

# Academic Policies and Procedures



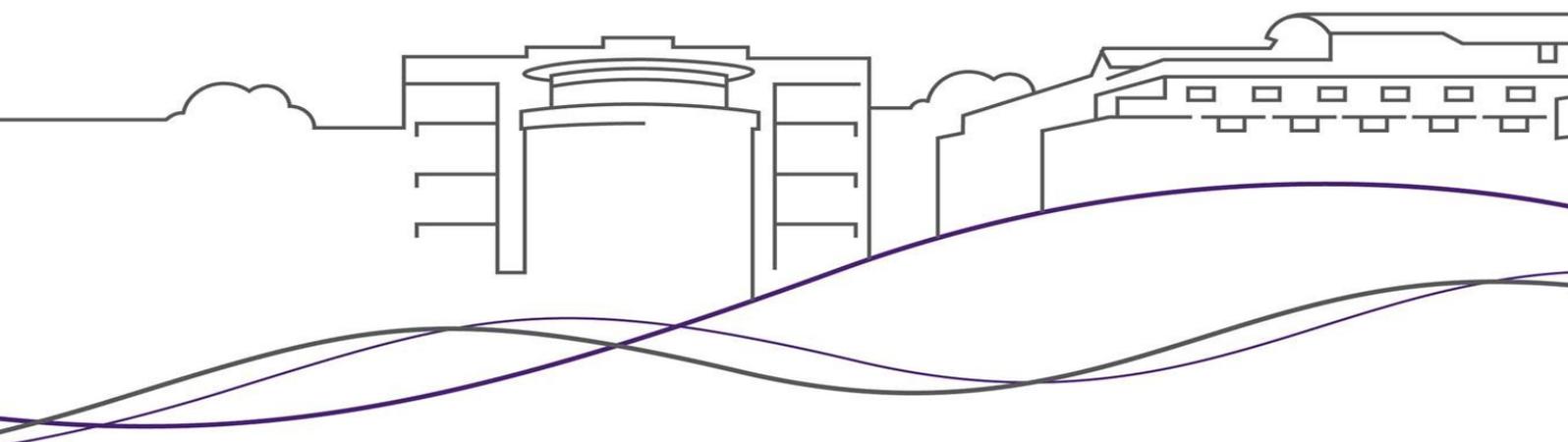
HIGHER EDUCATION

## EXTERNAL EXAMINERS POLICY AND PROCEDURE (HECRP4) v2.0

For SDC Awards

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External Examiners: Notes for guidance



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# 1 Introduction

External Examiners are essential to the academic well-being of the College. Their involvement ensures that:

- ◆ Standards are appropriate by reference to published national subject benchmarks, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and the College's programme and module specifications
- ◆ The assessment process measures student achievement against the intended learning outcomes
- ◆ The assessment process is in line with the College's Assessment Policy
- ◆ The College's awards are comparable in standard to awards conferred by other UK HE institutions
- ◆ The assessment process is operated fairly and equitably and in accordance with College Regulations.

External Examiners must be appointed for all programmes leading to a College award. The majority of the College's programmes operate within a standard modular framework. For such programmes the College operates a two-tier assessment process which is reflected in the College's definition of the separate roles of Subject and Award External Examiners.

The **Subject External Examiner** is primarily concerned with the standards of assessment in a specific group of modules (the subject) irrespective of the study programme(s) or award(s) to which the modules are attached. The Subject External Examiner will be asked to comment on assessment processes, and on the standard, content and development of the modules within the subject. S/he will be a member of the Subject Assessment Panel which confirms or modifies module marks and ensures that the students are being assessed in accordance with the assessment programme and the intended learning outcomes for the subject modules.

Subject External Examiners do not attend Award Assessment Boards (unless they are required to do so by a professional accrediting body). Nor do they see or comment on student profiles. Their focus is on the standards in the subject.

The **Award External Examiner** acts as the "critical friend" of the Award Assessment Board, to ensure that decisions on progression or awards for students are made in accordance with the assessment regulations, and that justice is done to the individual student, taking account of any recommendations resulting from prior consideration of extenuating circumstances or assessment offences.

