

EXTERNAL EXAMINING POLICY FOR TAUGHT PROVISION

Quality Assurance and Enhancement

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Introduction

1. This policy sets out the University's arrangements for external academic oversight of the University's taught course provisions, including the roles and responsibilities of External Quality Advisors (EQA), Apprenticeship Assessment External Examiners (AA EE) and the Chief External Quality Advisor (CEQA). It applies to all taught provision delivered by the University and its collaborative partners, including Professional Doctorates, Higher and Degree Apprenticeships and short courses.
2. External examining arrangements for MPhil and PhD candidates, and for the research thesis element of Professional Doctorates, are excluded from the scope of this Policy and are governed by the University's regulations for research degrees.
3. This Policy has been informed by the [Office for Students \(OfS\) Regulatory Framework](#); the [Office for Students' guidance](#) on external quality assurance for apprenticeship End Point Assessment; advice and guidance on the use of external expertise contained with the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) published by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education; the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assurance (UKSCQA) [External Examining Principles](#); and requirements for apprenticeship provision set by [Skills England](#).

Purpose of External Examining

4. The University's external examining arrangements comprise:
 - External Quality Advisors, who provide subject-level academic assurance and enhancement-focused commentary.
 - Apprenticeship Assessment External Examiners will be appointed for integrated apprenticeships where required by approved apprenticeship assessment plans and regulatory requirements; and
 - A Chief External Quality Advisor, who provides institutional-level strategic oversight.

Together, these roles form the University's external examining framework.

5. Collectively, these arrangements exist to:
 - Provide independent feedback on whether the University is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards, in accordance with the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications, relevant subject benchmark statements, approved assessment plans and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB).
 - Provide assurance that assessment processes measure student achievement rigorously and are fair, consistent and robust, in alignment with intended learning outcomes of awards and University regulations, and where applicable comply with the requirements and expectations of approved apprenticeship assessment plans and relevant regulatory frameworks.
 - Provide external comment on the comparability of academic standards and student achievement with those of other UK degree-awarding bodies, drawing on sector experience.
 - Support enhancement by identifying opportunities to improve the quality of learning opportunities and by providing constructive challenge and advice to course teams to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment practices are inclusive and reflect the diversity of the student body.
 - Contribute to institutional-level oversight through the synthesis of subject-level intelligence by the CEQA, alongside other mechanisms such as thematic reporting, supporting the University in maintaining confidence in its academic standards, regulatory frameworks and external assurance arrangements.

Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) Requirements

6. Where taught programmes are subject to Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation or regulatory approval, the University will ensure that its external examining arrangements meet the expectations of the relevant PSRB.
7. For PSRB-accredited provision, External Quality Advisors (EQAs) will fulfil the external examiner or external peer review function required by the relevant PSRB and will provide independent external

assurance of academic standards, assessment and moderation arrangements, and the comparability of student achievement with sector expectations.

8. The University will ensure that EQA appointments collectively provide appropriate disciplinary and professional expertise for accredited programmes and, where required by PSRB standards, that appointees meet specified eligibility or professional registration requirements.
9. Where PSRB standards require programme-specific reporting, enhanced oversight of assessment arrangements, or participation in award or examination boards, these requirements will be incorporated into the operation of the EQA role.

External Examining Structure

10. The University operates an integrated external examining framework comprising subject-level External Quality Advisors, External Examiners appointed for apprenticeship assessment (where required), and a Chief External Quality Advisor.
11. The University will ensure that Apprenticeship External Examiner arrangements are explicitly in place for all integrated apprenticeship standards, regardless of whether an External Quality Advisor is appointed to the associated academic provision.
12. The framework is designed to ensure both detailed subject-level scrutiny and institutional-level oversight of academic standards, assessment practices and student outcomes.

Within this structure:

- EQAs are appointed to specific subject areas, determined by the scale and complexity of provision.
- The number of EQAs appointed at any one time will be proportionate to the breadth of the University's academic portfolio.
- EQAs, the CEQA and AA EE are appointed by the University through its formal approval processes.
- The CEQA provides institutional-level oversight and reports formally to Education Committee, drawing on EQA reports, attendance at Award Boards and engagement with departments.
- The relationship between EQAs and the CEQA enables subject-level intelligence to be synthesised to inform University-wide enhancement and assurance.

