

# EXTERNAL EXAMINER HANDBOOK

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## Foreword

The External Examiner system is fundamental to the University's key aim of providing an outstanding student experience. It helps the University to ensure that awards delivered in its name meet threshold academic standards.

The aim of this Handbook is to ensure that policy, process and practice is transparent to all those involved, including University and partner organisation academic and administrative staff as well as External Examiners themselves. This process therefore aims to encapsulate the way the University interprets and implements the QAA Quality Code, particularly in relation to External Expertise.

In particular, the purposes of this Handbook are to:

1. Outline the roles and responsibilities of External Examiners and of the University (see Section 1)
2. Detail the induction arrangements for External Examiners (see Section 2)
3. Outline the requirements for External Examiner reports (see Section 3)
4. Describe how External Examiner reports are used throughout the University and how feedback is provided to external examiners (see Section 3)
5. Outline the administrative procedures for the submission and payment of External Examiner fees and expenses (see Section 4)
6. Provide links to information about the academic frameworks and generic assessment regulations which contextualize the award and module regulations that External Examiners receive for the particular Assessment Board to which they are appointed (see Section 5).

Further information about the University's quality policies and processes can be accessed through the [Quality Assurance and Enhancement](#) (QAE) website. Queries regarding the External Examiner system can be directed to [extexam@southwales.ac.uk](mailto:extexam@southwales.ac.uk).

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## Section 1: The Role and Rights of External Examiners

### Role of the External Examiner

External examiners have an important role within the quality assurance mechanisms in assuring comparability of academic standards outside and within the University and ensuring the fairness of the operation and assessment of courses. They also contribute towards the assurance and enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching, and the attainment by students of course outcomes.

The University [Assessment for Learning Policy](#) sets out the requirements for moderation of assessments and marking. External Examiners are expected to be familiar with the University's Assessment for Learning Policy and are encouraged to become familiar with other guidance and policy documents available on the [Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching](#) webpages.

The University appoints Subject External Examiners who attend the Subject Assessment Boards and Super Progression and Award External Examiners who attend the Progression and Award assessment boards. References to both roles are made throughout this handbook as appropriate.

In particular, the following normally comprise the External Examiner's role:

1.	To maintain oversight of the academic standards, quality and coherence of the module(s)/course(s) to which they are appointed.
2.	To judge the overall standards of student performance on module(s)/course(s) to which they are appointed or have oversight of.
3.	To monitor the overall standards of student performance on module(s)/course(s) to which they are appointed or have oversight of.
4.	To provide comment that the course(s) to which they are appointed or have oversight of, is in line with the Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements, as applicable, to the best of their professional knowledge.
5.	To provide comment that the course(s) to which they are appointed is in line with the Regulations for Taught Courses to the best of their professional knowledge.
6.	To comment on the form and content of elements of assessment that count towards the outcome of the module.
7.	To comment on whether the assessment board process is conducted in line with the relevant policies and regulations,
8.	To attend the University up to two occasions per academic year (see Section 4 for fees relating to additional visits).
9.	To provide feedback on any good practice and enhancement that has been observed.
10.	To produce and submit annual report(s) using the relevant standard University of South Wales template no later than 4 weeks from the date of the board attended.
11.	To undertake any training as directed.
12.	To potentially mentor new External Examiners, as requested.
13.	To comment on and approve changes to existing modules and the design of new modules considered by Faculty Quality Assurance Committees outside of the University's critical review process.
14.	To approve changes to course structures considered by Faculty Quality Assurance Committees outside of the University's critical review process.
15.	To report to the Vice-Chancellor, when appropriate, on any matters of serious concern.

In addition, the following comprise the Subject External Examiner's role:

16.	To scrutinise a sample of student work in accordance with the University guidance.
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17.	To monitor and report on the application of the moderation process undertaken by the module team.
18.	To attend and submit an oral report to at least one <b>subject assessment board</b> annually and provide a view on the overall performance of students, the strengths and weaknesses, the quality of knowledge and skills demonstrated by the students and the structure, organisation, design and marking of all assessments and to assess the extent to which the determination of awards is sound and fair.
19.	To attend and submit an oral report to at least one <b>progression and award board(s)</b> during tenure, either in person or by electronic means and provide a view on overall module performance and assess the extent to which the determination of marks is sound and fair.

