



BISHOP GROSSETESTE UNIVERSITY

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The University's Code of Practice for External Examining has been designed to set out clear procedures and guidance for the role of the External Examiner in detail in such a way as to ensure that our standards and learning opportunities are comparable with those of other institutions in the sector and that our assessment processes and regulations treat all students fairly and equitably.
2. The Code also outlines the process and criteria for the appointment, renewal and termination of an External Examiners' term of office and provides a definition of the role of the External Examiner.
3. The Code has been developed to reflect the expectations of the QAA, UK Quality Code for HE (2015), in relation to externality contained in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) UK Quality Code for Higher Education, specifically Chapter A3 - , *Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards [2013]* and B7 – *External Examining [2011]* (2015).

### Scope of the Code

4. This Code applies to all programmes of study and modules (including those offered as 'stand-alone') classified as taught by the Academic Enhancement Committee.

### Application to Collaborative Provision

5. This Code applies to all programmes and modules delivered in whole or in part by partner institutions leading to Bishop Grosseteste University awards. Such programmes and modules are designated as 'collaborative provision' by the University.

## THE ROLE OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER

### Scope of role

6. The role of the External Examiner is to assist the University in discharging its responsibility for the quality and standards of the education it provides and the awards it offers by:
  - assisting the University in maintaining academic, and where applicable professional, standards of its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and, where applicable, subject benchmark statements;
  - ensuring that the assessment process measures student achievement against the intended outcomes of the module/programme of study fairly, rigorously in the marking, grading classification of student performance in accordance with the University's policies and regulations; including the conduct of boards of examiners;
  - assisting in the comparison of academic standards across higher education awards and institutions;



- providing constructive comment and objective advice on opportunities for enhancement to teaching, learning and assessment processes;
  - Identifying good practice worthy of commendation/wider dissemination.
7. External Examiners are not permitted, and must not be asked, to undertake any of the following:
- setting assessment tasks (whether coursework, examination scripts or other);
  - first or second marking of student output;
  - revising the marks awarded for the output of individual students other than through giving an opinion in specific cases at the request of the internal examiners.

### Meeting students

8. External Examiners may meet with students from the cohort whose work they have scrutinised. It is the Academic Coordinators responsibility to consult with the respective External Examiner and, where necessary, make arrangements as required.
9. They must not meet with students as part of any process of assessment other than: to *observe* an assessment event (such as a performance) as part of their role in verifying standards and the fairness and rigour of the assessment process (being the equivalent of reading a sample of written examination or coursework output), but not as part of determining the mark awarded to individual students for such an event unless specifically requested in accordance with para.5 above.

### Chief External Examiner

10. The term Chief External Examiner refers to a specific role that oversees the core modules of programmes, enabling scrutiny of work across all provision at all levels to ensure standards and quality of learning opportunities and to ensure parity across all BGU validated provision, whether the programme is delivered at BGU or elsewhere. In addition to the scope of the role outlined above, the role of Chief Examiner includes the coordination of and reporting on relevant External Examiner feedback to ensure a cohesive overview at programme level.

### THE APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

11. The appointment of an External Examiner (including extensions to existing appointments) must be approved by the External Examining Oversight Group.

### Nomination

12. The Head of School is responsible for ensuring that all programmes and modules delivered by the University or collaborative partner are subject to oversight by appropriately qualified External Examiners, and should be sourced in good time as so they would commence at the



start of the academic year or to allow a smooth transition between one examiner and another.

13. Before it approves any External Examiner appointment the University's External Examining Oversight Group requires that all proposals are able to satisfy appropriate criteria (outlined in para. 21) to assure academic standards within subjects and programmes; and ensure that there are no conflicts of interest. All nominations must be endorsed by the relevant School Board. Following appointment, the External Examining Oversight Group via the Academic Quality Manager will expect to be notified of all material changes in the circumstances of any External Examiners.
14. Nominations must make explicit which programmes, modules or other elements the nominee will be responsible for overseeing as External Examiner.
15. In deciding whether to make a nomination the Head School must be satisfied that the nominee will have sufficient time to carry out the role having regard to the number of external examinerships currently held by the nominee. Nominees should hold no more than two substantial current external examiner appointments at any one time.