External Quality Advisor: Role and Tenure

13. EQAs are appointed to provide independent, assurance of academic standards and assessment practices and to offer external expert advice to support enhancement and comparability with sector expectations.
14. EQAs are appointed to their area of subject expertise for a period of four standard academic years.
15. In exceptional circumstances, an EQA appointment may be extended for a fifth year by mutual agreement. Requests for extension must be made to Quality Assurance and Enhancement for consideration.
16. EQAs do not determine individual student marks, re-mark student work, or replace internal moderation processes, which remain the responsibility of the University.
17. EQAs will normally be invited, at least twice a year, to engage in Continuous Monitoring Meetings in a critical-friend capacity, considering areas of good practice and actions arising from course monitoring activity and action planning.
18. EQAs will be given sight of internally verified assessments for modules contributing to award classification and will review representative samples of assessed work that have been internally moderated. At the outset of each semester, the Department, in consultation with the EQA, will agree an appropriate sample in line with the University's verification and moderation procedures, normally reflecting:
 - a range of assessment types, levels and years of study.
 - identified areas of risk or concern.
 - different delivery sites or partners.
 - the full range of student performance.
 - any additional sampling or oversight requirements arising from relevant PSRB standards, where applicable.

19. EQAs will provide written confirmation of the effectiveness of assessment and moderation processes for reporting at Award Boards.
20. EQAs may be invited to attend Award Boards in an advisory capacity, either exceptionally at the request of the Associate Dean or to meet the requirements of relevant PSRB standards; however, they do not hold decision-making authority.
21. EQAs will comment on proposed changes to existing courses and on the design of new courses within their subject remit.
22. EQAs may be invited by Departments to meet with staff at collaborative partners, normally via virtual meetings to assure the consistency of academic standards and assessment practices.
23. EQAs may be invited annually to meet with students, through appropriate means, to gather structured feedback on learning, teaching and assessment.
24. EQAs will submit an annual report summarising risks, assurances and recommendations for enhancement; commenting on the comparability of student achievement with similar provision across the sector; and highlighting areas of good practice for wider dissemination.
25. Following submission of the annual report, EQAs may be invited to participate in thematic discussions with other EQAs and the Chief External Quality Advisor.

Apprenticeship Assessment External Examiner: Role and Tenure

26. AA EEs are appointed to provide independent external scrutiny of the design, delivery and outcomes of the apprenticeship assessment for integrated apprenticeship standards delivered by the University as an Assessment Organisation (AO). This includes assurance of the validity, reliability, fairness and consistency of assessment decisions.
27. AA EEs are appointed to their area of subject expertise for a period of four standard academic years.
28. In exceptional circumstances, an AA EE appointment may be extended for a fifth year by mutual agreement. Requests for extension must be made to Quality Assurance and Enhancement for consideration.
29. Where required by the approved apprenticeship assessment plan, the AA examiner may also be appointed to act as an Independent Assessor, provided that all independence and eligibility requirements are satisfied and that no conflict of interest exists, including prior involvement in delivery or internal moderation for the relevant cohort.
30. The AA EE will normally review assessment plan instruments/materials and processes to confirm alignment with the published assessment plan and regulatory requirements, including any minimum requirements and flexibilities set out within the assessment plan and relevant regulatory guidance.
31. The AA EE will review representative samples of the apprenticeship assessment assessed work and outcomes, including observing assessments where required, including on-programme assessment where specified within the assessment plan.
32. The AA EE will observe internal moderation, standardisation and assessor processes relating to the assessment plan including assessor calibration and consistency of grading decisions.
33. AA EEs will also provide feedback on examples of good practice in apprenticeship assessment delivery and make recommendations for enhancement, including recommendations that support transition to revised assessment plans where applicable.
34. AA EEs review the application of gateway arrangements to ensure that the apprenticeship assessment is undertaken in accordance with the approved assessment plan.
35. AA EEs confirm the comparability of apprenticeship assessment processes and outcomes with those of other apprenticeship assessment organisations or higher education providers delivering integrated apprenticeship assessment with which they are familiar.
36. The AA EE will meet with assessors and relevant AO staff, including quality assurance and governance representatives where appropriate, to evaluate the effectiveness of the delivery and quality assurance arrangements for apprenticeship assessment.
37. The AA EE will consider feedback from apprentices and, where feasible, employers as part of the overall evaluation of assessment delivery.

