

**UNIVERSITY of
STIRLING**



External Examining Policy

VERSION CONTROL STATEMENT

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Aims and Objectives

1. The external examiner system at Stirling has been developed with reference to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance on External Expertise. The aims of the system are:
 - to verify that the academic standards for each award or award elements, for which the external examiner, is responsible, are set and maintained by the University at the appropriate level, and that the students' performance is properly judged against these;
 - to assist the University to maintain levels of students' academic attainment comparable to those in other universities in the United Kingdom;
 - to ensure that the assessment process measures student achievement against the intended outcomes of the programme appropriately and that the assessment system is operated fairly in the marking, grading and classification of student performance.
2. In order to achieve these aims external examiners are required:
 - to report whether the standards set are appropriate for the University's awards or award elements by reference to published national subject benchmarks, the University's programme specifications, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and other relevant information;
 - to report on the standards of student performance in the programmes or modules which they have been appointed to examine, and on their comparability to the standard of achievement on similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions;
 - to report on the extent to which the University's processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are sound and have been conducted fairly;
 - to review, evaluate and moderate examination and other assessment instruments and practices, particularly at the final year or award level;
 - to assist the University in the calibration of academic standards through the review and evaluation of the outcomes of assessment processes;
 - to be a member of, and attend, appropriate examination boards to ensure fairness and consistency in decision-making processes;
 - to present an electronic written report to the Principal and other relevant agents as appropriate, which includes commentary and judgments on the validity, reliability and integrity of the assessment process and the standards of student attainment, and on any aspects of good practice which they wish to commend.
3. In order to achieve these purposes, the external examiners must be able:
 - to participate in assessment processes for the award of degrees;
 - to comment and give advice on programme content, balance and structure.
4. The final decision on degree awards rests with the University, not the external examiner. In the event of a dispute, where the external examiner challenges the recommendations of the Board of Examiners, the matter shall be referred to Academic Registry in the first instance via quality@stir.ac.uk.

5. Except in exceptional circumstances, no degree of the University shall be awarded without participation in the examining process of at least one examiner external to the University. When, exceptionally, an external examiner cannot participate, degree awards and classifications may nevertheless be confirmed by the Deputy Principal (Education) under delegated authority from Academic Council.
6. In the case of a degree award that requires to be considered at a later point than the normal awards boards, if the component module outcomes have been confirmed through the appropriate module board procedure and therefore have been subject to scrutiny by an external examiner, then the degree award can be considered and confirmed without the input of an external examiner if required. Where in these circumstances the outcomes of the component modules or elements of a programme have not been confirmed through the standard procedure, the input of an external examiner must be included in the award consideration.

Appointment of External Examiners

7. External examiners shall be appointed by the Academic Council on the recommendation of faculties. The normal period of appointment shall be four years with an exceptional extension of one year to ensure continuity. Applications for an exceptional fifth year should be made via the submission of pro forma [ARO 005](#) to Academic Registry. An external examiner may be re-appointed in exceptional circumstances, but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment. External examiners shall be responsible to the Academic Council.
8. Faculty nominations for the appointment of taught external examiners are made via submission of pro forma [ARO 004](#) and in accordance with the nationally [specified criteria](#). They are scrutinised by Academic Registry and approved by the Deputy Principal (Education and Students) on behalf of Academic Council.
9. In approving nominations consideration must be given to appropriate subject expertise, genuine externality from the University, familiarity with the UK higher education sector, and examining experience. While the first two are absolute conditions of appointment, the experience of one or more internal examiners may compensate for inexperience in relation to the second two.
10. Faculties must avoid simultaneous reciprocal appointments with other institutions.
11. Faculties are responsible for regulating the number of external examiners that are appointed to its programmes. However, any significant increase or decrease would require a case to be made and approved through the route specified in 8.
12. The invitation to act as external should be supported by adequate background information, including a written briefing on the institution's policies for assessment and external examining in general, to ensure that the role and responsibilities are understood.