#### **Criteria for appointment**

16. In deciding whether to approve the appointment of an External Examiner the External Examining Oversight Group must consider the criteria given below. Where an appointment does not adhere to the criteria, the External Examining Oversight Group will not approve the appointment.
17. External Examiners are appointed for a period of four years.
18. Only in exceptional cases are proposals for extensions of a further year of appointment approved. Circumstances in which such proposals may be approved are:
  - the extension of an External Examiner's tenure will enable continuity where all other members of a subject External Examiner team, are to be newly appointed;
  - at short notice a member of the examining team has to resign from External Examiner duties;
  - where a course is to be closed within a year.
19. An External Examiner must not be appointed for a further term of office unless no fewer than five years have elapsed since the previous term of office.
20. Nominee personal specification:
  - has sufficient knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
  - possesses appropriate levels of academic and/or professional experience in relation to the relevant subject area and assessment with current or recent teaching experience in that subject and, wherever possible, a significant research profile;



- has sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic and professional peers;
  - possesses relevant academic or professional qualifications to at least the level of qualification being externally examined and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate;
  - is competent and experienced in matters relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.
21. Care must be taken to ensure the independence of the External Examiner is not compromised. It is the responsibility of the nominating Head of School or the nominee to ensure that any potential conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts of interest are explored and negated prior to nomination. In this respect the Head School should ensure the External Examiner is not a member of the governing body or committee of the University or any collaborative partner;
- the External Examiner does not have a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the relevant programme of study; nor be significantly involved in substantive collaborative research activity with a member of staff closely involved in the management, delivery or assessment of the programme(s);
  - the External Examiner is not a former member of staff or student of the University *unless* a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by the nominee have completed the programme(s);
  - the External Examiner is not in the same department from the same institution as an existing External Examiner; nor are they succeeding a colleague from the same department within the same institution;
  - the appointment does not create a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes;
  - any potential intellectual property issues, for example from the need for commercial confidentiality, should be resolved prior to appointment;
  - the appointment must be approved by the School Board or delegated body.

### **Confirmation of appointment**

22. Once approved, the External Examiner is sent a formal letter of appointment and will receive the following information:
- Important information about the role of External Examiner, which includes:
    - Confirmation of right to work in the UK
    - Providing Evidence of right to work in the UK
  - Appointment Agreement for External Examiners
  - The outgoing External Examiner's Annual Report (if applicable)



- Information to support the role of External Examiner, which includes Awards Regulations and the following Codes of Practice:
  - Code of Practice for External Examiners
  - Code of Practice on the Conduct of Boards of Examiners
  - Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students
- External Examiner Fees and Expenses Information
- Bank and Payroll Forms
- The External Examiners' Handbook

### **Recording External Examiner appointments**

23. The Quality Assurance Manager is responsible for ensuring that a central record of External Examiner appointments is maintained, including details of:
- the name and home institution (if applicable);
  - the nominating School;
  - the date of appointment;
  - the programmes, modules or other units for which the external has been appointed to oversee;
  - The date of receipt of the External Examiners' annual reports.

### **INDUCTION OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

24. New External Examiners must be provided with sufficient information to enable them to understand and fulfil their responsibilities.

#### **Induction by the University**

25. External Examiners will be invited to visit the University, which will provide the opportunity to meet with the academic team they will be working with, familiarise themselves with BGU's Quality Assurance processes, undertake a tour of the University's facilities as well as being able to present evidence of right to work in the UK, in person.

The Quality Assurance Manager will inform the External Examiner of any subsequent changes to the University Regulations and Codes of Practice.

