University of Staffordshire

EXTERNAL EXAMINER POLICY & PROCEDURE FOR TAUGHT PROVISION

Quality Assurance and Enhancement
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External Examiner Policy and Procedure for Taught Provision

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Introduction

1. This policy describes the roles and responsibilities of external examiners for taught provision at the University of Staffordshire, including taught elements of professional doctorates; provision delivered by collaborative partners; and higher and degree apprenticeships.

2. External examiner arrangements for MPhil and PhD candidates and for the research thesis element of Professional Doctorates are **not** covered by this policy. These are set out in the university's regulations for MPhil and PhD degrees.

3. This policy has been informed by the Office for Students (OfS) Regulatory Framework; advice and guidance relating to the use of external expertise contained within the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the UKSCQA External Examining Principles; and by Skills England in recognition of our apprenticeship provision.

Purpose of External Examiners

4. To provide feedback on whether the university is maintaining the **threshold academic standards** set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements.

5. To provide feedback on whether the assessment process **measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the award(s)**; is conducted in line with the regulations; and uses inclusive assessment processes.

6. To provide feedback on whether the **academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable** with those in other UK degree-awarding bodies of which the external examiners have experience.

7. To comment on how the university may seek to **enhance and improve the quality of the learning opportunities** provided to students and support the course team to ensure that the content and context of teaching and assessment is appropriately inclusive and reflects the diversity of the student body.

8. To ensure higher and degree apprenticeship end point assessment is fair, consistent and robust.

External Examiner Structure and Tenure

9. External examiners are appointed to one or more of the following three roles:

   - Module External Examiner
   - Award External Examiner
   - End Point Assessment External Examiner (for integrated apprenticeships)

10. External examiners are appointed for **four** standard academic years.

11. In exceptional circumstances the external examiner may be extended for a fifth year by mutual agreement. Requests should be made on the University template and submitted to QAE for consideration on behalf of Education Committee.

12. In the final year of their tenure external examiners may be required to attend boards or complete moderation of work for cohorts from their final academic year of appointment which may take them beyond the formal end of their tenure.

Module External Examiners

13. A single Module External Examiner is normally allocated to a module. Multiple Module External Examiners may however be allocated to a single module where greater flexibility is required.

Responsibilities

14. To maintain oversight and comment on the academic standards of the modules allocated including:

   - Confirmation that the content is current.
   - Confirmation that the outcomes align with the FHEQ.
   - Confirmation that the standards are commensurate with other HEIs with which they are familiar.
   - Confirmation that PSRB requirements are being met (where applicable).

15. To comment on and approve changes to existing modules and the design of any new modules.

16. To comment on the form and content of exam papers and other assessment briefs which form part of the summative assessment (to ensure that students are assessed fairly against the learning outcomes of the modules and in such a way that examiners can judge whether the outcomes have reached the required standard).

17. To judge the overall standard of student performance on the modules allocated to them:

   - Scrutinise a sample of scripts and summative coursework covering the range of marks awarded in accordance with the **Verification and Moderation Procedure**. Where the external examiner is not satisfied with the standard of the marks awarded they may recommend that the university re-mark all student work (not just the sample) for that piece of assessment. Where a module is delivered at different sites the examiner should ensure that each instance of delivery receives adequate scrutiny.

   - Monitor arrangements for live assessments, including performances and presentations. Where possible, recordings of live assessments should be made available to the external examiner. Where this is not possible, the reason will be discussed with the external examiner in advance, and instead the external examiner will be provided with as a minimum, the detailed assessment records which clearly demonstrate how the assessment criteria has been applied to each assessment and the rationale for the mark awarded.

18. To monitor the internal moderation of assessment results in accordance with the **Verification and Moderation Procedure**.

19. To provide feedback on examples of good practice and innovation relating to teaching, learning and assessment and make recommendations about opportunities for enhancement.

