

## THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

	<b>Code of Practice for External Examiners of Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes</b>
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<b>Purpose</b>	The Code of Practice sets out those matters relating to the role, powers and responsibilities the University assigns to its External Examiners for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes.
<b>Scope</b>	The Code of Practice is intended primarily for the information of External Examiners, but is also relevant for staff involved in examinations and Boards of Examiners.

### **The Code of Practice for External Examiners of Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes**

Nothing in this Code of Practice supersedes the University's *Assessment Regulations and Guidelines*, which are circulated annually by Academic Services. See: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/policies-regulations/regulations>

#### **General**

1. The conduct of assessment and examinations in the University is governed by the University's *Assessment Regulations and Guidelines* and by decisions taken, from time to time, by Senatus Academicus.
2. This Code of Practice sets out those matters relating to the role, powers and responsibilities the University assigns to its External Examiners for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. It is intended primarily for the information of External Examiners, but is also relevant for staff involved in examinations and Boards of Examiners.
3. Additional guidance on degree examination procedures may be found in the University's *Assessment Regulations and Guidelines* and guidelines for Boards of Examiners.
4. The Registry exercises general oversight of examination procedures on behalf of the University Secretary for degree examinations, including the provision of question papers, entry for examinations, the receipt and notification of results and the detailed arrangements for examinations, including the provision of accommodation.
5. Several different University committees have an involvement in areas covered by this Code of Practice. Senatus Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) has a monitoring role in terms of the appointment of External Examiners. It does not approve appointments (which is a College level responsibility) but receives a report periodically which analyses the composition of External Examiner

appointees. QAC also ensures that appropriate action has been taken in regard to External Examiners' reports by way of the annual College Quality Assurance and Enhancement reports. College Undergraduate Studies Committee (CUGSCs) and College Postgraduate Studies Committee (CPGSCs) (College PGT and College Research Experience Committee in MVM) ensure that External Examiners' appointments are consistent with the assessment regulations.

6. The University concurs with the *Quality Assurance Agency's* Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, *Section 4: External Examining (2004)*

### ***Purposes and Functions of External Examiners***

7. The External Examiner system forms a key part of the University's quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms. External Examiners help to ensure that degrees awarded by the University are comparable in standard to those of other equivalent departments in appropriate universities, although their content may differ. They also ensure that the assessment system is operated equitably and fairly in respect of the treatment and classification of students.
8. In order to achieve these purposes External Examiners need to be able to:
  - (a) participate in assessment procedures for the award of degrees
  - (b) arbitrate in problem cases
  - (c) comment and give advice on assessment procedures.
9. Where appropriate, External Examiners may also comment on course content, balance and structure and on degree programme curricula. Colleges or Schools may also choose to invite External Examiners to see and comment on reports and feedback related to curriculum review and quality of educational provision. External Examiners should be aware of the QAA infrastructure including relevant subject benchmarks, the national qualifications frameworks and programme specifications.

### ***Selection, Qualifications, Appointment and Period of Service***

10. The appointment of External Examiners is the responsibility of Colleges. Heads of Schools, Teaching Organisations, or the appropriate unit, have responsibility for recommending External Examiners to the College for appointment.
11. College Offices call for recommendations for the appointment of External Examiners. College Offices notify Heads of Schools indicating the External Examiner vacancies which are about to arise in their taught courses. Heads of School make nominations to College after consultation with the staff members teaching the course and having ascertained that the External Examiner is willing to accept the appointment. (see QA.EE.1, Nomination form for the Appointment of External Examiners). The information contained on the nomination form allows the College to judge whether the person nominated has the necessary seniority and experience and meets the other requirements set out in point 14 below.

