

Policy for the External Examining of Taught Programmes



Summary			
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.			
Student year of entry	n/a	Current students	n/a
Document Control			
Owning team	Academic Quality and Policy Office (AQPO)		
Division	Education Services		
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Superseded documents	External Examiner Policy for Taught Programmes 2023-24		
Related documents	Taught Code for Taught Programmes 2024-25, Procedure for External Examiners, External Examiner nomination form, External Examiner Report form, External Examiner School Response form		
Keywords	External examiners, nomination of, appointment of, examiner report		

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. External Examiners should not be involved in decision making on individual cases of student exceptional circumstances and academic integrity issues. Comments and reflections on general trends or processes can be made to the Board of Examiners and provided in the annual report.

Student consultation

3.3. Where External Examiners are asked to meet with students, these meetings should:

- Discuss students' learning and assessment experiences (but not individual assessment outcomes).
- Provide opportunities for students to comment on issues that the external examiner has identified or which are current topics of interest within the HE sector.
- Students should have been briefed in advance about the role of the External Examiner and the purpose of the meeting.

Board of Examiners

3.4 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

3.5 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 form prior to starting the role. UG external examiners will require a Right to Work check as part of the appointment process. All appointments will be confirmed in writing by the Academic Quality and Policy Office (AQPO).

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. The nature and extent of the commitment required should be made clear to the nominee, particularly if a nominee is from outside the higher education sector (perhaps from industry for a practical course component). 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.

5.4 Heads of School should aim to have a suitably diverse external examiner pool working for the programmes across the school, with that diversity contributing to the inclusiveness of teaching, learning and assessment processes for students.

Avoiding reciprocal and long-standing arrangements

5.5 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.

5.6 There should not be any reciprocal arrangements between cognate programmes with another institution in external examining. Schools must maintain a list of their staff acting as an External Examiner at other institutions for reference to ensure reciprocal arrangements are not put in place. 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

5.7 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

5.8 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

5.9 The appointment of an external examiner may be discontinued by the University or the individual examiner before the completion of their period of appointment.

5.10 Where the external examiner resigns from their position, they would normally be expected to complete duties related to the current academic year. Where this is not possible and the external examiner wishes to resign during the academic year, they should do so in writing, giving a three-month notice period.

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, relevant policies, assessment procedures, course learning outcomes, and policies on marking and moderation as well as with the extent and nature of their appointment as external examiners. The induction should consider the specific needs of the external examiner, especially their level of experience in the role. Where there are exceptional arrangements within a programme, the School should set these out to the External Examiner in advance of the exam board.

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 normally required. Where an external examiner is appointed to cover both UG and PG level units and submitting a combined report, the report must cover both unit levels explicitly and clearly distinguish whether any recommendations apply for either or both levels. Consideration will need to be given to the timeline for report submission and alignment to either the UG or PG deadline. It is important that the report is submitted so as to allow for the school to act on any recommendations for UG while fully covering the PG programme which typically runs over an extended academic year. It may be beneficial for a supplementary statement to be added to a report that was submitted in line with the UG deadline so that it fully covers the PG programme, once the dissertation has been submitted and final exam board conducted.

7.2 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:

- **01 July for undergraduate programmes**
- **20 December for postgraduate taught programmes.**

7.3 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.

7.4 In the final year of their period of appointment the examiner should provide an overview of their 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.

7.5 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:

- **01 August 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) and submission of a valid fee claim form. HMRC require that tax is deducted at source from payments to UG external examiners. Where an external examiner is covering units on both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, separate claim forms will need to be submitted for the work completed at each level to ensure the correct tax treatment is applied.

9. Information Provided to Students

9.1 The Report (and the Response Form) will be made available by the School to students via the relevant virtual learning environment and may be discussed at Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs). These will normally be uploaded by Schools within four weeks of the maximum deadline for the school Responses.

9.2 Schools should ensure that any comments identifying individual members of staff (with the exception of staff commendation) or students is removed from the Report Form and the Response Form prior to making these available via the relevant virtual learning environment.

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 (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.