

**ACADEMIC AWARD REGULATIONS  
External Examiners**

<b>Name of regulation :</b>	External Examiners
<b>Purpose of regulation :</b>	To ensure that the University appoints appropriate External Examiners who will be able to assure the wider community of the standard of the University's educational provision and awards
<b>Approval for this regulation given by :</b>	Academic Board
<b>Responsibility for its update :</b>	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar
<b>Regulation applies to :</b>	To all students registered on Staffordshire University Undergraduate and Postgraduate awards, Staff and External Examiners
<b>Date of Approval :</b>	29 June 2011
<b>Proposed Date of Review :</b>	May 2012

**1. Appointment of External Examiners**

**Purpose**

The purpose of this procedure is to ensure that the University appoints appropriate external examiners who will be able to assure the wider community of the standard of the University's educational provision and awards. The procedure relates to both undergraduate and postgraduate awards although it will be more relevant to one or the other in certain situations. External examiners are appointed to both awards and modules. The term 'award' is used in this section but the guidance applies equally to module external examiners.

**NB: The procedures for the appointment of internal and external examiners and University International Programme Advisors for the University's collaborative provision are covered in the Quality Handbook(s) for Collaborative Provision.**

## **2. Criteria for Appointment**

**2.1** Any new appointment should be considered in the context of the whole panel of external examiners for that award. External examiners do not normally operate in isolation but as a team with collective responsibility for ensuring the standard of the award. For some awards, particularly postgraduate qualifications, it can be appropriate to appoint a single external examiner. Particular attention should be paid to these nominations.

**2.2** External examiners should satisfy the following criteria :

- i. Their academic/professional qualifications should be appropriate to the award being examined, with both level and the subject(s) of those awards generally matching those to be examined. They should be able to command respect which may be demonstrated through academic expertise and/or professional achievement;
- ii. They will have expertise and experience in assessment at the appropriate level. If the nominee has no previous external examining experience, s/he will be expected to have extensive internal examining or other relevant experience. Externals with limited experience will initially only be required to act as one of a panel of external examiners on a programme of study;
- iii. In order to ensure impartiality, they will normally not have had close involvement with the University during the last five years. For example as a member of staff; a member of the Board of Governors; a student; a near relative of an internal examiner; an external examiner on a related programme in the University. They will not be personally associated with the sponsorship of students; involved in assessing colleagues who may be examined by the examination board; or involved closely with student placement. They must have no close personal connection with any candidate being examined;
- iv. Any requirements laid down by relevant professional or statutory bodies;
- v. Normally, there will not be any reciprocal external examining relationship between the Faculty/School concerned and the proposed external examiner's department;
- vi. A new external examiner should normally not be from the same institution as the outgoing external examiner;
- vii. An external examiner normally should hold no more than two concurrent substantive external examinerships, including the one at Staffordshire

University, without the prior agreement of Staffordshire University. It is essential that external examiners are able to devote sufficient time to their duties;

External examiners may be appointed from outside higher education, particularly for vocational or professional awards, but only as part of a team which includes external examiners with extensive experience in higher education. Nominees who have recently retired may be appointed where appropriate but consideration will need to be given to the means by which they will retain the currency of their experience.

### **3. Criteria for Teams of External Examiners**

- 3.1** One of the team will be asked to act as 'Chief External Examiner'. The Chief Examiner/spokesperson does not need to be a subject expert in all areas for the Board they are responsible. At the end of an Assessment Board all external examiners will be asked to complete a brief pro-forma which confirms their agreement with the standards of the undergraduate modules or postgraduate awards with which they have been involved. It will also ask them to record any specific comments they have for the Award Board. These forms will be left with the Chair of the Assessment Board and made available to the Award Board and the Chief External Examiner.
- 3.2** External examiners, who have limited experience, may be appointed if their presence is balanced by external examiners of seniority and experience for at least the first year of their service.
- 3.3** Appointments to a team should be staggered to ensure continuity.
- 3.4** There should normally be no more than one external examiner from the same institution appointed to the same award. This means that awards and their assessment will benefit from wide-ranging scrutiny.
- 3.5** Assessment and Award Boards should normally include at least two external examiners. Exceptions to this rule may only be made with the approval of the QDC and will normally only apply to postgraduate awards.