13. It is the University's responsibility to provide for the proper preparation of external examiners. This should include a written briefing on the University's policies for assessment and external examining in general, together with appropriate specific programme documentation.
14. Documentation issued by Academic Registry to newly appointed external examiners will include:
- an introduction to the University's policies, procedures and regulations concerning the structure and administration of its examining and awarding bodies;
 - a statement regarding the responsibilities and role of external examiners;
 - contractual arrangements (fee, expenses, length of appointment);
 - links to codes of practice and other relevant policies and procedures relating to academic quality assurance and standards, and learning and teaching;
 - a copy of any University handbooks or other resources relevant to external examiners.
15. Faculties are responsible for providing external examiners with supporting documentation on the programmes/subject area to be reviewed, including:
- information on the programmes/modules and their method of assessment for which the external will have responsibility;
 - programme regulations;
 - structure and content of the curriculum;
 - learning outcomes;
 - internal faculty marking schemes;
 - dates of boards of examiners' meetings;
 - arrangements for the sampling of scripts, including principles for selection of samples;
 - assessment structures, assignments and examination papers in relation to agreed learning outcomes;
 - arrangements for access to any work contributing to the final award, to determine that internal marking has been carried out according to marking schemes and that classifications are of an appropriate standard;
 - faculty principles for the selection of candidates for viva voce, oral and practical examinations and the external examiner's role in conducting these examinations with students.
16. Faculties should encourage their external examiners to visit the faculty. They should provide opportunities for them to become familiar with the institution and to discuss their responsibilities and other matters prior to the first visit to undertake assessments. This is particularly important in the case of external examiners with little or no previous experience of the role, or who are from outside higher education.
17. Faculties should include the names, positions and institutions of their external examiners within the information provided to students together with a statement advising students that it is inappropriate for them to make direct contact with external examiners.

18. Faculties will occasionally have cause to appoint a substitute external examiner for a period of less than four years to cover periods of unforeseen absence by an external examiner, due to illness or other exceptional circumstances. In such cases, the faculty should follow the procedures as set out in this section with a clear statement of the temporary period.
19. A central register database of external examiners is maintained by Academic Registry which details length of appointment, area(s) of responsibility, fee and contact details.

Role of External Examiners in the assessment process

20. External examiners shall participate in the assessment of all modules of study at level 9 and above, including postgraduate modules. It is not expected that external examiners should review resit examination papers or be involved in modules below level 9, except where necessary for professional or statutory purposes.
21. Draft examination papers should be sent to the external examiner for approval. Model answers should be included to aid external examiners in gauging the quality of individual questions. External examiners are not expected to approve coursework or assignments, except for those modules which would otherwise receive no scrutiny.
22. An external examiner has the right of access to any work that contributes to the assessment of an award and the degree classification, dependent on availability.
23. The normal expectation will be that a sample of work will be sent to an external examiner and the principles for such a selection should be agreed in advance. Normally:
 - the sample will include a selection of examination scripts and assessments, where the range of marks are represented;
 - the proportion of work considered by an external examiner will depend on the size of the module;
 - the selection will ensure that external examiners have enough evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and are applied consistently;
 - the sample will include all failed cases, borderline cases, and some, but not necessarily all, top mark cases.
24. The external examiner is a full member of the Board of Examiners whose opinion is important when the board is deciding problematic cases. The external examiner must not be used as the arbiter for the final decision in such cases. This decision is the responsibility of the board.
25. External examiners should be given the opportunity to meet students on the programmes/modules which they are examining, if they so wish.