S/he will be a member of the appropriate Award Assessment Board(s), which makes decisions on progression and awards on the basis of the module marks confirmed by the Subject Assessment Panel. For each named award with which s/he is associated, the Award External Examiner will be asked to provide informative comment and recommendations upon whether or not the College is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards and about the comparability of standards of student performance at award level with similar awards in other UK institutions with which s/he is familiar. Responsibility for maintaining the academic standard of the award/s is, however, the corporate responsibility of the Award Assessment Board, not the Award External Examiner's alone. The Board is in a position to fulfil this responsibility because it receives a report from each of the constituent subject panel chairs on the standard of assessment in subjects/modules.

The Award External Examiner may also be a member of the appropriate group of Subject External Examiners.

## **2 The Rights and Responsibilities of Subject External Examiners**

A Subject External Examiner can expect the College to

- provide sufficient information at the time of nomination to enable him/her to make an informed decision as to whether to accept the appointment, including the honorarium payable for the appointment
- provide briefing packs, with full access to all relevant documentation, and offer appropriate induction (including an explanation of the College's responsibilities for equality and diversity)
- facilitate arrangements for interim engagements/visits (the Subject External Examiner is required to carry out at least one interim engagement per year (which may take the form of a 'virtual' visit by video conference/skype) and at least one face to face visit during his/her year of office to obtain feedback from staff and students on assessment in practice at times other than at the

end of the academic year and to strengthen his/her engagement with the ongoing teaching and learning process )

- clarify at the time of appointment the range of modules within the subject area for which s/he is to be responsible (which should not normally exceed 360 credits in any one academic year)
- agree with the Subject External Examiner(s) the sample of modules to be scrutinised in each academic year in line with the guidance set out in the College's Marking and Moderation Policy. **The Subject External Examiner has responsibility for confirming standards in each module in their remit.** The normal expectation is that there should be detailed scrutiny of approximately one third of the modules (across all levels) to which the external is assigned in each academic year. This includes modules which are assessed on a pass/fail basis. In some cases professional body requirements will mean that External Examiner(s) are expected to scrutinise more than this minimum.
- agree dates of meetings of Assessment Panels with all the External Examiners well in advance
- agree with the Subject External Examiner(s) the means by which they are to be offered the opportunity to comment on draft examination papers
- follow agreed scrutiny procedures to ensure that examination questions are not recycled, involving appropriate consultation with the Subject External Examiner(s)
- provide draft assessments in accordance with those procedures, in sufficient time for the External Examiner(s) to comment
- agree with the Subject External Examiner(s) the means by which they will be able to scrutinise assessment tasks in order to confirm (or otherwise) that the assessment strategy is appropriately enacted in the questions set and invite them to provide formal confirmation of this at the time of the Subject Assessment Panel meeting
- agree with the Subject External Examiner(s) procedures by which the Subject External Examiner(s) will sample assessed work, including the criteria for sampling (which should be in line with the expectations set out in the College's Marking and Moderation Policy) and the means by which material will be made available (e.g. by post in advance of the Panel, at the time of an interim visit, and/or in the University shortly before a Panel)

- include marks and appropriate comments on, or with, all scripts, projects and dissertations submitted to a Subject External Examiner for consideration
- report any case in which there has been a problem with an assessment affecting or potentially affecting a group of students (eg an unseen examination paper has apparently been 'leaked', an examination has been seriously disrupted or students have been issued with conflicting information about a coursework submission date) and consult on appropriate remedial measures
- report any alleged breach of Assessment Regulations, confirm the means by which it has been investigated, and consult on the recommendations arising from that investigation
- enable him/her, where necessary, to alter the characteristics of marks distribution and, if there are inconsistencies in marking, to amend marks, provided that all scripts in the 'disputed category'<sup>1</sup> have been appropriately reviewed. The College would expect that proposed amendments to marks would be discussed and agreed at the Subject Assessment Panel.
- refer to the Award Assessment Board (through its Secretary and Chair) any major disagreement on a point of principle between Examiners (whether internal or external) which cannot be resolved.
- facilitate communication between Subject External Examiners and the Award External Examiner prior to the Award Assessment Board
- agree the mechanism by which responses will be provided to any issues raised in the annual report of the Subject External Examiner(s) and ensure that any comments from the Subject External Examiner(s) on the response are formally minuted at the Subject Assessment Panel