In addition, the following comprise the Super Progression and Award External Examiner's role:

20.	To attend and submit an oral report to all <b>progression and award board (s)</b> that they are allocated each year.
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### **Super Progression and Award External Examiners**

Super Progression and Award External Examiners are responsible for maintaining oversight of the academic standards and quality processes of the University's Progression and Award assessment boards and associated processes.

Role Requirements:

- Attend a selection of pre-allocated Progression and Award examination boards per year to provide an oral report, and submit an annual report within four weeks of the boards taking place;
- Provide informative comment and recommendations on whether the assessment process is conducted in line with the relevant policies and regulations;
- To undertake training, as required;
- To potentially mentor new External Examiners, as requested.

### **Role of Subject External Examiners in moderating assessments**

Moderation of work is subject to the University's [Assessment for Learning Policy](#), Appendix 2, paragraph 4.14.

The University will make assignments and examinations available to External Examiners prior to them being sat.

Following moderation, Subject External Examiners may feel it necessary to adjust the proposed marks of internal markers. In such circumstances, we ask that the marks of all students taking the module are revised (either upwards or downwards) and not just the students that have been sampled. This proposed adjustment would be agreed with the course leader or academic subject manager and the module leader prior to the subject assessment board.

Otherwise the University policy is that marks may not be amended in the assessment boards unless there is an unexpected and unplanned event which has impacted upon the students' performance. This must be supported by statistical evidence and must be agreed with the External Examiner prior to the assessment board.

## Rights of the External Examiner

An External Examiner has the authority and the responsibility to report directly to the Vice-Chancellor of the University in such cases that they believe there to be serious concerns about a module/course. Particularly, if it is considered 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. Any other issues of a confidential nature, which the External Examiner may wish to raise, may also be referred, in full and in writing, to the Vice-Chancellor.

Upon receipt of a report indicating serious concerns the Academic Registrar and/or nominee carry out an investigation, and a written response provided to the External Examiner.

The University hopes to resolve and address any serious issues they are notified of both effectively and speedily. Where this is not the case, and an External Examiner has serious concerns about systemic failings, and has submitted a report to the Vice-Chancellor and received a report of the investigation and outcomes, External Examiners may consider invoking the QAA's Concerns Scheme, as indicated in the [Advice and Guidance: External Expertise](#) theme of the UK Quality Code, or inform the relevant PSRB.

External Examiners are also able to:

- request to see all of the examination scripts and student assignments for modules for which they have responsibility. Whilst this will not be imposed they do have the opportunity to see everything if they wish;
- inspect any material relating to the course; particularly, but not exclusively, course handbooks, examination papers, scripts, coursework or project reports relating to the assessments with which they are specifically associated;
- discuss curriculum development with academic staff;
- meet students to discuss their course and review a sample of their work (this may include, for example, assessment of practice documents);
- withhold endorsement for the recommendation of an award.

Final judgements on, or approval of, assessment outcomes are academic peer group processes. As with any such process, it is possible that members of the group will disagree. The Academic Board is the final authority for any award of the University. Therefore, any disagreement so great that it cannot be resolved at the level of a Subject Board or Progression/Award Board may come to Academic Board (or delegated subcommittee) for resolution.

## Section 2: Induction

### General information for External Examiners

Upon appointment, External Examiners are sent a 'contract letter', which confirms and provides the following information, specific to each examiner:

- course and module details to which the External Examiner is appointed (**Subject External Examiner only**);
- arrangements for subject/award and progression boards;
- training requirements;
- PSRB requirements (where appropriate);
- reporting requirements;
- a copy of the previous External Examiners final report (if relevant);
- tenure details;
- request for completion of Bank Details to Payroll form;
- request of colour photocopy of passport<sup>1</sup> in accordance with UKVI ['right to work'](#) in the UK.

External Examiners are also directed to the [Quality Assurance and Enhancement](#) website where they can access current information relevant to their role along with this Handbook.

Following appointment, Subject External Examiners will have access to Blackboard, to enable them to view module content. This is arranged as a matter of course, however, should there be any issues with regards to access please contact a member of the QAE team in the first instance, via [extexam@southwales.ac.uk](mailto:extexam@southwales.ac.uk).