26. Where a viva voce examination is held for a proportion of the candidates, the principles for the selection of candidates should be agreed by the Board of Examiners. The examiners for such an examination should be decided by the Board of Examiners and may include the external examiner if considered necessary by the Board.
27. An external examiner concerned with the final classification of honours degrees or degree awards is a full member of the relevant board of examiners and attend (in person or remotely) the normal meetings at which honours degree classifications and degree awards are determined. The signature of at least one external examiner must be appended to the final list of degree awards. In the case of results lists for individual modules of study, the signature of the Chief Examiner will imply that such external participation as may be required has taken place.
28. Faculties should ensure that externals are given adequate notice of their required attendance.
29. Externals should be clearly informed on what basis they are required or not required to attend meetings of examiners or awards meetings.
30. External examiners should be provided with adequate opportunity to hold meetings with internal examiners.
31. External examiners should be encouraged to comment on the curriculum and on the assessment process, and should be consulted on changes to the curriculum and assessment arrangements. External examiners should be asked to comment on new programme proposals in their subject area.
32. External examiners may often be able to give advice to internal examiners, especially inexperienced examiners, either directly or through the dean of faculty or nominee. Members of academic staff should use the opportunity afforded by the visits of external examiners to discuss with them programme structure, curriculum and assessment procedures. Consideration should be given to involving external examiners in the faculty's quality enhancement activities. (e.g. by spending a day with the faculty once in a four year cycle, and having the opportunity to meet with students as part of this process).
33. External examiners retain the right to raise any matter of serious concern with the Principal, this may be in the form of a separate confidential written report. Any such matters arising will be considered and responded to as appropriate.
34. Where an external examiner has serious concerns relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme and all internal procedures have been exhausted (see also 4), the external examiner may invoke the Quality Assurance Agency's concerns scheme (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/how-to-raise-a-concern-in-scotland>) or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.
35. The external examining requirements for higher degrees by research are set out in the Research Postgraduate Regulations.

Submission and Receipt of, and Response to, External Examiners' Reports

36. For taught programmes, external examiners are required to submit an electronic written report annually and at the end of their period of service. No fee shall be paid to the external examiners until the reports have been received. Individual staff and students must not be named in external examiner reports. Reports will be amended by the University where individuals are identified.
37. Academic Registry will set a deadline for the submission of reports for undergraduate and postgraduate externals. Reports are addressed to the Principal and submitted to the Academic Quality and Governance team. Receipt of the report is acknowledged by Academic Quality and Governance. Outstanding reports are pursued by Academic Quality and Governance (where a second follow-up letter is required this will be issued via the Academic Registrar or the Deputy Principal (Education)).
38. Upon receipt, each external examiner's annual report is provided to the relevant faculty by Academic Registry. Faculties are required to:
- consider the reports and forward action points to other relevant committee(s) within the faculty as appropriate. Student representatives should be given the opportunity to be fully involved in the consideration of external examiner reports;
 - respond to external examiners to confirm action taken in response to issues raised within reports or reasons for not taking action. A copy of the response must be sent to Academic Registry via quality@stir.ac.uk.
 - produce a faculty summary report on issues arising from all external examiner reports together with action taken; the report should be submitted to Academic Registry at the end of February each year via quality@stir.ac.uk.
 - make external examiners' reports available in full to students upon request (with the exception of any confidential report made to the Principal).
39. Academic Registry is required to produce an institutional summary report on themes, issues arising from reports and actions taken for consideration by the Education Committee and/or one of its sub-committees.
40. The faculty must make Academic Registry aware of any serious matters arising in external examiner reports to ensure appropriate and timely action is taken.
41. For research postgraduate programmes: the procedure for research postgraduate examiners' reports is set out in the Research Postgraduate Regulations.

Termination of an external examiner's contract

42. An external examiner may choose to resign prior to the completion of their contract. A minimum of six months notice is required, and the examiner must normally complete the academic year. Letters of resignation should be addressed to the Principal.
43. The University reserves the right to terminate the contract of an external examiner at any time if, in the opinion of the University, the external examiner does not fulfil the University's requirements as set out in sections 1 – 6 and sections 36 – 41 above, performs at an inadequate standard in the context of the University's policies and procedures, if there has been any breach of confidentiality on the part of the examiner or where a conflict of interest may arise.

Appeals

44. The University's appeal procedures for both undergraduate and postgraduate students are set out in the policy and procedure for academic appeals.

Collaborative Provision

45. In respect of collaborative provision, external examining procedures for programmes offered by a partner organisation should be the same as, or demonstrably equivalent to, those used by the University for its own programme. The procedures should be clearly specified and documented in the collaborative memorandum of agreement, and rigorously applied.
- [External Examiners' Handbook](#)
 - Postgraduate Research Regulations