### **4. External Examiners' Responsibilities**

#### **General**

- 4.1** External examiners should be able to:
  - i. judge each student impartially on the basis of the work submitted for assessment without being influenced by previous association with the award, the staff, or any of the students;
  - ii. approve the form and content of proposed examination papers, significant

elements of coursework and other assessments that count towards the award (all levels for HNC/Ds, Level 2 and above for undergraduate awards and all stages for postgraduate awards) in order to ensure that all students will be assessed fairly in relation to the curriculum and regulations and in such a way that the external examiner(s) will be able to judge whether the students have fulfilled the objectives of the award and reached the required standard;

- iii. be consulted about and agree to any proposed changes to the structure of the assessment which will directly affect students currently on the award;
- iv. attend examiners' meetings, where appropriate, and have access to all assessed work, if they so require;
- v. to advise where there is a significant, unresolved difference between the marks awarded by the first and second markers on any script or piece of work;
- vi. to advise the Assessment Board on appropriate action where marks for any module are significantly outside normal patterns;
- vii. to agree principles for the selection of candidates for vivas and, as appropriate, to attend or conduct vivas or oral examinations. This will normally only be applicable to postgraduate awards;
- viii. as a Chief Examiner or Assessment Board representative attend the meeting of the Award Board at which decisions on recommendations for awards are made and ensure that those recommendations are reached by means according with the University requirements and normal practice in higher education;
- ix. participate, as required, in reviews of decisions about individual students' awards;
- x. as a Chief Examiner or Assessment Board representative to sign lists of results and classifications, or confirm in writing, their agreement with the outcome;
- xi. report to the University on the effectiveness of the assessments and any lessons to be drawn from them;
- xii. report to the Vice Chancellor on any matters of concern.

## **4.2 Related to Assessment**

External examiners should be able to:

- i. comment on draft examination papers and a significant proportion of summative coursework and be satisfied that they are at the appropriate

level;

- ii. see a sample of examination scripts and a significant proportion of summative coursework and the range of marks awarded and verify the standard of marking. The University requires, minimally, that for all Level 2 and above (and Level 1 in the case of HNC/Ds) for which an external examiner is responsible s/he will receive:
  - all first class honours/distinction work;
  - all failing assessments;
  - a sample of assessments which must represent fully the cohort of students' work and the spread of classification in the module.
- iii. it is emphasised that external examiners may not alter individual grade points for student work unless they have seen all of the students' work in the relevant category for that module. Should an individual external examiner insist that s/he should have such powers the Faculty/School will have to arrange for all student work to be available for external moderation. Where items of assessed work have been returned to student, the Faculty/School should have a means of having it available if it is requested;
- iv. see a sample of projects reports. Where there is a significant practical element, the Faculty/School should make arrangements to enable external examiners to interview students regarding the progress of their project. This also applies where there is a requirement for a presentation by the students;
- v. it is reasonable to expect that external examiners will be provided with samples of semester 1 work prior to the formal assessment period in June each year.

## **5. The Appointment Procedure for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Awards**

- 5.1 Faculties should be prepared to replace an external examiner at least one year in advance of his/her tenure expiring. They will be prompted to do this by Quality Improvement Service (QIS). QIS will provide reports for Faculties regarding the status of all external examiner appointments and exception reports where an external examiner's tenure is coming to an end and a suitable replacement has not yet been identified.
- 5.2 Where an external examiner is to be associated with a programme of study subject to validation, the programme initiator should be identifying and contacting possible candidates at the same stage as the initial validation. Good practice suggests that external members of the validation panels become effective external examiners.
- 5.3 The member of the Faculty/School responsible for the area within which the

external examiner will act should arrange for the completion of the External Examiner Nomination Form - [EE1A/00](#) in full. The nomination should be endorsed by the [FQC](#), acting on behalf of the Faculty/School Board. The form should be signed by the Dean of Faculty/School or Director for Learning and Teaching and forwarded to [QIS](#).

- 5.4** [QIS](#) will arrange for the nomination to be considered by the External Examiner Approvals Panel and then [QDC](#) which has delegated authority from Academic Board to approve the appointment of external examiners. [QDC](#) will report to Academic Board about the action it has taken on its behalf.
- 5.5** Once a nomination has been approved [QIS](#) will arrange for a letter of appointment to be sent to the external examiner. EdExcel should be informed if the examiner is attached to one of their awards.