Course teams (typically the Course Leader) are responsible for providing Subject External Examiners with course specific information, including relevant course handbooks, course and module specifications and, where appropriate, details of professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) information including that related to continuing PSRB accreditation (e.g. fitness to practise requirements). The Course Leader is also responsible for providing their Subject External Examiner with a schedule of key dates for the moderation of student assessments.

### Arrangements for informing External Examiners following appointment

An External Examiner's term of office will normally be four years to enable them to assess four successive cohorts of students and will normally begin on 1 September and end on 30 November. However, should their services as an External Examiner be no longer required during any year because, for example, the modules they are responsible for have been phased out, their appointment will end.

Where the University has appointed an External Examiner who has no previous experience of the role, an existing External Examiner might be asked to act as a mentor to that individual. Duties of mentors is as follows:

1. The general role of a mentor is to provide of advice and guidance. Key discussions may centre around:
  - the role of the external examiner;
  - assessment processes;
  - the approaches to moderation;
  - requirements for annual reporting to the University.

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<sup>1</sup> A full colour copy of the proposed examiners visa is also required if holding a non-European Union United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland passport.

2. There is no requirement for face-to-face meetings of the mentor and the mentee, although they may meet at subject or progression and award boards. Most contact will be via e-mail or telephone.
3. If an external examiner appointed as a mentor has any comments or concerns about the role, they should contact a member of the QAE team in the first instance, via [extexam@southwales.ac.uk](mailto:extexam@southwales.ac.uk).

The University offers training face-to-face or via Teams, which provides External Examiners with an overview of their duties, role and rights, and the general academic regulations.

### Section 3: Annual Report to the University

When in attendance, External Examiners attend as a full member of the appropriate subject and/or progression and award board and are required to submit annual report(s) to the University.

Subject External Examiner reports are shared with students via Blackboard, shared with the relevant course and faculty teams, and are used as a resource when undertaking continuous monitoring.

With this in mind, the formal report to the University, which should preserve the anonymity of students and staff, covers the a range of areas such as:

- the overall performance of the students in relation to their peers in comparable subjects;
- the strengths and weaknesses of the student body;
- the quality of knowledge and skills (both general and subject specific) demonstrated by the students;
- the structure, organisation, design and marking of all assessments;
- the quality of teaching as indicated by student performance;
- the curriculum, syllabus, teaching methods and resources of the modules and/or subject;
- the standards of the award;
- any matters in relation to Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs);
- any other recommendations arising from the assessments; and
- the conduct of the board.

External Examiners are expected to provide their written annual report(s) within 4 weeks of their attendance at an assessment board. Subject External Examiners with responsibilities for both undergraduate and postgraduate provision or in attendance at additional boards after the submission of their annual report will be expected to complete an additional addendum report to capture additional moderation and/or board observations. Super Progression and Award External Examiners will be expected to submit two annual reports to capture their observations from progression and award boards scheduled throughout the academic year.

A sample of the [Subject External Examiner report](#) and the [Super Progression and Award External Examiner report](#) may be viewed on the QAE Website. Payment of the annual fee is processed upon receipt of a satisfactory report and once attendance at the assessment board has been confirmed. The University reserves the right to take appropriate action in relation to non or late submission of a report.

#### External Examiners of Collaborative Provision

The general external examining arrangements and regulations for courses delivered in collaboration with the University's partner organisations are the same as those for the University's other provision. However, as a Subject External Examiner for collaborative provision, the University encourages Subject External Examiners to meet with the partner course team and/or students at least once during their tenure.

In some instances, the key contact for these arrangements will be the HE Manager or the Course Leader at the partner organisation. The outcomes of such meetings should be noted in the annual report.

Subject External Examiners can be appointed for provision which is delivered either by **multiple partner organisations and/or on multiple sites**. In such cases they should

expect to see clearly identified samples for external scrutiny and statistical profiles from **each** partner organisation/site of delivery in order to ensure equivalence of standards. For courses delivered by multiple partners, a further internal moderation activity should have taken place prior to external moderation to enable representatives from all partners to ensure consistency in the application of assessment criteria and complete internal moderation across all partners.

