



Teaching Quality Handbook

Part 5

External Examiners

(December 2015)

Part 5 outlines the appointment, function and roles of External Examiners for all RAU validated programmes.

Part 5: External Examiners

1. Introduction

- 1.1 External Examiners (EEs) are appointed to oversee and comment on the quality and standards of all RAU validated academic provision (at both module and programme level). Their appointment provides an independent external measure of the RAU's academic processes and ensures comparability of RAU awards with those of other HEIs in the United Kingdom.
- 1.2 The appointment and role of EEs at the RAU takes due account of the precepts and guidance contained within the [QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Chapter B7 External Examining \(October 2011\)](#).

2. Role and Function of External Examiners

- 2.1 External Examiners (EEs) have two main functions: to act as moderators of standards and to act as consultants.
- 2.2 As moderators of standards they should ensure that the assessment system is equitable and is fairly operated in the assessment of students and the awards given.
- 2.3 As consultants they should ensure that the awards given at the University are comparable in standard with those given at other HE institutions. They should comment on the degree pathway, approve the classification result for each student and act as a critical friend to the University. The Institutional External Examiner (IEE) should comment on the institution's approach to the process of ratification of School Examination Board results and awards.
- 2.4 Should an EE hold the view that the practices and procedures at the University are contrary to, or out of step with, those at other HE institutions or the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, they should express their views in their reports. EEs may also, at any time, submit to the Principal of the University a confidential report about matters of serious concern, e.g. where they consider assessment procedures to have been conducted in a way that jeopardises either the fair treatment of students, or the standard of the award for which they have responsibility and/or where it is necessary to name a member of staff. Student representatives on the programme(s) to which the report relates will be informed that a confidential report has been made, if there are implications for them, and if so, what these are. The University will provide a considered and timely response to any confidential report received, outlining any actions it will be taking as a result.
- 2.5 If an EE has a serious concern relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme(s), and has exhausted all published applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Principal, they are advised to invoke the [QAA's concerns scheme for addressing concerns about standards and quality in HE](#) as an appropriate independent mechanism for raising such matters outside the University, or to inform the relevant Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRB).
- 2.6 EEs are required to comment on the appropriateness of content and level of draft examination papers and to suggest amendments to ensure module outcomes are fully tested. They are also asked to comment retrospectively on all coursework briefing materials in their annual reports.
- 2.7 EEs are expected to review samples of marked examination scripts and coursework submissions, selected from across the marking range,

as part of their annual visit to the University (EEs are strongly recommended to attend University the day prior to any exam board meeting), and to discuss with relevant Module Leaders any modifications to ensure equality of marks across the whole programme of study. The EE has the authority to determine which scripts and coursework assignments are reviewed.

- 2.8 EEs may hold informal interviews with students during their visit(s) to the University, but should not conduct formal *viva voce* examinations in order to confirm assessment marking standards, unless specifically requested in cases where award determination has been compromised due to unavoidable mitigating circumstances or where the programme design requires the EE to viva all candidates as part of the assessment process. In such a case, any *viva voce* examination must be conducted in the presence of a member of RAU staff.
- 2.9 In cases where the EE has concerns about the standard of marking, they may request to view additional scripts prior to making a formal report on their findings.
- 2.10 Should an EE form a view that internal marking has not properly assessed student performance against the appropriate standards, appropriate action should be taken immediately by the Dean of the School to address the concern prior to the School Examination Board. Should the Dean decide not to take any action and thereby reject the view of the EE, the Dean should inform the EE of this decision.
- 2.11 EEs are required to attend the relevant School Examination Board meeting as non-voting members, except where external validating bodies (e.g. RICS) require them to be full voting members, and to participate fully in the Board's discussions as required. The IEE is a non-voting member of the University Examinations Committee (UEC).
- 2.12 EEs are required to sign the final agreed marks and award sheet prior to these being forwarded to the UEC for final ratification, thereby providing endorsement that they are satisfied with the conduct of the assessment process. The IEE appointed to attend the UECs in June and September should confirm in writing that the ratified marks and award sheets are correct before the results are made known to the candidates.
- 2.13 Should an EE be 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.
- 2.14 All details relating to the role of the EE are contained in the EE's Handbook, provided to the EE on appointment and updated periodically.

- 2.15 To ensure that the University's external examining arrangements are transparent, and to support the involvement of students in quality management processes, students are made aware of the identity and current position of the EEs appointed to their modules/programmes. The University makes it clear that it is inappropriate for students to make direct contact with EEs. Should an EE be contacted directly by a student the University requests that they respond to this effect and that, in particular, they do not discuss with students individual performance in assessments.

