provision.

## Nomination

Your appointment will be made by the Academic Board as a result of your nomination by the Head of School to AQSC. You will be asked to provide a CV (or other details of your academic credentials), contact details and confirm the number of External Examiner appointments you hold currently and in the past. The course team should also explore with you potential conflicts of interest (see page 6). You will also be required to produce proof of your right to work in the United Kingdom.

Your appointment will include a formal letter from Academic Registry, and you should have confirm in writing that you accept the appointment.

## Appointment

On appointment, we would ask you to:

- review and read all of the source material and information provided to you;
- consider any conflicts of interest that may exist in relation to your role;
- make yourself aware of issues relating to privacy and data protection in relation to your role.

## Source material and information

The formal letter of appointment will include web links to University Regulations and guidance. You should familiarise yourself with these documents, now and throughout the duration of your appointment. If you have any questions concerning the University's Regulations you can contact the Academic Registry team at [quality@rau.ac.uk](mailto:quality@rau.ac.uk). The website also provides downloadable templates for the Annual Report Form and the Expenses Claim Form.

Academic Registry will send you any External Examiner reports submitted in the previous academic year for your perusal; details of attendance requirements, including dates of meetings of the Boards of Examiners; confirmation of the fee that will be paid to you and an indication of when this is likely to occur. They will also provide details of key dates when you will be required to undertake specific tasks, i.e. approval of examination papers and sampling of assessments.

The Programme Team should also provide you with a range of information relating to the programme and its assessment. The information you can expect to receive is outlined below:

- aims and objectives of the programme;
- details of the programme curriculum;
- details of the programme assessment methods;

In cases where you are appointed for a programme that has a partnership involving academic provision, the Programme Team will ensure that you are fully briefed on the nature and extent of the partnership and who the Link Tutor for the partnership is, and that your role in relation to third party providers is clearly defined. This will include confirmation of whether you will be expected to visit partner sites either in the UK or overseas.

If at any point you believe that you have not received sufficient information to allow you to undertake your role please contact Academic Registry using the [quality@rau.ac.uk](mailto:quality@rau.ac.uk) email addresses for clarification.

### External Examiners' involvement in approving papers/moderating marks

Draft examination papers will be submitted to the External Examiners for approval – these should be returned to Academic Registry under cover of a short pro-forma which will record your role in the process.

It is not a University requirement for coursework assessment briefs to be subject to prior scrutiny by the External Examiners. Instead, all coursework briefing materials will be provided to you at the end of the academic year so that you can comment retrospectively on these briefs in your annual report.

Following internal moderation and double marking if appropriate, the moderated sample of all assessed work will be made available, via Gateway (VLE), as will any work that has failed to meet the pass criteria. All other work contributing to the final assessment should also be available for you to review.

Exceptionally, as part of the internal moderation and double marking process, an External Examiner may be requested to act as an adjudicator when internal assessors are unable to agree a final mark. This will be conducted in advance of the Programme Board.

### Attendance/Non-attendance at Boards of Examiners

External Examiners are expected to attend the Programme Boards all for programmes for which they are responsible and where Awards are due to be made.

If you are unable to attend a Programme Board for any reason, please inform Registry at the earliest opportunity. The Academic Registrar will agree an alternative process by which you can confirm full involvement in the examining process.

On completion of the Programme Board, you are required to sign the completed Student Degree Classification List prior to it being forwarded to the UEC for final ratification, thereby endorsing the conduct of the assessment process. The IEE should confirm in writing that the ratified marks and classification list from the UEC are correct before the results are made known to the candidates. If, for any reason you are unwilling to provide endorsement, written reasons are to be recorded and submitted to the UEC, or in the case of the IEE a separate report from the IEE must be submitted to Academic Board.

The University Examinations Committee, on behalf of Academic Board, has the responsibility for the standard of University Awards and for conferring awards. Any dispute between External Examiners (or between External Examiners and internal Examiners) which cannot be resolved through less formal mediation before or during a Programme Board will be referred to UEC for adjudication. Such a referral will always be made in any case where an External Examiner asserts their opinion that the standard of an Award may be compromised and indicates their inability to sign a recommendation for an Award.

## Fees and Expenses

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

- Attendance at the Programme Board / University Examinations Committee
- A visit to campus each year to meet with the programme team and, where possible, with the students.
- Completion of the External Examiner's Report
- Sign off of examination papers and coursework for the programmes they are appointed to
- Responses to Minor Changes.

Academic Registry will forward you a fee payment form upon receipt of the formal External Examiner's report for that year. Fee payments are made through the University's payroll so all new Examiners must complete a Bank Detail Request Form and New Starter Checklist and submit them to ensure both prompt payment and that the correct tax code is applied. Any queries regarding payment of fees should be directed to Academic Registry using the [quality@rau.ac.uk](mailto:quality@rau.ac.uk) address.

[External Examiner Expenses claim forms](#) are available on the website and should be submitted to [quality@rau.ac.uk](mailto:quality@rau.ac.uk) shortly after the Board. Payment of expenses does not depend on the submission of an External Examiner’s Report.

Links to

[QAA –UK Quality Code for Higher Education; Advice and Guidance – External Expertise](#)

[QAA –UK Quality Code for Higher Education; Advice and Guidance – Assessment](#)

[QAA Subject Benchmark Statements](#)

[Royal Agricultural University, Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes](#)

[External Examiner Policy](#)

[Annual External Examiner Report template](#)

[External Examiner Initial Response Form](#)

[External Examiner Nomination Form](#)

[Expense Claim](#)

[Fee Payment Form](#)

### Version Control

<b>Version number</b>	<b>Purpose/change</b>	<b>Name and job title</b>	<b>Date (DD/MM/YYYY)</b>
V1.0	Updated handbook to reflect new External Examiner Policy	Caro Khamkhami – Assistant Registrar QAE	17/12/2019