Subject External Examiners are expected to comment on both the comparability of standards and quality of the learning experience and consistency in assessment practice, e.g. application of grading criteria, for the module/course as delivered at each partner organisation/site of delivery and any specific issues for the course as a whole throughout the final report. Where there are inconsistencies in standards, quality of learning experience or assessment practice, or comments that are specific to individual partner organisations, these should be identified through the annual report to enable appropriate response, support and action. Similarly, if there are instances of good practice at one or more partners, these should be clearly identified.

### **Purpose of External Examiner Reports**

External Examiner reports form an essential aspect of the quality assurance and enhancement processes operated by the University. These are incorporated specifically within the processes of continuous monitoring and critical review, and through course management meetings, where they may be discussed with student representatives.

The process for receipt of, and responding to, External Examiner reports is as follows:

### **Subject External Examiner Reports**

Report is reviewed by a member of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team and, if deemed complete, sent to the Principal Quality Assurance and Enhancement Officer (PQO) for the relevant faculty

Report is reviewed by the PQO prior to its circulation to the relevant course team. Reports on courses taught collaboratively with partners are copied to the HE Lead of the partner organisation and University Link Officer.

A response is prepared by the Course Leader, approved by the Dean of Faculty (or nominee), and forwarded to the External Examiner, normally within eight weeks of receipt of the report. External Examiners' reports are considered for general as well as specific issues within the University.

In addition, the course continuous monitoring report which should refer to External Examiner reports and the Course Team responses to these, is discussed with students through SSCLGs. They are also used to populate continuous monitoring action plans at both school and faculty level for approval by the University's Quality Assurance Committee. In addition, the Academic Registrar produces an overview report for Academic Board, referring to feedback made by Subject External Examiners.

External Examiners who have raised institutional issues, can expect a response from the Academic Registrar or nominee.

## **Super Progression and Award External Examiner Reports**

Report is reviewed by a member of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team and, if deemed complete, sent to the Academic Registrar or nominee.

Report is scrutinised by the Academic Registrar or nominee and a response sent. Should the Academic Registrar or nominee highlight any issues of serious concern, this is noted and responses are reviewed to ensure the issues are addressed prior to sending the response.

In addition, the Academic Registrar produces an overview report for Academic Board, referring to feedback made by Super Progression and Award External Examiners.

## Section 4: Fees and Expenses

### Payment of Fees/Expenses

**Expenses:** The Expenses Claim form and Guidance can be found on the [External Examiner Website](#).

**Annual Fee Payment:** The annual fee will be processed upon receipt of the satisfactory annual report and confirmation of attendance to relevant boards.

If you make additional visits, either to the University or its collaborative partners, then you will be paid at a rate of £100 per full day visit or £50 per half day visit. Up to two visits per academic year will be permitted and any further visits must be approved in advance. Claims for fees for additional visits should be made on the '[External Examiners Additional Visits Fees Proforma](#)', available on the Academic Registry web pages. Any such additional visits should be agreed at the start of the academic year with the faculty/College. An "additional visit" may be conducted in order to engage with calibration activities with course team(s) (on-campus or online), meet with representatives from student cohorts (on-campus or online), or view physical assessments, or attend oral / performed assessments that are only available on-campus.

### Super External Examiners

In addition to expenses, Super External Examiners will be paid their annual fee that is processed upon successful completion of the role in relation to all allocated progression and award assessment boards.

## **Section 5: Termination of Contract**

All External Examiners are entitled to submit their resignation for any reason. The University requests sufficient notice in order to make revised arrangements.

The University reserves the right to terminate the contract of any External Examiner, subject to the agreement of the Academic Registrar.

### **Useful Links**

[Quality Assurance and Enhancement Service Homepage](#)

That will direct you to the;

[Quality Assurance Manual](#)

[Regulations for Taught Courses](#)

[Changes to Regulations](#)

[Policies relating to Assessment and Feedback including Assessment for Learning Policy](#)

[Annual Report Template](#)

### **National Links**

[The Higher Education Academy, Guidance on External Examining](#)

[Quality Assurance Agency: UK Quality Code](#)

[Quality Assurance Agency: External Expertise Advice and Guidance](#)

### **Additional Information**

[University of South Wales homepage](#)

[Campus Information](#)