3. Appointment of External Examiners

- 3.1 EEs are appointed by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC). AQSC receives nominations from the relevant Schools. There will be one, or occasionally two, EEs per approved programme. One currently appointed EE who is nearing the end of their tenure, or a previously appointed EE whose tenure ended in the past 3 years, will be appointed by AQSC to act as the IEE and attend the UECs in June and September.
- 3.2 Before making such a nomination, the Dean of the School, or the relevant Programme Manager, would normally informally approach the proposed appointee to ensure that he/she is willing to serve as EE.
- 3.3 It is expected that the nomination to AQSC will consist of the submission of a full CV, any relevant supporting documentation and a letter of recommendation from the School concerned. Following approval by AQSC, an official letter of appointment will be sent to the EE by the Academic Registrar as well as relevant supporting documents, e.g. the EE's Handbook, Programme Specification and the most recent Annual Programme Manager's Report.
- 3.4 EEs, including the IEE, are normally appointed for a period of 4 years. An exceptional extension of one year is possible to ensure continuity, in particular in collaborative arrangements. Where a School wishes to propose an extension to the tenure of an EE, this should be made in writing to AQSC stating reasons for the extension. Sufficient time should be allowed for the approval process to be completed before the relevant academic session begins. AQSC may decide to extend, exceptionally, the tenure of the IEE beyond the 4 years.
- 3.5 An exceptional extension to an EE's tenure will be no longer than one academic year.
- 3.6 The appointment of an EE will not normally extend beyond 3 years after retirement and candidates must provide sufficient evidence of continuing involvement in the academic area in question, and with current developments in HE teaching, learning and assessment.
- 3.7 To avoid potential conflicts of interest (e.g. caused by close involvement with the University which might compromise objectivity), and to ensure that EEs remain impartial in judgement, EEs will not be appointed if they are any of the following:
 - i. former staff or students of the University, unless a period of 5 years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the EE have completed their programme(s).
 - ii. a member of a governing body or committee of the University or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the University or one of its collaborative partners.

- iii. anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the provision. This may include anyone closely (personally or corporately) associated with the sponsorship (financial or otherwise) of a student on the provision and anyone closely associated with placements or training forming part of the provision.
- iv. anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the provision.
- v. anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the provision.
- vi. anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the provision.

All formal arrangements involving third parties are subject to the RAU Policy and Procedures Relating to Bribery and Corruption.

The RAU may make appropriate use of the exceptions outlined in Chapter 5 of the Quality Code for External not meeting the criteria above in disciplines, which are small, and specialist and where the pool of potential External Examiners is therefore restricted.

- 3.8 It may be appropriate for individuals who have been involved as external academic advisors to the Validation and Review Board (VRB) during the (re)validation of a programme to become the EE for that (or a cognate) programme, so long as such an appointment has not been discussed or agreed with the external academic advisor prior to the completion of all validation activities. An EE may also be an EE on another cognate programme in the University.
- 3.9 An EE shall not normally be appointed from an institution in which a member of the University's academic staff, or collaborative partner academic staff, is simultaneously serving as an EE for a cognate programme.
- 3.10 No more than one EE may normally be appointed to a programme from any one Department / Faculty of an institution, either simultaneously for different programmes, or in succession for the same programme. However, exception may be made where there is a restricted pool of suitable EEs in the subject area concerned.
- 3.11 A person appointed as an EE may not normally simultaneously hold more than one other EE position during the period of appointment as an EE for the University.
- 3.12 An EE may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances for a full term of office but only following a break of 5 years.
- 3.13 All EEs are expected to have:

- a. Knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality.
 - b. Competence and experience in the fields covered by the provision.
 - c. Sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers.
 - d. Relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification to be externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate.
 - e. Competence and experience in teaching and examining, in particular relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures. Candidates should hold, or have held within the 3 years prior to appointment, an academic post of at least Senior Lecturer level. Exceptions may be made where a particular programme requires an EE from an industry or professional source.
 - f. Familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed.
 - g. Fluency in English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that EEs are provided with the information to make their judgements).
 - h. Met applicable criteria set out by PSRBs.
 - i. Awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula.
 - j. Competence and expertise relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.
- 3.14 An EE should be able to report on the general principal precepts of the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, i.e.
- (a) whether the University's standards are appropriate for its awards.
 - (b) whether the standards of student performance are comparable with some other HE institutions with which they are familiar.
 - (c) whether the assessment and award system is rigorous and fairly conducted and ensures equity of treatment for all students.
 - (d) whether there are areas of good practice they have identified.
- 3.15 Normally an EE will have had recent external examining experience or will have had appropriate comparable experience in assessing students. A proposed EE who has no previous external examining experience (at the appropriate level), or who possesses considerable professional experience relevant to a professional or vocational programme but lacks the academic qualifications anticipated, may be appointed provided that they are mentored and supported by an appropriate experienced co-examiner, who meets the criteria outlined in 3.13 above, for at least one year.

