

Policy for the External Examining of Taught Programmes



| Summary | | | |
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| The Policy and its related forms are reviewed annually to ensure that the External Examiner Process remains effective and aligned with current external requirements. | | | |
| Scope - This document applies to: | | | |
| External Examiners, Heads of Schools for compliance/ guidance. | | | |
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| Document Control | | | |
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| Division | Education Services | | |
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| Superseded documents | External Examiner Policy for Taught Programmes 2020-21 | | |
| Related documents | Taught Code for Taught Programmes 2021-22, Procedure for External Examiners, External Examiner nomination form, External Examiner Report form, External Examiner School Response form | | |
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Policy for External Examining of Taught Programmes at the University of Bristol

This Policy summarises the University's expectations for the conduct of external examining of taught programmes. This Policy can be found on the Academic Quality and Policy Office (AQPO) website: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/exexs/>.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes: Rules for Assessment, Progression and Award of a Qualification, which can be found at: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/codeonline.html>.

This Policy contains information on the following:

| No | Section Title |
|-----------|----------------------------------|
| 1. | Preamble |
| 2. | Role |
| 3. | Duties |
| 4. | Programme Requirements |
| 5. | Nomination and Appointment |
| 6. | Induction |
| 7. | Reports and Responses |
| 8. | Fees and Expenses |
| 9. | Information Provided to Students |
| 10. | Serious Concerns |

External Examiners at the University of Bristol should also refer to the Procedures for External Examining document, which sits alongside the Policy and can be found here: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/exexs/>

External Examining Policy

1. Preamble

1.1 External examining provides a crucial means for maintaining academic standards and is an integral part of the University's Quality Framework. External examiners' reports are an essential aspect of the quality assurance and enhancement processes operated by the University. The University views the external examiner system as a key mechanism for the management of academic standards and reflection on the quality of the student learning experience.

2. Role

2.1 The **role** of an external examiner is to:

- Assist the University in ensuring that the Degrees awarded by the University of Bristol meet or exceed the academic standards stipulated in external points of reference;
- Offer an independent and comparative view of academic standards, assessment processes and programme structures and ensure that relevant processes are conducted in accordance with the relevant University Policy and Regulation;
- Assist the University in ensuring that the academic standards and achievement of students are comparable with other UK higher education institutions;
- Assist the University in enhancing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by advising on good practice identified within the University and beyond.

3. Duties

An external examiner is expected to carry out the **duties** that will enable them to fulfil the role, as summarised below:

Programme structures, including curricula and assessment design

3.1 External examiners should:

- Ensure the programmes/ units are coherent and are in alignment with internal and external frameworks;
- Comment and provide advice on matters of curriculum content, balance and structure, in so far as these affect the programme academic structure;
- Scrutinise and approve the draft assessment requirements and ensure that assessment criteria and marking schemes are set at an appropriate level.

Assessment and marking

3.2 External examiners should:

- Assure themselves that the institution is maintaining academic standards and rigour in its marking. External examiners should not change individual marks but should alert the Programme Director and the School Education Director where there are concerns regarding the overall standard of marking.

Board of Examiners

3.3 External examiners should:

- Be notified of, and have the right to attend, the meetings of the Board of Examiners for all programmes which lead to a university award, and to which they have been appointed as external examiner;
- Attend (in person or virtually) at least one meeting of the Board each academic year, as specified by the school;
- Assure themselves that University's policy and procedures have been applied fairly and equitably and any decisions made of the Board of Examiners are consistent with those policy or procedures;
- Provide initial reflections at designated meetings of the school, department or programme Board of Examiners acting as a critical friend, to highlight key strengths and weaknesses, including any initial recommendations for action.

External Examiner Reports

3.4 External examiners should:

- Submit an annual Report, providing recommendations and highlighting good practice as appropriate on the conduct of the assessment processes, academic standards, assessment, and the curriculum design and delivery;
- Satisfy themselves that the school has given due consideration to any recommendations given in the previous year's Report, with any actions or rationale for the status quo noted.

4. Programme Requirements

4.1 The Head of School is ultimately responsible for ensuring that a sufficient number of external examiners are appointed so that adequate expertise is available to cover all the major areas of the programme(s) being examined, including the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

4.2 The Head of School (or nominee) must ensure an appropriate match between the numbers of external examiners and the quantity of material being examined. Where there are specialist units requiring particular expertise, the school may also appoint external examiners to act as external assessors.