20. To comment on how far the teaching and assessment is inclusive and reflects the diversity of the student body.

21. To undertake any specific duties required by a PSRB (where applicable) as agreed and arranged by the School.

22. To submit an annual report. **[See Clauses 117-126]**

23. To report any serious matters of concern. **[See Clauses 127-129]**

24. To engage with briefings and guidance offered by the university.

Apprenticeships

25. For integrated apprenticeships, the Module External Examiner should normally also be the EPA External Examiner. In exceptional circumstances where this is not possible (because the appointment criteria for both roles cannot be met by one person) separate EPA and Module External Examiners may need to be appointed. In this instance the Module External Examiner will work with the EPA External Examiner and will be responsible for the oversight of the whole assessment. Both roles must be cognisant of the EQA Framework. **[See clause 44]**

Award External Examiners

26. A single Award External Examiner is normally allocated to a course. Multiple Award External Examiners may however be allocated to a single course where greater flexibility is required. Where a course is delivered at multiple locations, separate Award External Examiners may be appointed to the course at each location to spread the workload.

Responsibilities

27. To maintain oversight and comment on the academic standards of the courses allocated including:

- Confirmation that the curriculum remains current and coherent.
- Confirmation that the outcomes align with the FHEQ and any relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.
- Confirmation that the standards are commensurate with other HEIs with which they are familiar.
- Confirmation that PSRB requirements are being met (where applicable).

28. To comment on and approve changes to existing courses and the design of any new courses.

29. To monitor the overall standards of student performance on courses allocated.

30. To provide feedback on examples of good practice and innovation relating to teaching, learning and assessment and make recommendations about opportunities for enhancement.

31. To comment on how teaching and assessment is inclusive and reflects the diversity of the student body.

32. To attend relevant award boards or to submit an *in absentia report*. **[See Clauses 87-98]**

33. To submit an annual report. **[See Clauses 117-126]**

34. To report any serious matters of concern. **[See Clauses 127-129]**

35. To engage with briefings and guidance offered by the university.

Apprenticeships

36. Award External Examiners appointed to apprenticeships which include an academic award of the university will undertake the full duties of the Award External Examiner and will be required to comment on the effective integration of theory and practice.

37. Award External Examiners appointed to apprenticeships which do not include an academic award of the University, will not be required to attend or submit a report to the award board. All other responsibilities of the Award External Examiner will be as detailed above.

38. Where an apprenticeship includes a qualification awarded by another body the Award External Examiner will be given access to external verifier/examiner reports provided by that awarding body to the university to inform their overview of the apprenticeship.

39. For integrated apprenticeships where the Award Board acts as the EPA, the Award External Examiner will also be the EPA External Examiner and the Independent End Point Assessor (IEPA) and MUST attend the Award Board. An *in absentia report* will not be sufficient in this instance. **[See Clauses 42 and 92]**

End Point Assessment (EPA) External Examiners

40. Where an apprenticeship has an end point assessment (EPA) which is integrated into the university award (in a module or via the Award Board) an End Point Assessment (EPA) External Examiner will be appointed to ensure that the EPA meets the principles and standards set out by Skills England.

41. There will normally be one EPA External Examiner appointed for the EPA. However in exceptional circumstances the size and complexity of the provision may require the appointment of more than one. Where this occurs, the EPA EEs will be given the opportunity to meet to share their findings ahead of the Award Board. Where a separate Module External Examiner is in place, they will have oversight of the whole module in which the EPA sits. **[See Clause 25]**

42. Where the EPA is the Award Board the EPA External Examiner must also be the Award External Examiner and the Independent End Point Assessor (and MUST attend the Award Board) **[See Clauses 39 and 92].**

43. Some apprenticeship standards may also require the EPA External Examiner to be the Independent End Point Assessor.

    Where the EPA is embedded in a module the EPA External Examiner will normally also be the Module External Examiner. In exceptional circumstances where this is not possible (because the appointment criteria for both roles cannot be met by one person) separate EPA and Module External Examiners may need to be appointed. In these instances the Module External Examiner will work with the EPA External Examiner(s) and will be responsible for the oversight of the whole assessment. Both roles must be cognisant of the EQA Framework. **[See Clause 25]**

Responsibilities

44. To review documentation relating to the EPA, including the EPA assessment instruments/materials and internal quality assurance documentation to ensure the EPA is delivered in line with the published EPA plan.

45. To review a sample of EPA assessed work, including observing EPA assessments.

46. To observe assessor standardisation or moderation meetings, to ensure the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the EPA plan.