38. The AA EE will review the management of reasonable adjustments and accessibility arrangements within apprenticeship assessment to ensure fair and compliant assessment practice.
39. AA EEs attend Award Boards where the Award Board acts as the apprenticeship assessment, in accordance with University procedures and relevant assessment plans. The AA EE will also undertake, for each cohort completing assessment, appropriate review and observation of the assessment activity (which may include attendance at Award Boards or other assessment methods), to evaluate the University's performance in delivering the apprenticeship assessment and to inform their formal report.
40. The AA EE will submit an annual apprenticeship assessment specific report in accordance with University procedures, drawing on cohort-based review and observation activity undertaken during the year, and distinct from any EQA report.
41. The AA EE may be required to participate in OfS readiness checks and monitoring visits in relation to Apprenticeship Assessment Plans and will provide appropriate cooperation and evidence as requested.

Chief External Quality Advisor: Role and Tenure

42. The CEQA is appointed to provide an independent, strategic external perspective on the University's approach to safeguarding academic standards and maintaining confidence in its assessment, progression and award frameworks.
43. The CEQA supports institutional oversight through external insight and reports formally to Education Committee.
44. The CEQA is appointed for a period of four standard academic years.
45. In exceptional circumstances, a CEQA appointment may be extended for a fifth year by mutual agreement. Requests for extension must be submitted to Quality Assurance and Enhancement for consideration by Academic Board.
46. The CEQA will act as a critical friend in the development and review of institutional academic regulations, policies and procedures relating to assessment, progression and awards.
47. The CEQA will serve as an external member of Education Committee, acting as a key channel through which the CEQA provides strategic, independent advice and external sector insight on the effectiveness of the University's assessment, progression and external assurance arrangements.
48. The CEQA will engage with EQAs across the institution, including meeting annually with a selected group, in order to identify emerging risks, recurring issues and areas of good practice.
49. The CEQA will review a representative sample of EQA annual reports drawn from across the University's academic provision to gain assurance that appropriate subject-level scrutiny is being applied.
50. The CEQA may attend a selection of Award Board and University Award Board for Exceptions (UABE) meetings in an observational and advisory capacity in order to:
 - observe the application of relevant academic regulations and procedures.
 - consider the consistency of decision-making and the handling of precedent across the University; and
 - offer independent advice where appropriate.
51. The CEQA will submit an annual report to Education Committee summarising observations on the University's approach to securing academic standards, the effectiveness of its assessment and progression frameworks, and the operation of its external quality assurance arrangements.

Appointments and Approval Process

52. The University will appoint External Quality Advisors (EQAs), Apprenticeship Assessment External Examiners (AA EEs), and the Chief External Quality Advisor (CEQA) through formal and transparent recruitment and approval processes designed to ensure independence, expertise and compliance with regulatory requirements.
53. An individual may be appointed to both the External Quality Advisor and AA External Examiner roles. However, appointment as an EQA does not in itself satisfy the requirement for an AA External Examiner. Where an individual is proposed to hold both roles, they must be separately

appointed in accordance with this Policy and meet all eligibility, experience and independence requirements applicable to each role.

54. For Professional Doctorates, only external examiners for the taught part of the programme will be nominated and managed in accordance with this Policy. Examiners for the research/viva will be nominated and managed in accordance with the University's Postgraduate Research Regulations. Where the same individual is proposed for both roles, they must be nominated and approved through both procedures.
55. All appointments will be made following nomination and approval in accordance with University procedures, including verification that candidates meet the experience and eligibility criteria set out in this Policy for the relevant role.
56. In considering appointments, the University will have regard to individuals' current workload and other external examining commitments. EQAs and AA EEs should not normally hold more than one other concurrent external examining appointment.
57. The CEQA must not hold any other external examining appointments during their tenure with the University.
58. Final approval of appointments and extensions for EQAs and AA EEs will normally be exercised by QAE on behalf of the University's Education Committee.
59. The Chair of Academic Board will consider and approve the appointment of the CEQA.
60. Appointments will be subject to the University's requirements on independence, reciprocal arrangements and conflicts of interest. Individuals must disclose any actual, potential or perceived conflicts prior to appointment and throughout their term of office.
61. The University will ensure that all appointees receive appropriate induction, briefing and access to relevant policies, regulations and guidance to enable them to fulfil their role effectively.
62. The University will maintain central oversight of appointments, tenure and reporting arrangements through the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team.

External Quality Advisors

63. Candidates will normally be expected to have:
 - A high degree of competence and experience in the subject area to which they will be appointed, normally demonstrated by qualifications in the relevant subject area to at least the level being examined and at least one full year's experience of teaching and preparing assessment in that subject in a UK Higher Education Institution (HEI).
 - A good current understanding of the UK higher education sector, normally demonstrated by current or recent 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.
 - Experience as an external examiner or in an equivalent external academic advisory role.
 - Familiarity with relevant external reference points, including the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications and subject benchmark statements.
 - Where relevant to the provision, experience of working with collaborative partners, multiple delivery sites or apprenticeship provision.
 - Where relevant to accredited provision, evidence of appropriate professional standing, registration or experience required by the relevant Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB).