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<sup>1</sup> External Examiners are not expected to double mark individual scripts or assignments. If a Subject External Examiner believes that standards of marking overall, or within a particular classification, are inappropriate, s/he may propose that all marks in that category be revised up or down, as the case might be. It would be expected that such a recommendation would be discussed with the module team in advance of the Subject Assessment Panel. If a Subject External Examiner, in reviewing sample scripts, identifies concerns about marks in individual scripts, they may not be revised unless the examiner also reviews comparable marks across the cohort (ie the issue may relate to classification boundaries, in which case all scripts or assignments falling within one or two marks of the boundary should be reviewed). Again, the College would expect that the issue would be discussed with the markers in advance of the Panel. Subject External Examiners would be expected to notify the Subject Assessment Panel Chair of any disagreement about marks in advance of their visit to the College or the Subject Assessment Panel.

- pay expenses promptly on receipt, and honorarium on receipt of the annual report<sup>2</sup>
- consult him/her about proposed changes to programme-specific assessment regulations which will directly affect students currently registered on the modules for which s/he has responsibility
- provide a considered and timely response to any report received, outlining any actions that will be taken as a result.

### The College will expect a Subject External Examiner to

- take up his/her appointment in full knowledge of College regulations, policies and procedures and undertake to operate within them
- ensure that the standard of the subject assessment is maintained
- agree with the subject team the sample of modules to be scrutinised in each academic year in line with the guidance set out in the College's Marking and Moderation Policy. **The Subject External Examiner has responsibility for confirming standards in each module in their remit.** The normal expectation is that there should be detailed scrutiny of approximately one third of the modules (across all levels) to which the external is assigned in each academic year. This includes modules which are assessed on a pass/fail basis. In some cases professional body requirements will mean that External Examiner(s) are expected to scrutinise more than this minimum.
- approve the assessment scheme for all modules in the agreed sample. This will normally include approval of the form of coursework assessment and the form and content of 'initial' and 'resit' examination papers, together with accompanying marking schemes
- approve any exceptions to the College's policy that examination questions should not be recycled
- confirm (or otherwise) that the assessment strategy is appropriately enacted in the questions set
- ensure that the assessments are conducted in accordance with the approved regulations for the modules/programmes of study

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<sup>2</sup> The College will process payments as expeditiously as possible, but Examiners should be aware that the College's payroll systems operate to strict deadlines. Claims which miss the deadline in any one month cannot normally be processed before the end of the following month.

- ensure that students have been assessed fairly in accordance with the syllabus and regulations for the programme of study and have fulfilled the objectives of the module or programme at the relevant standard
- discuss with the subject team the types of disabilities within the current cohort and the adjustments made to support those students, including provision for alternative/inclusive assessments
- raise with the subject team other appropriate equality and diversity issues (covering disability, race and gender) relevant to the assessment of students
- carry out at least one interim engagement per year (which may take the form of a 'virtual' visit by video conference/skype) and at least one face to face visit during his/her term of office to obtain feedback from staff and students on assessment in practice at times other than at the end of the academic year and to strengthen his/her engagement with the ongoing teaching and learning process
- discuss with subject leaders and students the formative assessment included within modules
- review an appropriate sample of work submitted for summative assessment (usually encompassing a sample within each range of marks and a sample of project/dissertation work) and agree with the subject team the means by which that sample is to be selected in line with the expectations set out in the College's Marking and Moderation Policy
- discuss with the subject team any previously undetected suspected assessment/examination offence(s) discovered during the review of assessed work<sup>3</sup>
- agree with the subject an appropriate method for adjusting module marks as and when necessary (noting that the College does not have a policy on scaling or norm referencing of marks)
- agree with the subject team the extent of the involvement of Subject External Examiners in resits/reassessment, which must include agreeing the form and content of resits (for resit examination papers this should normally be undertaken at the same time as approval is sought for the main examination papers; the form of coursework reassessments may be dealt with at the

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<sup>3</sup> See the relevant expectations in the College's current Assessment Policy. It is anticipated that discussions on formative assessment would take place at an interim visit. Comments will be required in the annual report.