- 3.16 New EEs will be briefed on their appointment with regard to their duties and obligations, preferably by visiting the University to meet relevant staff and students. The briefing should cover, *inter alia*, the EE's Handbook and reporting requirements, the dates of the meetings of the School Examination Boards and the UECs, the Programme Specification, the methods of assessment and marking criteria, Annual Programme Manager's Reports, outcomes from VRB events (where appropriate) and the general University regulations for assessment and progression. Such information will be updated as necessary during the period of appointment.
- 3.17 The fees of EEs shall be those approved from time to time by the University and shall in all cases be paid net of travel and subsistence expenses. The fees shall be stated in the letter of appointment. Fees will not be paid until the EE's report has been received.

4. External Examiners' Reports

- 4.1 EEs are required to submit a report each year within 6 weeks of the School Examination Board meeting, preferably electronically, to the Academic Registrar. Blank report pro-formas will be provided by the Academic Registrar before the School Examination Board meetings so that EEs are aware of the reporting parameters required.
- 4.2 The pro-forma seeks to elicit answers to a particular range of questions for maintaining threshold academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality. It is essential that all parts of the form are completed. Any additional sheets must be clearly referenced and signed.
- 4.3 The Academic Registrar will acknowledge receipt of the report and will then distribute it to the Dean of the relevant School, the Programme Manager and the AQSC for consideration at the next available meeting. The AQSC will consider items arising from the report that require urgent attention or those recommendations that require central, collegiate attention, e.g. those concerning general assessment regulations. The report will also be included in the Annual Programme Manager's Report where points raised by the EE will be addressed. A copy of this Annual Report will be sent to the EE by the Academic Registrar so that actions taken, or not taken, can be seen to have been justified.
- 4.4 The EE may, should they wish, submit an 'End of Term of Office Report' as well as their final EE report for that year. This should summarise the 3 or 4 years of tenure and should include such items as programme development, changes in University regulations and their effectiveness, trends in student achievements, self-reflection on their effectiveness as an EE as well as comments on the arrangements made by the University to facilitate their role as EE.
- 4.5 To ensure that the University's external examining arrangements are transparent, and to support the involvement of students in quality management processes, EEs' reports are made available in full to students via the relevant programme page on the University's VLE, 'Gateway', with the sole exception of any confidential report made directly to the Principal. The only circumstance under which reports can be redacted is where the EE has contravened the requirement not to identify individuals.
- 4.6 The IEE should provide a brief report on the conduct of the UEC at its June and September meetings confirming, or otherwise, that the results issued to students have been arrived at in a fair and equitable way and that all circumstances relating to individual candidates, or groups of candidates, have been considered.

5. Premature Termination of Appointment

- 5.1 The appointment agreement between the University and the EE may be terminated by either side by giving at least three months notice. Premature termination of an EE's appointment may be approved by the AQSC on the following grounds:
- a. That the EE has failed to carry out their duties and fulfil their obligations, as defined in the EE's Handbook and agreed at the commencement of the appointment, at the end of any single year of appointment (e.g. failure to attend the Examination Board without making alternative arrangements, failure to submit a report, or the provision of an incomplete report).
 - b. That compelling evidence is received by the University in relation to the suitability or competence for the role of EE.
 - c. That the EE requests, in writing, a termination of the appointment.
- 5.2 Neither the raising of well-founded concerns about academic standards, nor the submission of a confidential report to the Principal (whether or not followed by the submission of a concern to QAA or a relevant professional body), constitutes valid grounds for termination (see paragraph 2.5).
- 5.3 The Academic Registrar shall be responsible for informing the EE of the decision of the AQSC following termination as a result of a. or b. above. The Academic Registrar will also write to an EE if a request has come from the EE under c. above, acknowledging the request and confirming the termination of appointment.