12. External Examiners should normally be resident in the United Kingdom. If the Examiner is resident abroad, the School should take account of the cost and, where appropriate, check that the College is prepared to pay the cost of travel to Edinburgh before proposing the appointment.
13. Scrutiny of External Examiner nominations by the College should have regard to the following:
  - 13.1 Only individuals of sufficient standing and experience to be able to command authority should be appointed. S/he must be both competent and have the requisite experience to examine the course at the level at which it is taught. In exceptional circumstances, an External Examiner may be appointed who does not meet the criteria with respect to standing and/or experience. In such cases, a mentor (usually an existing member of the external examining team) will be appointed to work with the Examiner to provide guidance and to ensure that the Examiner fulfils the requirements of his/her role.
  - 13.2 In view of the time commitment required to fulfil the duties of an External Examiner, including attendance at Boards of Examiners' meetings, it is recommended that no individual should hold more than two External Examiner appointments simultaneously for undergraduate or taught postgraduate courses during the period of employment as an External Examiner in the University.
  - 13.3 An External Examiner should not be appointed from a department in a university where a member of staff from the inviting university (University of Edinburgh) subject discipline is known to be serving as an examiner, unless this imposes difficulties in obtaining the services of an External Examiner. In cases of doubt, the Head of College or his or her nominee shall determine what constitutes a discipline.
  - 13.4 External Examiners must not be close relatives of any member of the inviting School and are asked to declare any link and/or relationship which might lead to a conflict of interest. (Resolution Number 35/2002).
  - 13.5 No person who has held an appointment on the teaching or research staff of the University, or who has been granted honorary status in the University, is eligible to act as an External Examiner until a period of four years has elapsed since the termination of the appointment or the status. In exceptional circumstances, the Curriculum and Student Progression Committee may waive this rule (Resolution No. 28/2004). Members of affiliated or associated institutions may be Internal but not External Examiners.
  - 13.6 External Examiners for the same courses should not be drawn sequentially from the same institution. Should exceptions to this be unavoidable, a case for approval must be made, in writing, to the Head of College.
  - 13.7 No External Examiner may hold office for a longer period than five consecutive years. An External Examiner is not eligible for re-appointment beyond a total of five consecutive years until s/he has ceased to hold that office for at least one year. In exceptional circumstances, the Curriculum and Student Progression Committee may

waive this rule (Resolution No. 28/2004).

- 13.8 External Examiners from outside the university system, for example from industry or the professions, may be appropriate in certain circumstances. However, where an External Examiner who is not an academic is appointed for a particular course, the School needs to ensure that a mechanism for assuring academic standards is maintained, for example, by having another External Examiner who is an academic on the Board of Examiners.
  - 13.9 In some professional disciplines, External Examiners are subject to validation by external organisations.
  - 13.10 Subject to the above conditions, External Examiners may be appointed either for a specified period of years or on a year-by-year basis.
14. If there is any doubt regarding the proposed appointee's compliance with the regulations/Code of Practice, or if it is considered appropriate to seek approval for non-compliance, then the External Examiner's appointment form must be forwarded to the Senatus Curriculum and Student Progression Committee for consideration and, if appropriate, approval.
  15. Once nominations have been approved, the College Office dispatches letters appointing the External Examiners. The letters should make reference to the method of calculating the fees, or the precise fee payable, the date when the fees will be paid, and to the fact that receipt of the External Examiner's report is a prerequisite for payment.
  16. The number of External Examiners for any particular degree programme or course should be sufficient to cover the range of studies therein. More than one External Examiner may be needed where there are a large number of students or where the course or degree programme covers a wide range.
  17. The College Office should be prepared to report the details of newly appointed External Examiners to the secretary of the Senatus Quality Assurance Committee when requested so that an analysis of the University's External Examiner appointments can be undertaken.
  18. It is recommended that the period of office for all undergraduate and postgraduate External Examiners begins at the start of the academic session. However, continuity of External Examiner appointments is essential and it may be necessary to use alternative start dates in order to ensure such continuity.
  19. If an External Examiner seeks early termination of his/her contract, this must be negotiated with the Head of College, or his or her nominee, on behalf of the College. Where possible, a report should be obtained from the External Examiner on the reasons for termination. If, in exceptional circumstances, a School wishes an early termination of an External Examiner's contract, this should be negotiated with the Head of College, or his or her nominee, on behalf of the College. A report on the reasons for termination must be obtained from the School and the External Examiner. The Head of College has the authority to appoint a replacement External Examiner. Copies of all reports relating to the

termination of an External Examiner's contract should be forwarded to the Convener of the Curriculum and Student Progression Committee.

20. If a potential conflict of interest arises because of a change in circumstances, e.g. the External Examiner changes job, the School should seek advice from the Head of College or his or her nominee on how to resolve the matter.