Summer Panel or by correspondence) and agreeing marking standards, either on the basis of satisfaction with standards overall or through further sampling of work.<sup>4</sup>

- be a full and equal member of the Subject Assessment Panel (which will also comprise the subject leader or equivalent as Chair, and internal examiners associated with assessments for the particular subject specific modules)<sup>5</sup>
- attend meetings of the relevant Subject Assessment Panel at which consideration is being given to assessments which contribute to a final award<sup>67</sup>
- sign a declaration form as confirmation of agreement with the marks confirmed by the Subject Assessment Panel (but see footnote 5 below)
- provide a report within six weeks of the meeting of the Subject Assessment Panel, for consideration as part of the required evidence base for annual review.

#### **The Subject External Examiner has the right to**

- see and moderate all forms of subject assessment at levels 4-7, including examination scripts, coursework, continuous assessment, project reports, design work and dissertation in order to fulfil his/her role
- request sight of the final stage results list for programmes with which s/he is associated

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<sup>4</sup> The procedures adopted and the external examiner's agreement thereto should be fully minuted at the Summer Subject Assessment Panel.

<sup>5</sup> The College expects its Subject Assessment Panels to discuss issues fully in order that they can reach decisions by consensus. If an External Examiner disagrees in principle with a proposed decision, s/he should notify the Chair that s/he will be unable to sign the declaration in respect of that decision, so that the Chair can consider deferring the decision until the disagreement has been reviewed on behalf of Academic Board.

<sup>6</sup> The date of the meeting of the Subject Assessment Panel will be agreed early in the Academic Year and a Subject External Examiner will be expected to keep this date free in her/his diary. In the unavoidable absence of a Subject External Examiner, the Panel may proceed provided the External Examiner has provided comments on the standard of all modules for which s/he has responsibility, and any queries regarding marks have been resolved in advance with module examiners. If it is clear at an earlier stage in the academic year that a Subject External Examiner will not be able to fulfil all the duties required of her/him, it may be appropriate for an emergency replacement examiner to be appointed. If the Subject External Examiner is unable at the last minute to attend a Panel, s/he may be deemed to be present and in attendance through a video link provided it is possible to ensure that s/he is as well informed as other members, has access to all necessary documents, and that a visual link can be maintained.

- raise any concerns arising from the assessments or relating to academic standards with the Chair of the Assessment Panel and/or the HEMAR
- make a confidential report direct to the Vice Principal Quality and Performance if not satisfied that appropriate action has subsequently been taken. Where an External Examiner has a serious concern relating to academic standards and has exhausted all internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Vice Principal Quality and Performance, he/she may invoke QAA's Concerns scheme.

**The College does not expect a Subject External Examiner to**

- act as a second marker
- amend the marks of individual students
- make use of viva voce examinations except where these have been arranged with the subject team in advance as a means of resolving concerns about standards of marking in a module.
- consider cases of extenuating circumstances (which will be reviewed at the Award Assessment Board)
- act concurrently as an advisor to a programme team on programme design, or be a member of any panel(s) established to review programmes(s) on which s/he examines.