47. To meet with independent assessors and other EPA Organisation staff.

48. To meet, normally remotely, with apprentices and, where possible, employers.

49. To attend the Award Board, where the Award Board acts as the EPA.

50. To identify any issues or activities within the context of the delivery of the EPA that do not meet with the requirements of the Standard or pose a risk to effective EPA delivery and/or the achievement of occupational competence.

51. To provide feedback on examples of good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment and make recommendations about opportunities for enhancement.

52. To provide assurance that apprentices have met the relevant criteria to enable them to embark on the EPA.

53. To be assured that the independent assessors' knowledge is up to date.

54. To provide feedback on the accessibility of the EPA (including the management of reasonable adjustments).

55. To provide confirmation that the EPA process is comparable with that of other EPA Organisations with which they are familiar.

56. To participate in OfS Readiness checks and Monitoring Visits as required.

57. To submit an annual (EPA) report. NB This is a separate report to the Module/Award External Examiner Annual Report. **[See Clause 118]**

58. To report any serious matters of concern. **[See Clauses 127-129]**

59. To engage with briefings and guidance offered by the university.

Appointment of External Examiners

60. **Module External** Examiners will be appointed to:

- All taught modules at Level 5 and above.
- Level 3 and Level 4 taught modules where they contribute to the final classification of an award or contribute to a stand-alone award at Level 3 or Level 4.
- All taught modules contributing to professional doctorates.

61. **Award External Examiners** will be appointed to all university taught courses that lead to an award of the university and/or an apprenticeship. This includes stand-alone awards at Level 3 or Level 4 and professional doctorates.

62. **EPA External Examiners** will be appointed to the EPA where it is part of an integrated apprenticeship.

63. External examiners will be formally appointed to a named area of provision. The appointment letter issued to the examiner will identify the courses and modules included within the named area at the time of appointment. The list of modules and courses included at the time of appointment may change during the period of tenure. Any changes to the courses or modules included will be notified to the external examiner.

64. For Professional Doctorates, only external examiners for the taught part of the programme will be nominated and managed in accordance with this External Examiner Policy and Procedure. Examiners for the research/viva will be nominated and managed in accordance with Postgraduate Research Regulations. If the same examiner is nominated for both roles, they will need to be nominated through both procedures.

Criteria for Appointment of Module or Award External Examiners

65. Module and/or Award External Examiners must have:

- A high degree of competence and experience in the field(s) to which they will be appointed: normally demonstrated by qualifications in the relevant field to at least the level being examined **and** at least one full year's experience of teaching and preparing assessment in that field in a UK HEI.
- A good current understanding of the UK Higher Education Sector: normally demonstrated by their employment in a UK HEI.
- Experience of course design and student assessment at the level to which they will be appointed.
- Experience of quality assurance in UK Higher Education.

66. External examiners for apprenticeships should have an appropriate level of practice-based experience. Where possible a single external examiner should be appointed with subject and practice-based expertise, ensuring the examiner is able to comment on the effective integration of theory and practice.

Criteria for Appointment of EPA External Examiners

67. EPA External Examiners must have:

- A high degree of competence and experience in the field(s) to which they will be appointed: normally demonstrated by qualifications in the relevant field to at least the level being examined **and** at least one full year's experience of teaching and preparing assessment in that field in a UK HE.
- Knowledge and understanding of EPA processes and procedures.

Criteria for all External Examiners

68. External examiners must comply with the relevant employment legislation. This includes right to work in the United Kingdom and any additional safeguarding requirements which may be appropriate.

69. External examiners should not normally hold more than one other concurrent external examiner appointment.

70. Former members of staff, former students and former external examiners should not be invited to become external examiners until at least five full academic years after their appointment/registration/tenure ended.

71. External examiners from the same department at the same home institution should be avoided and will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where, for instance the course already has a good spread of external examiners from other institutions. In such cases the two examiners could not however be assigned the same provision and should not have a close working relationship at their home institution.