## **6. The Appointment Procedure for Other Awards**

### **MPhil/PhD Examiners**

- 6.1** The appointment of external examiners for MPhil and PhD candidates are dealt in the Executive Programme Office.
- 6.2** An examiner must be independent of both the University and any collaborating establishments. S/he will not have acted previously as the candidate's supervisor or adviser. Former members of the University shall normally not be approved as external examiners until three years after the termination of their employment with the University.
- 6.3** An examiner shall not be approved so frequently that his/her familiarity with the Faculty/School might prejudice objective judgement.
- 6.4** If two external examiners are proposed, they should not normally be drawn from the same institution. Appointments must be approved by the Research Degrees Sub- committee.

## **7. Period of Tenure**

- 7.1** The period of appointment should normally be from 1 October to 30 September four years later for undergraduate awards and 1 October to 31 December four years later for postgraduate awards, with the possibility of extension by mutual agreement for a fifth year. This will enable the external examiner to be involved in assessments from the start of the academic year, and to continue in office to deal with reviews, further assessment, and resits. Continuing external examiners need not be re-nominated annually. In some cases the dates of appointment will be different because of the start date of the programme. [QIS](#) will be able to advise in these instances.
- 7.2** An external examiner who wishes to resign before the expiry of his or her normal period of office is required to write formally to the Vice Chancellor, giving sufficient notice for the appointment of a replacement.
- 7.3** The termination of an external examiner's appointment, before the expiry of his or her normal period of office, must be done through a formal recommendation from the Faculty/School to the Quality Development Committee. The Committee

will then take a decision on behalf of the Academic Board.

## **8 Briefing**

**8.1** The University's letter of appointment and External Examiners' Handbook(s) will give a general outline of the responsibilities of external examiners. However the detailed role of each external will vary according to the discipline, the custom and practices of the Faculty/School, and the distribution of responsibilities amongst the panel of external examiners. It is therefore essential that a new external is carefully briefed as soon as possible after his/her appointment has been confirmed.

**8.2** External examiners who accept an appointment for collaborative provision may have their tenure extended to provide comparison with University awards.

**8.3** It is recommended that the briefing addresses the following:

- general information on the Faculty/School, including information provided to students, such as the Faculty/School and Module Handbooks, and the relevant regulations for the awards to be examined;
- Faculties must ensure that external examiners are clear about their responsibilities within two tier assessment boards and should indicate whether the examiner is required to attend both Assessment and Award Board, or the Assessment Board only;
- the names of other external examiners in the team, and the awards for which they will be responsible, together with the modules for which each external will be solely responsible;
- the award objectives (and, where relevant, those of individual modules), together with the curriculum and the means by which they will be assessed;
- the conventions used by the Assessment Board in assessing individual pieces of work;
- the 'calendar' of events over the coming year, including the deadlines for submission of work to external examiners, and for its return, the dates of meeting of the Board, and dates on which external examiners are required at the University (for example, to examine projects or to hear presentations);
- the fact that written reports must not make reference to individual students by name. If the University was in possession of such comments, under the Data Protection Act, it would have to make the comments available to the student should s/he make a request;
- that full copies of Staffordshire University's Academic Award Regulations can be viewed on the web site at:

**9. Extension of the Appointment of an External Examiner or a Reallocation of Duties between Approved External Examiners**

- 9.1** Where a Faculty/School wishes to extend the tenure of an external examiner or reallocate duties amongst the approved team the procedure outlined in [paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5](#) should be used in conjunction with Form [EE1B/00](#), 'Application for Approval of an Extension of Appointment or a Reallocation of Duties between Approved External Examiners for a Taught Course Award.' QIS will advise on the relevant criteria for such an application.
- 9.2** Faculties should note that the external examiner's agreement to such a proposal must be obtained prior to an application being submitted.

**Staffordshire University's commitment to equality and diversity means that this policy has been screened in relation to the use of gender-neutral language, jargon-free plain English, recognition of the needs of disabled people, promotion of the positive duty in relation to race and disability and avoidance of stereotypes. This document is available in alternative formats on request. If you think we can improve the fairness of this policy, please contact the individual who has responsibility for its update.**