### **3 The Rights and Responsibilities of Award External Examiners**

**An Award External Examiner can expect the College to:**

- provide sufficient information at the time of nomination to enable him/her to make an informed decision as to whether to accept the appointment, including the honorarium payable for the appointment
- provide briefing packs, with full access to all relevant documentation, and offer appropriate induction
- agree dates of meetings of Award Assessment Boards well in advance

- report on proven examination and assessment offences and the penalties recommended by the Panel/Committee of Investigation
- involve him/her in discussions of students who may be required to withdraw from a programme because of unsatisfactory progress, academic or professional, or conduct considered to be unethical, unprofessional or dangerous (except where these issues have been resolved through the College's Disciplinary Procedure)
- refer to the Academic Board any major disagreement on a point of principle between Examiners (whether internal or external) which cannot be resolved
- facilitate communication between Subject External Examiners and the Award External Examiner prior to the Award Assessment Board
- agree the mechanism by which responses will be provided to any issues raised in the annual report of the Award External Examiner and ensure that any comments from the Award External on the response are formally minuted at the Subject Assessment Panel
- pay expenses promptly on receipt, and honorarium on receipt of the annual report<sup>8</sup>
- consult him/her about proposed changes to programme-specific assessment regulations which will directly affect students currently registered on the modules for which s/he has responsibility
- provide a considered and timely response to any report received, outlining any actions that will be taken as a result.

**The College will expect an Award External Examiner to**

- take up his/her appointment in full knowledge of College regulations, policies and procedures and undertake to operate within them
- ensure that the Award Assessment Board is conducted in accordance with the approved regulations for the programme(s) of study and that students are treated equitably within those regulations

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<sup>8</sup> The College will process payments as expeditiously as possible, but Examiners should be aware that the College's payroll systems operate to strict deadlines. Claims which miss the deadline in any one month cannot normally be processed before the end of the following month.

- ensure that all relevant extenuating circumstances and assessment offences relating to individual students have been taken into account in reaching decisions
- be a full and equal member of the Award Assessment Board (which will also comprise the HEMAR, programme manager(s) and the Chairs of relevant Subject Assessment Panels, as approved at programme approval)<sup>9</sup>
- attend meetings of the relevant Award Assessment Board at which consideration is being given to progression to the final stage or to conferment of awards<sup>10</sup>
- provide informative comment and recommendations upon whether or not the College is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards and about the comparability of standards of student performance at award level with similar awards in other UK institutions with which s/he is familiar
- act as a conduit for communicating overall good practice and/or concerns from the Subject External Examiners to the Award Assessment Board
- participate in discussions about the impact of extenuating circumstances bearing in mind the College's Regulations, and the custom and practice of the Board in question
- sign a declaration form as confirmation of agreement with the decisions taken and awards conferred by the Award Assessment Board (but see footnote 9 below)
- provide a report within six weeks of the meeting of the Award Assessment Board, for consideration as part of the required evidence base for annual review

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<sup>9</sup> The College expects its Award Boards to discuss issues fully in order that they can reach decisions by consensus. If an External Examiner disagrees in principle with a proposed decision, s/he should notify the Chair that s/he will be unable to sign the declaration in respect of that decision, so that the Chair can consider deferring the decision until the disagreement has been reviewed on behalf of Academic Board.

<sup>10</sup> For Summer Award Assessment Boards, the Award External Examiner must attend the Board held in the first year of his/her term of office, but thereafter may have the option of remote attendance (via Skype, videoconference or telephone link), provided the College's expectations regarding an annual interim engagement have been fulfilled (not applicable if the Award External does not hold a Subject External appointment as well). In the unavoidable absence of an Award External Examiner in his/her first year of office, the Board may proceed provided that an emergency replacement examiner has been appointed, or that s/he may be deemed to be present and in attendance through a video link which ensures that s/he is as well informed as other members, has access to all necessary documents, and that a visual link can be maintained. In all other cases, the Award Board must be deferred.

- formally endorse the results of resits/reassessment, either through her/his presence at the Referred Board or by post/fax. Alternatively, the Award External Examiner may sign a statement indicating that the Referred Assessment Board is authorised to process and confirm results without further consultation.

#### The Award External Examiner has a right to

- request sight of the final stage results list for programmes with which they are associated
- raise any concerns that academic standards are not being maintained, that justice is not being done to the students or that there is any matter of serious concern arising from the assessments with the Chair of the Assessment Board and/or the HEMAR
- make a confidential report direct to the Principal if not satisfied that appropriate action has subsequently been taken. Where an external examiner has a serious concern relating to academic standards and has exhausted all internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Principal, he/she may invoke QAA's Concerns scheme.
- The College does **not** expect the Award External Examiner (or Award Assessment Board) to adjust marks agreed by the Subject Assessment Panel.