#### **Induction by the academic department**

26. A designated contact within the School will provide additional information needed to fulfil the role as an External Examiner, which should include:



- the programme and module specifications for each programme/module within the remit of the External Examiner;
  - the assessment criteria for the assessment tasks for the programmes/ modules in question;
  - the student handbook(s) for the current session;
  - information about the School's other External Examiners and their remits;
  - copies of the annual monitoring reports for the relevant programmes for the previous three years;
  - a copy of the most recent periodic review and subsequent action plan;
  - a copy of any external PSRB accreditation (if applicable);
  - dates for forthcoming examination and assessment deadlines and boards of examiners meetings;
  - an invitation to meet staff and students (In the case of collaborative provision any invitation to meet staff should include an opportunity to meet the partner institution staff and students).
27. The Academic Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that appropriate discussions are held with the External Examiner as to how communications will take place, the evidence which the Examiner will require to fulfil their role, and how this will be communicated between the subject team and the External.
28. Subject teams should seek to utilise the External Examiner as a resource throughout the year, for example seeking their opinion on proposed changes to programmes and modules.

#### **CONSIDERATION OF ASSESSMENT TASKS**

29. External Examiners are entitled to be consulted on draft assessment tasks, irrespective of their format, level or stage within a programme. The School or Collaborative Partner is responsible for ensuring that this exchange takes place and that the External Examiner is given sufficient time to scrutinise and comment before assessment tasks or examination papers are required.
30. 'Assessment tasks' are defined as all those forms of assessment, whether examination, coursework, performance, practical or oral, which contribute to the summative assessment of a module. Comment by Externals will be noted and acted upon by the Academic Coordinator in finalising their assessments. Examiners' comments should be in writing, and should cover areas including appropriateness of task/question to the level, opportunity to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes, clarity of expression and motivation.
31. Where modules are offered jointly by more than one School, the relevant Heads of School must agree how the responsibilities under this part of the Code will be discharged.
32. The opinion of the External Examiner on the validity of assessment tasks is persuasive but not binding. The School has final responsibility for determining the assessment task, however, where the School acts contrary to the advice of the External Examiner, the Examiner must be informed of the School's actions and reasons.



33. The assessment tasks for collaborative provision must have been approved by the University's Link Tutor before submission to the External Examiner. In the event of disagreement the University Link Tutor has final responsibility for determining assessment tasks.

#### **MODERATION OF STUDENT OUTPUT**

34. 'Student output' is defined as any student work submitted to fulfil an assessment task contributing to the summative assessment of module. 'Moderation' in this context means the process through which the External Examiner is able to verify the appropriateness and comparability of standards and the fairness and rigour of the assessment process based on an agreed sample of student output. It does not refer to giving an opinion on the mark awarded in specific cases.
35. The External Examiner is entitled to see all student output as defined in this Code. The precise output to be seen must be agreed between the School and the External Examiner (in the case of collaborative programmes, agreement must involve the University Link Tutor) in advance. Agreement is subject to the External seeing a sample from the top, middle and the bottom of the range of marks awarded within a module including all fails and all first class/distinction level work.
36. Where an External Examiner considers that the sample reviewed reveals evidence of significant over- or under-marking they may recommend rescaling of the marks to the Board of Examiners. The final decision remains that of the Board and must be applied to all student work for the assessment task in question and not just those pieces of student output viewed by the External Examiner.
37. The moderation of student output submitted by students undertaking collaborative programmes must be undertaken by the University Link Tutor as defined in the University's Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision.

#### **MEMBERSHIP OF BOARDS OF EXAMINERS**

38. External Examiners are appointed as members of the relevant Board(s) of Examiners through which they can carry out their role as specified above. Where an External Examiner is consulted on an individual student case (to resolve a difficult case at the request of the internal examiners), the judgement of the External Examiner in such cases is persuasive but not binding. The final decision, and the accountability for that decision, remains that of the Board of Examiners as a whole.
39. All External Examiners are full members of the relevant Board of Examiners and are expected to attend where practicable. Inability to attend relevant Boards can result in termination of contract.
40. As a member of the Board of Examiners, External Examiners should be given opportunity to comment on:
- the standards of marking, student performance and achievement;



- the conduct of the assessment process generally, with the opportunity to offer suggestions to enhance the process and quality of learning opportunities;
  - the conduct of the board.
41. The Chair of each Board of Examiners is responsible for ensuring that the Board acts in accordance with the University's Regulations and Codes of Practice. If an External Examiner has serious concerns about the conduct of the Board which require an immediate response (prior to submission of the External Examiner's report) they are encouraged to raise those concerns with the Registrar and Secretary.