#### *Status*

21. External Examiners are full members of the relevant Board(s) of Examiners.

#### *Information required on Appointment*

22. On appointment, College Offices arrange that the External Examiners are sent:
  - 22.1 Information about payment
  - 22.2 A copy of this Code of Practice
  - 22.3 The Assessment Regulations
  - 22.4 A copy of all relevant extracts from the Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study (including General Regulations, College Specific Regulations, Degree Programme Tables for the relevant School and (in the case of years 1 and 2) relevant sections of the course catalogue).
  - 22.5 The School may also send the External Examiner a written statement about their responsibilities as seen by the School, with particular reference to the relevant degree examination or curriculum. In the statement from the School, the External Examiner should be informed of dates of meetings, his or her role in relation to the existing examination team, the objectives of the courses, syllabuses and teaching methods, methods of assessment and marking scales, the schedule for aggregation of marks of the various components in the overall assessment, and any arrangements for compensatory passes or reassessment of parts of the course. At an early stage in their appointment there should be discussion with each External Examiner of issues of policy on assessment, such as that regarding practicals and oral examinations.

#### ***Participation of External Examiners in Assessment and Examination Procedures***

23. No University degree should be awarded without participation in the assessment and examining process by at least one examiner external to the University. This includes participation in the following:
  - 23.1 *Curriculum.* The External Examiner is expected to comment on the syllabus, learning objectives and design of the assessment scheme. In order to do this, External Examiners should have made available to them the full details of each course on which the examinations are set.
  - 23.2 *Examination Papers.* All draft degree examination papers must be seen by the External Examiner(s) for comment. Where appropriate, draft papers should be accompanied by model answers or solutions and a marking scheme for each paper. In appropriate cases, External

Examiners may be expected to set some questions or an entire examination paper.

- 23.3 *Examination Scripts.* An External Examiner has the right to see all degree examination scripts and any other coursework including other invigilated examination scripts contributing to the assessment. The guiding principle for any selection of scripts is that External Examiners must have enough evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and are consistent. External Examiners should see samples of scripts from the top, the middle and the bottom of the range. Where it is agreed that an External Examiner will see a selection of scripts or other written work, the principles governing the selection must be agreed in advance and communicated to the Examiner. The External Examiner should also consider borderline cases. Borderline cases are those which relate to the decisions of the Board of Examiners on pass/fail boundaries, progression, or in the case of final year candidates, the classification or award of a degree.
- 23.4 *Assessed Coursework.* An External Examiner has the right to see any work that contributes to the assessment and the degree classification, or the documentation which relates to the work. Where it is agreed that the External Examiner will see assessed coursework, the principles governing the selection must be agreed in advance and communicated to the Examiner.
- 23.5 *Placements.* An External Examiner has the right to observe students on placement, the principles and arrangements for such observation being agreed in advance.
- 23.6 *Oral, Practical and Clinical Examinations.* Examinations that contain oral elements are invigilated by internal members of academic staff and may be conducted jointly with an External Examiner. If oral performance is to be assessed, students should be aware of how it is to be assessed and special efforts should be made to involve at least two examiners in making the assessment. External examiners should have access to the necessary information and assessment material required to assist them in reaching a reasonable conclusion on assessment performance, and have the opportunity to view oral examinations and presentations (either in person or by audio visual means) where practicable. External examiners should have the same degree of involvement in both the content and the examination of practical examinations as they have for written papers. External Examiners should take an active part in clinical examinations where practicable. The selective use of oral examinations for helping a Board of Examiners come to a final conclusion about a student, e.g. on borderlines, is not permitted. Any waiver of this rule requires the approval of the Senatus Curriculum and Student Progression Committee.
- 23.7 *Attendance at Examiners' Meetings.* All External Examiners have the right to attend meetings of all relevant Boards of Examiners and must attend at least one Board of Examiners meeting during each academic year to enable them to comment on the assessment process.