## 4 External Examiners' Reports

External Examiners have a vital role to play in the monitoring of academic standards and in providing information on outcomes, as demonstrated through assessment.

Every External Examiner is therefore required as a condition of their appointment to complete and submit to the HE Senior Quality Co-ordinator an annual report<sup>11</sup> in accordance with the standard template. Award External Examiners are also required to complete a separate Award External Examiner's report. The report/s should be submitted as soon as possible after the Panel/Board meetings, and by 31 July at the latest (or within six weeks if the Panel/Board meetings are after this date).

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<sup>11</sup> The report forms and guidance on where to return completed forms are available on the College's Uni Moodle site. External Examiners are requested to return completed forms electronically to facilitate their distribution

Where more than one Panel/Board meeting is held per year, the External Examiners concerned are required, in addition to completion of the annual report, to complete an abbreviated version of the report template (the 'panel', 'board' or 'dissertation' report) following attendance at subsequent Panel/Board meetings to provide the College with ongoing assurance of standards. The HE Senior Quality Co-ordinator will provide additional guidance on reporting requirements and deadlines where this additional requirement applies.

On receipt of an External Examiner's report the HE Faculty Office will

- save the report in the central External Examiners' database
- make copies available to the Programme Team, Section Head and HEMAR
- make the report available to all members of staff teaching on the modules/programme
- copy Award External Examiners' reports to relevant Subject External Examiners, and vice versa, for information
- provide a response to each External Examiner using the final section of the External Examiner's report template, with a copy lodged with the HE Senior Quality Co-ordinator<sup>12</sup> The response should be signed off by the HEMAR before being sent to the External Examiner
- ensure that the Chair of the Award Assessment Board responds directly to issues raised by the Award External Examiner, whether these are programme specific or related to wider matters
- share the full report with students through the student portal and appropriate student/staff committee structures to strengthen student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement
- ensure that the report and response are considered by the relevant programme committee/s as part of the evidence base for annual programme review and that the External Examiner is sent a follow up action plan and subsequent updates, if appropriate.

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<sup>12</sup> The response should be completed by 28 September, or within 4 weeks of the receipt of the report.

External Examiners should note that if the College receives a request for a report under the Freedom of Information Act, then the report will normally be released, subject to omitting any reference to named individuals and deleting the name and contact details of the examiner concerned.

Individual students or staff should not be identified in the report. Examiners should note that where an individual is named in a report, if s/he requests copies of personal information held by the College Data Protection Policy, the College would normally release that information.

An External Examiner's report may have implications for the way in which the modules/programme are designed and delivered, but it is for the College rather than the External Examiner to consider what changes should be made.

## **5 Student Engagement with External Examiners**

In line with the relevant indicators of sound practice in Chapter B7: External examining of the QAA Quality Code, the College makes Subject External Examiners' details (name, position and home institution only,) and their report, available to students via the portal. It is, however, made clear to students that they may not initiate contact with External Examiners. If any such contacts are attempted then details, with copies of any correspondence, should be notified to the HE Senior Quality Co-ordinator

## **6 Termination or Notice of Appointment**

If an External Examiner is for whatever reason unable to fulfil his/her role, s/he will be expected to tender his/her resignation.

While the College expects that a prospective External Examiner will have been briefed about College Regulations and procedures in advance of accepting the nomination, if an Examiner subsequently identifies that s/he is not comfortable about operating within these Regulations and procedures, or in accordance with these guidelines, the College expects that the Examiner will tender his/her resignation in sufficient time for a replacement appointment to be made.

If an External Examiner has for whatever reason not carried out the full range of his/her responsibilities within the terms of these guidelines and of College Regulations, or if there is a material change of circumstances which would lead to a breach of the conditions of appointment, the College may terminate the appointment.