### **CONFIRMATION OF DECISIONS**

42. The Chair of the Board of Examiners must invite the External Examiner to counter-sign the completed Official Candidate List for the module(s) or programme(s) which they have been appointed to oversee. Signature of the list provides confirmation that the Board which made the decisions represented on the list has been conducted fairly and rigorously, that the assessment process prior to the Board has been conducted fairly and rigorously, and that the academic standards achieved are broadly comparable. Signing does not indicate that the External Examiner necessarily agrees with every individual decision made.
43. Where an External Examiner is not prepared to counter-sign a Candidate List they must submit a written report within 48 hours to the Registrar and Secretary (copied to the relevant Head of School) stating the reasons for refusing to sign the list. On receipt of the report, the Registrar and Secretary will consult with the Head of School and Chair of the relevant Board of Examiners. If the matter cannot be resolved the Registrar and Secretary will determine whether to approve the results, notwithstanding the External Examiner's refusal to counter-sign, or whether to order other action deemed appropriate, for example the reconvening of the Board of Examiners.
44. Where Registrar and Secretary decides to approve the results despite the External's refusal to counter-sign, a written report shall be provided to the External Examiner stating the reasons, the report will be copied to the Head of School and the Chair of the Board of Examiners.

### **EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

#### **Introduction**

45. External Examiners play a critical role in enabling the University to maintain the academic standards of our awards and ensuring that they are comparable with other institutions in the sector and that our assessment processes and Regulations treat all students fairly and equitably.
46. The University has a duty to ensure that its responsibility for the standards and quality of programmes are discharged through effective and scrupulous use of External Examiners and their reports.

In summary the reporting process is as follows:



- report received by Quality Assurance and Student Data Office and logged (facilitating payment of fee);
- report distributed widely across the institution and in the case of collaborative partner the Link Tutor and the senior member of staff of the partner organisation responsible for collaborative provision;
- formal response is provided by the Academic Coordinator addressing the points and issues raised in the report;
- acknowledgement sent to external examiner by the Vice Chancellor;
- comments are incorporated into the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) Action Plan. The AMR will then be forwarded to the Academic Quality Manager who will verify that External Examiner recommendations have been responded to appropriately;
- in the case of a collaborative programme the partner institution will consider the External Examiner report and ensure that any actions in response to the report are captured within the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) Action Plan. A copy of the AMR will then be forwarded to the Link Tutor and the Academic Quality Manager.

#### **External Examiner Reports Submission**

47. External Examiners are required to use the form updated annually and published as document C2. The purpose of the form is to ensure that External Examiners provide consistent information irrespective of the subject area they are appointed to oversee. The form is also designed to reflect external expectations.
48. The completed form must be returned to the Quality Assurance and Student Data office, in all instances the report should be submitted electronically using the email address published on the form. If External Examiners are unable to include an electronic signature a signed hardcopy of the report must also be submitted.
49. In addition, External Examiners are entitled to send a separate report to the Vice Chancellor in confidence, where the examiner wishes to raise issues of serious concern directly and privately.
50. Reports should be submitted no later than 20 working days from the relevant Board of Examiners. This deadline is designed to encourage the provision of feedback from the External Examiner in time to enable the School to reflect on that feedback as part of its annual monitoring review of programmes, and assumes that few new issues will arise during the reassessment process. Where an External Examiner, having submitted the report by the deadline, considers that there are further issues raised during the reassessment – or other subsequent assessment - process, they may submit supplementary report (or part thereof) as appropriate.

#### **Non-submission**

51. Where a report has not been submitted by the required date, the Academic Quality Manager will write to the External Examiner asking them to advise the University within 14 days of the reasons for non-submission and the likely date on which it will be submitted.