4.3 All educational partnerships leading to an award from the University of Bristol must be the subject of scrutiny by an external examiner(s). For joint awards, the arrangements for external examiner appointments will be set out in the institutional collaboration agreement.

5. Nomination and Appointment

5.1 On behalf of Senate, the Faculty Board shall appoint external examiners, in accordance with regulations. All external examiners must be formally appointed to the role and sign an appointment letter prior to starting the role.

5.2 It is normally the responsibility of Heads of Schools to monitor all appointments and to ensure adherence to the appointment procedures for external examiners. At least one external examiner must be appointed for each subject or group of subjects forming part of a programme leading to an award of the University.

5.3 External examiners should normally be able to show evidence that they meet specific appointment criteria set by the University, which are predominantly based around knowledge, competence, experience and qualifications in the subject area and an understanding of UK academic standards and quality assurance.

Avoiding reciprocal and long-standing arrangements

5.4 The incoming external examiner should not have been an external examiner for a taught programme at the University of Bristol for at least five years. Former staff (including those with honorary appointments) and students of the University of Bristol can only be appointed as external examiners after a lapse of at least five years.

5.5 There should not be any reciprocal arrangements between cognate programmes with another institution in external examining. Where there is more than one external examiner covering a programme/s, the incoming external examiner should not be from the same department in the same institution as any other external examiner covering the programme/s. An incoming external examiner should not be from the same department in the same institution as an outgoing external examiner.

Conflicts of interest

5.6 The nominated external examiner and members of the school involved in the nomination should declare any conflicts of interests that should be given due consideration before the nominated external examiner can be formally appointed.

Duration

5.7 The normal period of appointment of external examiners for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes is four years (for the MBChB, BDS and BVSc it is five years). The appointment may be exceptionally extended for a further one year period to ensure continuity, for example when a programme is coming to an end, with the permission of the Dean of the relevant faculty.

Discontinuation of Appointment

5.8 The appointment of an external examiner may be discontinued by the University or the individual examiner before the completion of his/her period of appointment.

6. Induction

6.1 The school has a primary responsibility for ensuring that external examiners receive appropriate induction and support. The external examiners must be provided with opportunities to familiarise themselves with the University, its assessment procedures, school policy on moderation as well as with the extent and nature of their appointment as external examiners.

7. Reports and Responses

7.1 External examiners should submit an annual written report, using the approved University template. Separate reports for undergraduate and postgraduate level programmes are required. The External Examiner Report must be sent to the relevant academic school within **four weeks** of the final meeting of the Board of Examiners, and it must be sent by the following maximum deadlines:

- **1 August for undergraduate programmes**
- **20 December for postgraduate taught programmes.**

7.2 Postgraduate taught programmes that have a non-standard structure, where the 20 December deadline is unsuitable, may apply to the Academic Quality and Policy Office for a separate maximum deadline.

7.3 In the final year of his/her period of appointment the examiner should provide an overview of his/her experience at the University of Bristol, including comment of the University's academic standards in the relevant subject and in particular any significant changes in standards over the appointment period.

7.4 The Head of School (or nominee) is responsible for ensuring that all external examiner reports are responded to within four weeks of receipt of the report, and by the following maximum deadlines:

- **15 September for undergraduate programmes**
- **31 January for postgraduate taught programmes.**

8. Fees and Expenses

8.1 Schools have the discretion to determine the appropriate fee payable for each external examiner. The fee will be paid upon receipt of the annual report(s).

9. Information Provided to Students

9.1 The Report (and the Response Form) will be made available to students via the relevant virtual learning environment. These will normally be uploaded within four weeks of the maximum deadline for the school Responses.

10. Serious Concerns

10.1 In the event that an examiner has a serious concern relating to academic standards and internal procedures, during their term of office, which they are unable to resolve with the appropriate academic staff, they may draw these to the attention of the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) Education, Quality and Standards by submitting a special report to him/her at any time. The Associate PVC will notify the University Academic Standards and Quality Committee that a special report has been received and will investigate the points raised.

10.2 The University shall provide a timely response to the report received, which will describe the actions taken to address the concerns. The Associate PVC, or nominee, will consider whether changes to Policy are required and provide an update to the University Academic Quality Standards Committee once the investigation has taken place and any actions to resolve the issues have been agreed.