- 23.7.1 All main meetings of Honours Boards of Examiners for all programmes must have at least one External Examiner present.
- 23.7.2 For the degrees of MBChB and BVM&S, where contributing subjects have been assessed by a Board comprising internal and external examiners, the final assessment may be made at a meeting of the Board of Examiners in the absence of an external examiner. Wherever possible, it is highly desirable that at least one external should be present.
- 23.7.3 Non-honours Boards of Examiners meetings and resit and reconvened Boards of Examiners do not require the presence of an External Examiner but at least one External Examiner must contribute, ideally by video- or tele-conferencing and otherwise by email or fax.
- 23.7.4 External Examiners should be involved in the scrutiny of scripts and should have access to assessed coursework as appropriate.
- 23.7.5 Interim Boards of Examiners meetings do not require the involvement of an External Examiner but recommendations of Interim Boards are provisional until ratified by a Board of Examiners with an External Examiner involved.
- 23.7.6 The signature of at least one External Examiner should be appended to the following declaration, which must appear on the Examiners' Lists: 'I declare that I approve the process of examination which produced the examination results reported on this List.' If no External Examiners will sign the List, or if any External Examiner refuses to sign it, then the Head of the College, after consultation with the External Examiner, and then with the Principal or another Vice-Principal, has delegated authority from the Senatus Academicus and must sign the List or convene a reconvened Board of Examiners. After exercising such authority, the Head of the College must fully report the circumstances, including the views of the External Examiner, to the Principal.

24. *Classification.* The views of an External Examiner must be taken into account, particularly in the case of disagreement on the mark to be awarded for a particular unit of assessment, or on the final classification to be derived from the array of marks of a particular candidate at the Final Examiners' meeting. The signature of the External Examiner(s) must be appended to the final list of degree results as evidence that he/she accepts the classification. (Refer to 24.7.6).

25. *Personal Interest.* No External Examiner shall be involved in the conduct or assessment (whether by setting, invigilating, marking or otherwise) of any examination, including an examination for a prize or scholarship, in which he or she may reasonably be regarded as having a strong personal interest because of a current or previous relationship to or friendship with a candidate whom she or he would otherwise be expected to examine. In such circumstances s/he shall decline to act as examiner. If in doubt as to what course professional integrity requires, s/he shall consult the Head of the College who may bring the case to

the attention of the Principal or the Senatus Curriculum and Student Progression Committee.

26. *Illness.* Where any External Examiner is taken ill during the examination period, or is unable to attend due to other unforeseen circumstances, the Head of the College shall have the authority to appoint a replacement External Examiner. The College Office reports this appointment to the Senatus Quality Assurance Committee for information.
27. *Organisation.* The work of the External Examiner is much helped by efficient and systematic organisation of all of the assessment material, including clear tabulations of the marks as agreed internally, these being the recommendations of the internal markers. A list in rank order, with suggested boundaries between classes, may be a helpful way of presenting the data.

### **Discussion of Course Structure, Assessment Process and Degree Schemes**

28. Schools and External Examiners should use the opportunity afforded by the visits of External Examiners to discuss the assessment process and schemes for marking and classification. Colleges or Schools may also choose to discuss with External Examiners the structure and content of the course and the curriculum, and reports and feedback related to curriculum review and quality of the educational provision. Any comments or suggestions made by the External Examiners should be discussed by the staff of the School and an explicit decision made about whether or not to introduce changes.

### **External Examiner Reports**

29. External Examiners are required to report to the Head of College annually on a pro-forma provided by the University (see QA. EE. 2). The pro-forma addresses the relevant sections of the QAA Code of Practice.
30. The Head of College officially requests a signed report from each External Examiner at the end of each complete diet of examinations, as well as at the end of the Examiner's period of office.
31. External Examiners are free to make any comment they wish in their reports, including observations on teaching, course structure and course content. In particular, External Examiners are invited to comment on the comparability of standards with other institutions, and the extent to which the degree programmes and courses met their stated aims and objectives.
32. The preferred means of submission of External Examiner reports is electronic however hard copies are acceptable. The College Office can advise on available electronic submission forms.
33. External Examiners are also encouraged to make use of opportunities to communicate with the School informally about the teaching of the course, assessment issues and the overall performance of the students.
34. The External Examiner may additionally make use of an invitation to communicate in confidence to the Head of College or the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance on sensitive matters requiring

confidential consideration. The Head of College and the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance decide what action should be taken on such a report.