72. An external examiner should not normally be succeeded by another external examiner from the same institution.

73. External examiners appointed to courses which are regulated by a PSRB should meet any requirements set by the PSRB.

Conflicts of Interest

74. An external examiner must be wholly independent of the university, including the governing body and any relevant collaborative partners, and have no close relationships to people working or studying at the university.

75. The appointment should not result in any reciprocal examining arrangements eg where staff members from two institutions hold external examiner positions in each other's home institution in the same or closely related provision at the same level (ie undergraduate or postgraduate). Such appointments will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances.

76. The external examiner must not be able to personally benefit from any student outcomes or have any connection with any student being assessed.

77. The University will not normally appoint a person to be the external examiner to provision delivered at a partner institution if that person's home institution is also in collaboration or is seeking collaboration with the same partner.

78. The University does **not** regard having previously acted in the capacity as review/approval panel member as a conflict of interest.

79. Where an EPA External Examiner is also required to be an IEPA, the University Apprenticeships Team will complete a conflict-of-interest check for each apprentice.

Procedure for the appointment of external examiners

80. Schools will seek to replace an external examiner as early as possible during their final year of tenure to ensure continuity of cover.

81. Nominations should be submitted to QAE on the University template with all relevant sections completed including the module/course allocation and School approval.

82. Schools should secure the external examiners agreement prior to submitting the nomination to QAE and should inform them of any particular requirements of the role.

83. QAE will consider the nomination on behalf of Education Committee and will notify the School of its decision. The School will be responsible for communicating the decision to any collaborative partners.

84. QAE will issue the external examiner with an offer letter including information about the initial allocation of work and the fee structure, and the external examiner will be asked to acknowledge their acceptance of the offer and their understanding of the role in writing. QAE will arrange to complete a check of the external examiner's eligibility to work in the UK in accordance with The Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006, and all appointments will be subject to confirmation of the external examiner's eligibility to work in the UK.

Allocation of Work

85. An external examiner's allocation should represent a reasonable workload. This may change over of the period of tenure but the School will ensure that a balanced workload is maintained.

Attendance at Award Boards

86. Award External Examiners will attend the (first sit) Award Boards for courses allocated to them including those for collaborative partners. Attendance will normally be undertaken remotely.

87. Award External Examiners will not be required to attend Resit Award Boards (unless, for apprenticeships, the Award Board acts as the EPA). **[See Clause 92]**

88. Registry Services will provide examiners with the dates of Award Boards as early as possible during the academic year.

89. If circumstances arise which prevent an Award External Examiner from attending an Award Board, they should inform Registry Services and they should complete an *in absentia report* for presentation at the Board.

90. At least one examiner should normally be present at (first sit) Award Boards. If, due to exceptional circumstances, a School wishes to hold an Award Board without an external examiner in attendance they should make a formal request to the Executive Director of Curriculum and Academic Affairs. Their

authorisation to proceed will then be noted in the meeting and recorded in the minutes, and the *in absentia reports* detailing the views of the Award External Examiner(s) will be presented. If *in absentia reports* have not been received but the board feels confident to make a decision, the *In absentia reports* will be requested retrospectively, but if the board does not feel confident to make a decision, either the award in question will be withdrawn and considered at a reconvened board or the entire award board will be cancelled and re-convened on a later date.

91. For integrated apprenticeships where the Award Board acts as the EPA, the Award External Examiner (who will also be the EPA External Examiner and the IEPA) MUST attend the Award Board (and any Resit Award Boards).

92. At the end of the (first sit) Award Board Award External Examiners in attendance will be asked to indicate whether they endorse the decisions of the board and the responses will be recorded in the minutes. Any instances where an Award Board External Examiner feels unable to endorse a decision taken by the Award Board will be referred to the Executive Director of Curriculum and Academic Affairs for consideration. Schools will then ensure that the final decision is communicated back to the Award External Examiner. Schools will also inform students of any delay in finalising and communicating their results.

93. After the Award Board has completed its deliberation on candidates, Award External Examiners will be invited to give a brief oral report (for which the points are included in the minutes) which should cover:

- Their opinion of the assessment procedure (its fairness, accuracy and efficiency).
- Their opinion of the academic qualify of the cohort covered in the board.
- Any recommendations to improved the teaching or assessment process.
- Their opinion about whether recommendations made in previous years have been suitably addressed.