Apprenticeship Assessment External Examiner

64. The AAEO EE 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.
 - Knowledge and understanding of apprenticeship assessment processes and procedures, including the application of approved assessment plans.

- Experience of assessment design, moderation or standardisation in higher education or occupational contexts.
- Familiarity with maintaining and judging national occupational standards.
- Awareness of the regulatory requirements applying to Assessment Organisations.

Chief External Quality Advisor

65. The CEQA will normally be an individual with substantial experience of institutional academic governance and the assurance of standards within the UK Higher Education sector.

Candidates will normally be expected to demonstrate:

- Extensive academic leadership experience, with responsibility for assessment, progression, awards or quality assurance.
 - Significant experience of operating at institutional level within academic governance structures, including committee membership and regulatory oversight.
 - A strong track record as an external examiner or external advisor, with experience across more than one provider and an understanding of a range of institutional models.
 - Deep familiarity with UK regulatory and reference frameworks, including the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications, subject benchmark statements, and the expectations of the Office for Students and other relevant sector bodies.
 - Experience of reviewing or approving academic regulations, assessment frameworks or quality assurance processes.
 - Credibility and authority to provide independent challenge and strategic advice to senior academic leaders and governing bodies.
 - The ability to analyse complex institutional information and provide independent, well-evidenced written advice and challenge
 - Conflicts of Interest and Independence
66. EQAs, AA EEs and the CEQA must be wholly independent of the University, including its governing body and any relevant collaborative partners, and must not have close personal or professional relationships with individuals working or studying at the University which could give rise to a real or perceived conflict of interest.
67. Appointments must not result in reciprocal external examining arrangements, for example where staff from two institutions hold external examining roles in each other's home institution in the same or closely related provision at the same academic level. Such arrangements will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and with explicit University approval.
68. Individuals must not be in a position to personally benefit from student outcomes and must not have any connection with any student whose work they are responsible for reviewing or assuring.
69. The University will not normally appoint an individual to act as an external advisor or examiner for provision delivered at a partner institution where that person's home institution is also in collaboration with, or is seeking collaboration with, the same partner.
70. The University does not normally regard previous service as a review or approval panel member as constituting a conflict of interest.
71. All individuals must declare any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest at the point of appointment and throughout their tenure. Where a conflict arises, the University will determine whether the appointment may proceed and what mitigations are required.
72. Where an AA EE is also required to act as an Independent Assessor, the University Apprenticeships Team will complete a conflict-of-interest check for each apprentice in accordance with regulatory requirements.

Support for External Roles

Briefings and Induction

73. On appointment and throughout their period of tenure, EQAs, AA EEs and the CEQA will be invited to attend institutional briefings providing an overview of their duties, roles and responsibilities and an introduction to relevant University regulations, policies and governance arrangements.
74. Briefings will usually be held remotely, and recordings will be made available.

75. The CEQA will receive additional tailored induction in relation to the University's governance structures, committee operations and reporting expectations.

Mentoring

76. EQAs and AA EEs who are new to the role will be allocated a mentor for the first year of their tenure. Mentors will be appointed from among experienced EQAs or AA External Examiners, typically those with prior experience in external quality assurance or external assessment roles.
77. Mentors will normally be allocated at the start of the appointee's tenure and will be selected by the relevant School.
78. The role of the mentor is to provide guidance on 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.
79. The assigned mentor will be asked to make the first contact; thereafter the initiation for contact should normally come from the mentee.

Access to Information and Operational Support

80. Schools will be responsible for ensuring that EQAs, AA External Examiners and CEQA have access to relevant course, module and assessment documentation, including internally moderated samples of assessed work and module marks. This will normally be provided via Blackboard (or, for partners, via the designated platform).
81. Registry will be responsible for providing operational information required to support the role, including Award Board dates and papers.
82. On request, relevant previous external annual reports will be made available to new appointees in their first year of tenure.