52. If a response is not received within 14 days or the response is deemed unsatisfactory the Academic Quality Manager will inform the Registrar and Secretary who will determine what further action should be taken, including whether payment of the fee shall be withheld.

#### **'Insufficient' feedback from External Examiners**

53. Where the Head of School considers that the feedback provided by the External Examiner through the report form and other means (such as at the Board(s) of Examiners), is 'insufficient' the Head of School should notify the Academic Quality manager who will write to the External Examiner requesting more detailed feedback.
54. If within 14 days the External Examiner has not responded or has not responded satisfactorily the Academic Quality Manager will inform the Registrar and Secretary who will determine what further action should be taken, including whether payment of the fee shall be withheld.

#### **Serious concern**

55. Where the Head of School or Link Tutor considers that an External Examiner's report discloses an issue of serious concern e.g. evidence that academic standards of the provision may be at risk or that the University Regulations are not being adhered to; the Head of School must ensure that appropriate action is taken, that a response detailing the action taken is provided to the External Examiner, with a report provided to the Academic Quality Manager.

#### **Availability of reports**

56. External Examiner reports are circulated widely within the University and are made available in full to students through the VLE.

#### **School responsibilities**

57. The Head of School is responsible for ensuring that the School has in place systems for addressing the issues raised in the report, and providing feedback to the External Examiner. This process should form part of the ongoing interrelationship between School and External Examiner. In particular, the report would normally provide confirmation of issues which the External Examiner has raised during the Board of Examiners and through other discussions with the School.

#### **Quality Assurance and Student Data office responsibilities**

58. Where serious issues or concerns have been identified, the Academic Quality Manager is responsible for preparing an analysis for the Registrar and Secretary of the issues raised and actions taken or other response, drawing on the information provided by the School(s).



### Teaching Quality Information

59. Schools must provide copies of External Examiner reports and respective responses in full (with the exception of any confidential reports made directly to the Vice Chancellor), to staff/student committee(s).

### TERMINATION OF AN EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S CONTRACT

60. Where concern is raised that an External Examiner is not performing their duties in accordance with the University's requirements (other than submission of the annual report, explained above (para. 51/52 above) as defined in this Code of Practice, the Head of School should adhere to the following process, adopting each further step only in the event that the first step does not resolve the matter satisfactorily:
- inform the relevant Head of School of the concerns;
  - contact the relevant External Examiner and seek to clarify actions which are desirable to resolve those concerns;
  - make a formal written request to the External Examiner setting out actions deemed appropriate (copied to the Head of School and Academic Quality Manager);
  - make a formal written request via the Head of School to the Registrar and Secretary to terminate the External Examiner's contract, specifying the reasons for the request, and providing evidence of the steps taken to resolve the concerns;
  - on receipt of such a request the Registrar and Secretary may consult further with the Head of School, Academic Coordinator and External Examiner;
  - where the Registrar and Secretary is satisfied that reasonable steps have been taken to resolve the concerns and the concerns remain unresolved, the termination request may be approved and the External Examiner will be written to informing them of the decision and the reasons for it;
  - all such termination decisions must be reported to the Academic Enhancement Committee.



**APPENDICES TO THIS CODE:**

Appendix 1: Nomination for an External Examiner (new or re-appointment)

Appendix 2: External Examiner nomination checklist

Appendix 3: External Examiner Fees and Expenses

Qa: C2: Provides the proforma through which External Examiners must provide their annual report to the University. (This form is updated annually (and therefore carries an expiry date).

Reference should also be made to Codes of Practice on:

- Assessment and Awards
- Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students
- Code of Practice for Changes to Validated Programmes
- Code of Practice for the Conduct of Boards of Examiners (under review)
- Code of Practice for External Examining (under review)
- Code of Practice for Flexible and Distributed Learning
- Code of Practice for Work-based and Placement Learning

Regulations for Awards

- University Awards and Credit Framework
- Regulations for Taught Masters
- Minor Awards Regulations
- Regulations for the Award of Foundation and Honours Degrees
- Regulations for PGCE Programmes