University Award Board for Exceptions

94. The University Award Board for Exceptions (UABE) will consider submissions of individual students which have been established by Registry as having satisfied the criteria for special consideration.

95. Award External Examiners are not required to attend this board as part of their routine responsibilities. Registry Services will select from existing Award External Examiners a sufficient number (usually two) to act as UABE Examiners for an additional fee.

96. The role of a UABE External Examiner is to attend the UABE to offer an additional perspective, both in challenging and supporting the internal considerations.

97. UABE meetings are held four times a year remotely and attendance is shared between the selected UABE External Examiners.

Support for External Examiners

Mentoring

98. External examiners who are new to the role will be allocated a mentor for the first year of their tenure. Experienced external examiners may therefore be asked to act as a mentor.

99. The mentor will normally be allocated at the start of the mentees appointment and will be selected by the host School. The person selected will be an existing experienced external examiner who may be from a related or a different subject area.

100. The role of the mentor is to be on hand to answer any questions which the mentee may have about benchmarking with the sector and in accordance with the FHEQ and to give advice from their own experience as an external examiner. Mentors are **not** expected to advise on the operation of tasks and processes at the University or its regulations.

101. The Mentor who is assigned will be asked to make the first contact but thereafter the initiation for contact should be from the Mentee whenever there is a need.

Briefings

102. On appointment and throughout their period of tenure, external examiners will be invited to attend a briefing which will provide an overview of the duties, roles and responsibilities and an introduction to the university regulations, including any changes which may have been made.

103. Briefings will usually be held remotely and recordings will be made available.

Other Support

104. Schools will be responsible for ensuring that external examiners have access to the relevant course/module documentation. This will normally be provided via Blackboard.

105. Registry Services will be responsible for ensuring that external examiners are provided with:

- Award Board Dates and Grids (for Award External Examiners only)
- Signpost to relevant Blackboard and SharePoint folders, as required;
- Oversight of the External Examiner processes at Partner Institutions.
- Oversight to ensure institutional requirements for access to information and reporting are met.

106. The previous external examiners annual report will be made available to the new external examiners in their first year of tenure on request.

External Examining at Collaborative Partners

107. The University will ensure that all external examiners appointed to collaborative provision have full oversight of the modules and courses allocated to them.

108. For **dual awards**, University of Staffordshire will appoint external examiners to modules and courses leading to the University of Staffordshire award. Where an external examiner is also appointed by a collaborative partner, joint appointments may be explored. Such arrangements must be approved by Education Committee.

109. External examiners will not normally be required to visit collaborative partners in person but will be invited to attend a *remote* meeting with the collaborative partners to which they have been appointed in order to establish connections and understanding of the provision. These meetings will be arranged by the course team. For **dual award** provision these meetings will include full details of the regulatory framework for the awards.

110. Academic Link Tutors will share with partners any relevant feedback from the External Examiners' Annual Report(s).

External Examining of Micro-credentials

111. Proposals presented to the Portfolio Development and Review Board should include external comment on the proposed course. An existing external examiner from a cognate area should be asked to provide feedback where appropriate. Where micro-credentials are focused on transferable skills an appropriate external will be identified to provide comment on these.

112. Approved micro-credentials will be assigned an external examiner, normally from the University's existing pool of examiners.

113. An external examiner will also be appointed to oversee the skills-based portfolio.

114. External examiners must also be appointed to any assessed modules which will go to Award Boards in the normal way.

115. Requests for amendments to micro-credentials must be made to the Portfolio Development and Review Board and accompanied by external examiner comment on the proposed change.

External Examiner Annual Report

116. Module and Award External Examiners will submit an annual report to the university by the date notified to them on the template provided. There is one template for this and so only one report is required where examiners cover both roles, including provision at collaborative partners. The use of alternative templates developed by or on behalf of a PSRB must be approved by the university prior to use.

117. EPA External Examiners will submit an annual report to the university by the date notified to them on the template provided. For examiners who are also Module and/or Award External Examiners this will be in addition to their Module/Award External Examiner annual report.

118. Annual Reports must clearly identify the module / course/ site to which the examiners comments refer.

119. Annual Reports will ask the examiner to identify areas of good practice; recommendations or causes for concern.

120. Where the University feels that the report is inadequate the relevant Head of Department will write to the examiner asking for a revised report to be submitted by a given date. If an adequate report is not received, the examiner's tenure may be terminated. **[See Clause 134]**

121. The relevant academic staff will provide a response to each external examiner and this will note any actions which have or will be taken in light of their comments. Where it is not considered appropriate to take action, the reasons should be given. If the report covers provision delivered by a collaborative partner, the partner should be invited to contribute to the response.

122. Responses to external examiner reports will be approved by the Head of Department. Quality Assurance and Enhancement will circulate the response to the external examiner. School Academic Committees are responsible for overseeing the timely completion of responses to external examiners.

123. Schools will be responsible for ensuring the external examiner reports are shared with PSRBs where required.

124. The external examiner reports form a key part of the evidence for course monitoring and apprenticeship self-assessment.

125. Quality Assurance and Enhancement will produce an annual report identifying common themes emerging from external examiner annual reports for consideration by Education Committee. External examiner feedback will also inform the university's annual quality and standards and student success report to Academic Board and the Board of Governors, and the Apprenticeship Self-Assessment Report.

Reporting Serious Concerns

126. External examiners wishing to raise a matter of serious concern with the University should send a confidential email, separately from their annual report, to the Pro Vice Chancellor, Education and Research.

127. The Pro Vice Chancellor, Education and Research will conduct necessary investigations and respond directly to the external examiner. Any resulting actions will be monitored by Education Committee.

128. Only when an external examiner has exhausted all applicable internal procedures for reporting serious concerns (including the submission of the confidential email to the Pro Vice Chancellor, Education and Research) should they contact the Office for Students or inform the relevant PSRB.

Students and External Examiners

129. External examiners may ask to meet students to enhance their understanding of the programme. This would normally happen remotely.

130. Students will be provided with the name and the home institution of the Award and Module External Examiners for their course and modules. No contact details will be provided and students will be advised that they must not make direct contact with external examiners but should direct any queries for them through their Course Leader. If contacted directly by students, external examiners should decline to comment and refer the student back to the University.

131. The University and its Collaborative Partners will make external examiner reports available to students. This will happen routinely through the sharing of reports at Course Committees (or equivalent) and by request from individual students. The report should be accompanied by the approved School response.

Termination of Tenure

132. An external examiner who wishes to resign before the expiry of their normal period of tenure should formally write to the University giving three months' notice to allow for the appointment of a replacement. This should be by email to QAE at quality@staffs.ac.uk

133. The University may terminate an external examiner's appointment at any time in the event that:

- The external examiner fails to perform satisfactorily any of the duties listed in this policy (including failure to attend an Award Board where required to do so and without good cause and/or making alternative arrangements and/or failing to submit a full and complete annual report by the deadline determined by the university).
- An irresolvable conflict of interest or an irretrievable breakdown in relations arises.
- The external examiner commits a breach of confidentiality with regard to information of the university and its students.
- The external examiner brings the University into disrepute.
- The modules or awards to which the external examiner is appointed are withdrawn or suspended.
- The University finds there is a conflict of interest or reciprocal arrangement about which it was not aware at appointment.

134. Where a School wishes to terminate an external examiner the reasons should normally be discussed with the external examiner before a decision is made. The School should then submit to Education Committee a formal recommendation for the tenure to be terminated citing the reasons and the date it should be effective. If approved, QAE will formally write to the external examiner on behalf of Education Committee to inform them of the decision.

Break in Tenure

135. In some instances an external examiner may need to take a break in their tenure (for illness or personal reasons or maternity cover). Where this happens the examiner should inform the university of their situation. During that time the School should either temporarily allocate the workload to other examiner examiners or appoint a short term temporary external examiner through the usual appointment procedure.

Key to abbreviations
EPA: End Point Assessment
EQA: External Quality Assurance of Apprenticeships
FHEQ: Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
HEI: Higher Education Institution
IEPA: Independent End Point Assessor
OfS: Office for Students
PSRB: Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies
QAE: Quality Assurance and Enhancement
UKSCQA: UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment

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