35. Heads of College have responsibility for ensuring that robust mechanisms exist in Colleges to handle External Examiners' reports and that appropriate action is taken on their comments.
36. Following an initial review at the College, External Examiner reports are copied to the Head of the appropriate School and other appropriate people. The Head of School, or a senior person designated by the Head of School (with the approval of the College Office) to take responsibility for teaching, has the responsibility for responding to the College Office on the comments in the report. The Head of School Comment Sheet (see QA.EE.3) may be used to record responses.
37. External Examiners' reports and the comments of Heads of School are considered and appropriate action is approved by a representative of the Head of College or the College Quality Assurance Committee or its equivalent. The stages in handling External Examiners reports are outlined in each College's External Examiners report form (QA.EE.2). The annual College Quality Assurance and Enhancement reports to the Senatus Quality Assurance Committee include a summary of External Examiners' comments and the appropriate action taken. Any External Examiner reports which the Head of College judges to be particularly serious or important, or which raise issues of wider significance for the University, are copied directly to the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance acting on behalf of the Principal. This is only likely to occur in exceptional cases and the reports will be ones where institutional action is necessary or where serious quality assurance issues, which affect more than one degree programme or School, have been identified.
38. The Senatus Quality Assurance Committee has the right to see the original External Examiner reports and Heads of School Comment Sheets or equivalent. College Offices ensure that appropriate arrangements are made to retain reports and responses from schools.
39. Replies from the School, or by a representative of the Head of College, are sent to External Examiners after receipt of their reports. Responses to External Examiners may provide information on the consideration of their comments, an indication of any action taken as a result of their reports, and reasons for not accepting particular recommendations or suggestions.
40. Some External Examiners are appointed subject to validation by external organisations. If appropriate to the discipline, Schools may choose to send the reports of these External Examiners to the appropriate organisation, provided they are accompanied by information setting the Examiner's comments into context and noting any action which will be taken as a result of the report.

#### *Expenses and Fees*

41. Arrangements for the payment of External Examiners' expenses and fees are handled in Schools or in the College Office. Payment of fees is made annually by the Finance Office, after receipt of a completed report from the External Examiner. The School may be expected to provide a modest level of hospitality to the External Examiner, especially as this may provide valuable occasions for

informal contact with those involved in teaching the course.

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### **Annexes and other References**

- Assessment Regulations:  
<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/policies-regulations/regulations>
- Nomination form for the Appointment of External Examiners, QA.EE.1
- Re-Nomination form for the Appointment of External Examiners, QA.EE.1
- External Examiner's report form, QA.EE.2
- Head of School Comment Sheet, QA.EE.3

## Notes

1. The Senatus Academicus of the University of Edinburgh approved this Code of Practice and the associated template forms QA.EE.1, QA.EE.2 and QA.EE.3 on 7 July 1999. Revisions to the Code and QA EE.2 were approved on 5 July 2000 and 12 March 2003. Further revisions to the code were approved by the Senatus Quality Assurance Committee on 25 May 2010
2. This Code applies to all Colleges in the University. The forms QA.EE.1 to QA.EE.3 are templates, which College Offices tailor to their own needs, by:
  - (i) inserting relevant contact details and dates;
  - (ii) amending the College Office Use boxes to reflect the stages for handling External Examiner reports in their Colleges; and
  - (iii) supplementing the questions in the report form with those specific to their Colleges, e.g. regarding clinical placements.
3. In the External Examiner report form, College Offices may chose whether to complete the sections on the first page regarding name, address and degrees and courses examined. However, those Colleges which ask the External Examiner to complete these questions check that the degree and course details are correct.

<b>CODE OF PRACTICE INFORMATION</b>	
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Dr Linda Bruce, Academic Policy Manager, Academic Services (Linda.Bruce@ed.ac.uk)
<b>Approving authority</b>	Senate Quality Assurance Committee
<b>Consultation undertaken</b>	College Quality Deans, Senate Quality Assurance Committee
<b>Impact assessment</b>	Pending
<b>Date of commencement</b>	1 August 2010
<b>Date for next review</b>	2013/14
<b>Role responsible for guidance maintenance &amp; review</b>	Assistant Principal Academic Standards & Quality Assurance
<b>Related policies, procedures guidelines &amp; regulations</b>	The Assessment Regulations and Guidelines: Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate; Guidance for Boards of Examiners
<b>Guidance superseded by this guidance</b>	External Examiners Code of Practice (November 2004)
<b>Keywords</b>	External Examiners, Boards of Examiners, assessment