Annual Reporting and Institutional Response

EQAs and AA EEs

83. EQAs and AA EEs will submit an annual report to the University by the date notified to them using the approved University template. Individuals appointed to both roles are required to submit separate reports for each role.
84. Annual reports will require the author to identify areas of good practice, recommendations for enhancement and any causes for concern.
85. Where the University considers that a report is inadequate, the relevant Head of Department will write to the individual requesting a revised report by a specified date. If an adequate report is not received, the individual's tenure may be terminated in accordance with University procedures.
86. Relevant academic staff will provide a written response to each report, setting out actions taken or proposed in response to the comments. Where it is not considered appropriate to act, reasons must be recorded. Where the report covers provision delivered with a collaborative partner, the partner must be invited to contribute to the response.
87. Responses to EQA reports will be approved by the relevant Head of Department. Quality Assurance and Enhancement will circulate the approved response to the report author. School Academic Committees will oversee the timely completion of responses.
88. Schools will be responsible for ensuring that reports are shared with PSRBs where required.
89. Quality Assurance and Enhancement will produce an annual institutional thematic report identifying common themes emerging from EQA and AA EE reports for consideration by the Education Committee. This analysis will inform the University's annual OfS B Condition Overview report the Apprenticeship Self-Assessment Report.

Chief EQA

90. The CEQA will submit an annual institutional report to Education Committee by the date notified to them using the approved University template.

91. The CEQA report will draw on engagement with EQAs, review of EQA reports, attendance at Award Boards and consideration of the University's regulations and processes.
92. The CEQA's annual report will provide an additional independent external perspective on the University's management of academic standards and assessment practices and will be considered alongside internal thematic reporting.

University Award Board for Exceptions

93. The University Award Board for Exceptions (UABE) will consider submissions of individual or groups of students which have been established by the University as having satisfied the criteria for special consideration.
94. EQAs are not required to attend this board as part of their routine responsibilities. The University will select from existing EQAs (usually two) to act as UABE Examiners for an additional fee.
95. The role of a UABE Examiner is to attend the UABE to offer an additional perspective, both in challenging and supporting the internal considerations.
96. UABE meetings are held four times a year remotely and attendance is shared between the EQAs selected as UABE Examiners.
97. The Chief External Quality Advisor is not normally required to attend the UABE but may attend to observe proceedings in an advisory capacity for institutional assurance purposes.

Reporting Serious Concerns

98. EQAs, AA EEs and the CEQA who wish to raise a matter of serious concern with the University must do so separately from their annual report by submitting a confidential notification in accordance with University procedures.
99. The confidential notification should normally be sent to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education & Research). The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education & Research) will ensure that appropriate investigation is undertaken and will respond directly to the individual raising the concern.
100. Any resulting actions will be monitored through the Education Committee. Where the matter is raised by the CEQA, the notification may alternatively be sent to the Chair of Academic Board.
101. Only when all applicable internal procedures for reporting serious concerns have been exhausted should the individual contact the Office for Students or inform the relevant PSRB.

Termination of Tenure Process

102. An EQA, AA EE or CEQA 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.
103. The University may terminate an EQA, AA EE or CEQA appointment at any time in the event that:
 - The individual fails to perform satisfactorily any of the duties listed in this Policy
 - An irresolvable conflict of interest or an irretrievable breakdown in relations arises.
 - The individual commits a breach of confidentiality with regard to information of the University and its students.
 - The individual brings the University into disrepute.
 - The subject area to which the individual is appointed is withdrawn or suspended.
 - The University finds there is a conflict of interest or reciprocal arrangement about which it was not aware at appointment.
104. Where a School wishes to terminate an EQA or AA EE the reasons should normally be discussed with the Individual 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 EQA/AA EE on behalf of Education Committee to inform them of the decision.
105. Where the University proposes to terminate the CEQA, the matter should normally be discussed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education & Research) with the Chief prior to any decision being made. A formal recommendation should then be submitted to the Academic Board requesting approval to terminate the tenure, including the reasons for the recommendation and the proposed effective

date. Following approval, QAE will issue formal written notification to the CEQA on behalf of the Academic Board.

Break in Tenure

106. In some instances, an External may need to take a temporary break in their tenure (e.g. due to illness, personal reasons or maternity leave). In such cases, the External should notify the University as soon as possible. Where an EQA or EPA EE takes a break, the School will appoint a temporary replacement through the usual appointment procedures for the duration of the absence.

Key to abbreviations

AA EE: Apprenticeship Assessment External Examiner
AO: Assessment Organisation
CEQA: Chief External Quality Advisor
EQA: External Quality Advisor
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
QAA: Quality Assurance Agency
UABE: University Award Board for Exceptions
UKSCQA: UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment

