

# Code of Practice

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## External Examining

Reference:

Version: 5.00

Status: Final

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Date: 08/11/2017

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# 1. Introduction

The purpose of this Code of Practice chapter is to set out the principal responsibilities of External Examiners appointed to modules/units and programmes offered by UCEM; procedures relating to their appointment; induction; reporting and other duties; their involvement with Boards of Examiners (made up of the Module Board/Unit Board and Progression and Awards Board for UCEM programmes); their remuneration; and circumstances relating to the termination of their appointment. Where appropriate, these principles and procedures also relate to programmes that align with Level 3 of the Regulated Qualifications Framework, where so identified in UCEM's Quality Framework for Awards at Level 3.<sup>1</sup>

These statements have been informed by Chapter B7: *External examining* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), 2011) and benchmarked against other such guidelines in the sector. They apply to all programmes offered by UCEM at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as well as to provision at Level 3 in relation to apprenticeships. They are supported by an External Examiner site within the UCEM Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) containing further documentation and guidance.

As Chapter B7 explains, *'External examiners are appointed to provide each institution with impartial and independent advice, as well as informative comment on the institution's standards and on student achievement in relation to those standards'* (QAA 2011, p4). Through acting as a 'critical friend', the role of the External Examiner is one of the most effective means of monitoring standards and maintaining the academic and professional relevance of programmes through quality enhancement. The Expectation of Chapter B7 is that *'Higher Education providers make scrupulous use of External Examiners'* (p.4)

It should be noted that no qualification arising from a programme offered by UCEM will be awarded without participation in the assessment process by at least one External Examiner to ensure the appropriateness of the academic standards being applied.

UCEM currently operates two different procedures relating to External Examiners; one for its 'legacy' programmes validated by the University of Reading (plus a number of long-established UCEM-validated diploma programmes), and another for the programmes validated by UCEM itself following its acquisition of Taught Degree Awarding Powers in January 2013. For legacy programmes, appointments may be made either by UCEM or by the University of Reading as appropriate to the academic level of the award; it is anticipated that these programmes will not be offered beyond the end of the 2017/18 academic session.

The number of External Examiners appointed to each programme will reflect the numbers of component modules and elements of assessment, and also any requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with which the programme is associated. External Examiners normally are drawn from both academia and professional practice relevant to the subject matter of the programme. Where appropriate, the same External Examiner may be appointed to two or more cognate routes within a single programme. Similarly, separate External Examiners may be given responsibility for different groups of cognate modules within a programme. External Examiners are responsible to the UCEM Academic Board and, where relevant, to the equivalent body of the University of Reading.

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On UCEM programmes, External Examiners are responsible to the UCEM Academic Board, on whose behalf appointments are made by the External Examiner Appointments Subcommittee of Quality Standards and Enhancement Committee. As with legacy programmes, External Examiners normally will be drawn from academia and professional practice and appointments will take into account any requirements of PSRBs. For UCEM programmes, a two-tier system of formal meetings of examination boards is operated, and there are distinct roles for External Examiners at each tier. The first of these is the Module External Examiner (or Unit External Examiner at Level 3) and the second is that of Award External Examiner. All External Examiners are appointed as Module/Unit External Examiners and may also be appointed as an Award External Examiner. Module/Unit External Examiners are responsible for a group of modules. They will be responsible for all students studying those modules regardless of the programme upon which a student may be studying. Module/Unit External Examiners will be invited to attend Module/Unit Boards for the modules for which they are custodian. Award Board Examiners, as well as fulfilling the duties of a Module/Unit Board Examiner, are responsible for one or more named awards and will be invited to attend the Progression and Awards Board. Invitations for Award Board Examiner positions are normally provided six months in advance of the initial date of attendance at the start of an appointment.

## 2. Criteria for Appointment

In making appointments, UCEM has adopted QAA's definitions of both the attributes of a potential External Examiner (listed in 2.1 below) and conflicts of interest (as set out in 2.2 below).

### 2.1 Person specification

Institutions appoint External Examiners who can show appropriate evidence of the following:

- knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
- competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof;
- relevant academic and/or professional qualification to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate;
- competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures;
- sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience with the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers;
- familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed;
- fluency in English; where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that External Examiners are provided with the information to make their judgements);
- meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies;
- awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula;

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- competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

### 2.2 Conflicts of interest

Institutions do not appoint as External Examiners anyone in the following categories or circumstances:

- a member of a governing body or committee of the appointing institution or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the appointing institution or one of its collaborative partners;
- anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programmes of study;
- anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study;
- anyone who is, or know they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study;
- anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme(s) or modules in question;
- former staff or students of the institution unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the External Examiner have completed their programme(s);
- a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institutions;
- the succession of an External Examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home department and institution;
- the appointment of more than one External Examiner from the same department of the same institution.

(Quality Assurance Agency UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality Chapter B7: *External Examining* (2011, p.13), <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b>)

In addition, UCEM will not appoint anyone who either is currently or has been within the previous five years an Associate Tutor of UCEM.

External Examiners should not hold more than two such appointments for taught programmes or modules at any point in time.

### 2.3 Dealing with Conflicts of Interest

Notwithstanding the criteria in 2.2, above, a conflict of interest may arise at some stage following the appointment of an External Examiner. Should a conflict of interest arise, for example as a consequence of a relative or employee of the External Examiner taking the programme, or due to attachment by an employer as a counsellor or mentor to a student under a professional qualification scheme, the External Examiner should declare this information to the Head of Assessment as soon as it is known.

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Normally, the External Examiner will be required to be absent from any point within a meeting of a Board when that student's results are considered.

Where it is not possible to resolve a conflict of interest, it is normal practice for the External Examiner to resign. However, UCEM reserves the right to terminate the appointment as a final resort to protect the integrity of the external examining process.

### 3. Procedures for appointment

Twelve months prior to the expiry of an **existing** External Examiner appointment, the Head of Assessment will advise the appropriate Head of Faculty of the need to install a replacement External Examiner. The Head of Faculty, liaising with the Programme Leader, will supply the Head of Assessment with details of the proposed replacement normally within three months (although this period may be extended if there is only a small pool of potential candidates to draw upon).

If the appointment is being made to a **new** programme or award, the nomination(s) will be made as soon as practicable following programme validation.

Candidates nominated for appointment are asked to complete a proposal form detailing their qualifications, relevant experience and any potential conflicts of interest. The nomination is endorsed by the relevant Programme Leader or Head of Faculty. The details provided by the nominee on the proposal form should be scrutinised by reference to the criteria set out in section 2, above, by the Head of Assessment in consultation with the Academic Quality Unit (AQU) to ensure that:

- the nominee is competent to undertake the responsibilities of an External Examiner;
- any potential conflicts of interest are identified and resolved.

Nominations in respect of **UCEM programmes** are approved by the External Examiners Appointments Subcommittee of the Quality Standards and Enhancement Committee (QSEC) and reported to QSEC and to the Academic Board. UCEM provides the appointee with a briefing in respect of the terms of the appointment and their role, powers and responsibilities, both generally and with specific regard to the assessment process (see sections 4 and 8 below).

For appointments to **legacy programmes** validated by the University of Reading, the nomination is presented to the External Examiner Appointments Subcommittee for endorsement prior to being submitted to the University for approval in accordance with its standard procedures.

As a consequence of the termination of University-validated programmes, such nominations normally will seek the extension of an existing appointment rather than the introduction of a new External examiner<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> During the run-out of the legacy programme when the numbers of remaining students become small, annual extensions to the appointment may be sought beyond the normal single year's extension; additionally, where appropriate, an External Examiner may be asked to assume additional responsibility for one or more cognate programmes rather than separate Externals being reappointed for each.

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Confirmation will be sought from the External Examiner concerned of their willingness to continue prior to initial discussion with the Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning at the University. If the proposal is supported by the Associate Dean, it will be forwarded for formal approval by the University. If consent is given, the University will notify both UCEM and the candidate. The University will provide the appointee with any additional briefing and training in line with its own protocols and procedures.

In all cases, UCEM will provide the incoming External Examiner with a formal letter of appointment, a copy of the current External Examiners Handbook (see Appendix C) and all necessary documentation relating to the award(s) for which the EE will be responsible (see section 9 below). Appropriate PSRBs are notified annually by UCEM of changes of External Examiners and of extensions to existing appointments.

Following appointment, External Examiners are required to inform the Head of Assessment of any change in their personal or professional circumstances which might impact on their role with UCEM. Any proposal to amend the terms of an appointment, e.g.

- to extend the length of the appointment;
- to appoint a module examiner additionally as an award examiner;
- to enable the External Examiner to assume responsibility for extra modules/units or an additional cognate award,

is subject to approval by the External Examiners Appointments Subcommittee, following completion of the appropriate pro-forma by the relevant Head of Faculty or Programme Leader (see Appendix C).

## 4. External Examiner Induction and Development

All appointees are obliged to undertake an induction that includes a briefing on UCEM processes. This is offered online via the External Examiner area of the VLE. In addition, a face-to-face induction may be provided where feasible to do so. The induction and development of External Examiners aims to give an overview of UCEM practices and procedures as well as equipping the appointee to be an effective External Examiner. Engagement with this process is monitored by the Head of Assessment; non-completion within a reasonable period of time (normally, three semesters) may result in the appointment not being renewed for the following year.

Where UCEM appoints an External Examiner with no previous experience of external examining, wherever practicable to do so UCEM will seek to arrange mentoring guidance during the first year of appointment by teaming them up with an experienced External Examiner.

## 5. External Examiner Principal Responsibilities

### 5.1 Attendance at meetings of Boards of Examiners

Arrangements and protocols concerning attendance by External Examiners at meetings of Boards of Examiners to which they have been appointed are set out in UCEM Code of Practice: *Boards of Examiners*.

### 5.2 External Examiner's inability to attend a meeting of a Board of Examiners

Circumstances may arise where an External Examiner may not be able to attend a meeting of either a Module or a Progression and Award Board (whether in person or via teleconference). In such circumstances, it is the responsibility of the External Examiner concerned to liaise with their fellow External Examiner(s) in order to aid in the discharge of their duties.

Wherever possible, UCEM will seek to arrange an appropriate alternative time for the External Examiner to review students' work and other relevant documentation in order to inform the deliberations of the Board of Examiners and the completion of their report(s).

External Examiners who are unable to attend are required to complete an Absence Form (see Appendix C) to confirm that they have reviewed the necessary paperwork.

## 6. External Examiner's Report

External Examiners' reports are an important part of UCEM's quality assurance processes, reflecting the significance placed upon them by QAA and by PSRBs.

**Informal feedback** may be provided by an External Examiner to UCEM and/or the relevant programme team at any time during the academic year (for example, at the end of the first semester of study). The Head of Assessment or the relevant Head of Faculty / Programme Leader / Module/Unit Leader will contact the External Examiner to discuss any aspect of the feedback if appropriate to do so.

External Examiners are required to submit a full **annual written report** to UCEM or to the University of Reading by the date specified. This should be submitted on a form provided by either UCEM or the University, as appropriate, and returned as directed. The External Examiner will be asked to comment upon the standard of candidates, examination scripts, coursework, examination script marking and study material.

In addition, QAA recommends that the report should:

- confirm that sufficient evidence was received to enable the role to be fulfilled (where evidence was insufficient, they give details);
- state whether issues raised in the previous report(s) have been, or are being, addressed to their satisfaction;
- address any issues as specifically required by any relevant professional body;
- give an overview of their term of office (when concluded).

(QAA 2011, p.22)



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The purpose of the report is to help UCEM to judge whether the programme is meeting its stated objectives and to make any necessary improvements. Appendices C, D and E summarise the procedure for responding to the report once it has been received by UCEM. The full annual report will inform the annual monitoring process and will be made available to the relevant Board of Studies and UCEM students, and will also be provided to PSRBs on request. Matters of institutional significance will also be brought to the attention of the relevant UCEM deliberative committee.

The non-confidential portions of External Examiner reports are made available to students on the VLE.

External Examiners retain the right to submit a confidential report direct to the Principal of UCEM or as directed by the awarding body, if they have concerns relating to the value being placed on the advice given, the running of the programme or the academic integrity of the programme. In addition to this, if they still have concerns about a serious systemic failing with the quality and standards of the programme(s) the External Examiner can refer the matter to the QAA under its Concerns Scheme (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/concerns>) and/or inform the relevant PSRBs.

## 7. External Examiners' Other Duties

The External Examiner may be asked to perform other occasional duties, for example, to advise the Progression and Award Board on prizes to be awarded to outstanding candidates, to participate in exceptional viva voce examinations or new methods of examination.

External Examiners normally are not expected to adjudicate on cases of mitigating circumstances submitted by students. These are considered by the UCEM Mitigating Circumstances Committee which meets prior to the Boards of Examiners. The recommendations of the Mitigating Circumstances Committee are presented at the meetings of Module Boards; however, to ensure the confidentiality of such mitigating circumstances the exact nature normally will not be discussed unless the committee was unable to reach a decision due to lack of evidence, or a need to consider the student's performance as a whole, rather than at a module level. Further guidance relating to decisions regarding candidates with accepted mitigating circumstances is provided in the UCEM Code of Practice: *Boards of Examiners*.

In compliance with the UCEM Code of Practice: *Programme Monitoring, Amendment, Review and Discontinuation*, External Examiners periodically may be invited to provide a commentary about changes to the programme or modules for which they are responsible. For example, other than in the case of editorial and some minor changes, External Examiners normally should be consulted about proposed amendments to programmes that may affect assessment or progression. Any such views will be included in the request for approval submitted to the relevant UCEM Board of Studies and (where appropriate) to the University of Reading.

External Examiners' names, position and institution will be made available to students via the VLE. In line with standard practice within the UK Higher Education sector, UCEM will make clear to students that they are not permitted to contact External Examiners directly; however, UCEM may set up formal opportunities for External Examiners and students to engage. If an External Examiner expresses a wish to interact with students, arrangements can be made usually via a teleconference or webinar.

It should however be noted that students are not obliged to agree to meet with or otherwise communicate with External Examiners.

## 8. Fees

For legacy programmes an annual fee is paid by the relevant awarding body upon receipt of the External Examiner's report, this includes a fee for attendance at Results Boards. For post-2013 UCEM programmes a fee is paid for attendance at Module / Unit Boards and on receipt of the External Examiner's annual report; a separate fee is paid for attendance at Progression and Award Boards, Fees payable may be banded relative to the number of modules or units for which an External examiner is responsible.

For both legacy and UCEM programmes reasonable travelling and subsistence expenses in line with the current schedule issued by the UCEM Finance Department will be reimbursed on submission of a UCEM expenses form, or for External Examiners to University of Reading-validated awards, a University claim form. The latter is submitted direct to the University by the Examiner for approval.

## 9. UCEM Responsibilities

To aid the External Examiner to fulfil his/her duties, UCEM will provide the following:

- an induction will be provided to all new External Examiners as detailed in section 4 above;
- access to the External Examiner VLE site which contains:
  - QAA and HEA resources for External Examiners including details of QAA's Concerns scheme;
  - UCEM Code of Practice;
  - UCEM Academic and General Regulations;
  - Programme Specifications;
  - Assessment, Progression and Award Regulations;
  - schedule of key dates of scrutiny and Boards of Examiner (Module Board / Progression and Awards Board) meetings;
  - Boards of Examiners Terms of reference;
  - pro-formas for external examiner reports, and guidance on how to submit;
  - programme statistics;
  - a schedule allocating the modules for which the External is responsible;
  - copies of the previous two years External Examiners' reports for their allocated programme (if available);
  - sample agendas for both a module and award boards;
  - schedule of key dates for the next academic year;
  - a copy of the assessment scrutiny flow chart process.
- a complete set of study material at the start of each academic year via the VLE;
- copies of draft assignments for all modules assessed by means of coursework only with a proforma report form;
- a complete set of draft examination papers prior to the scrutiny meeting with a proforma report form;

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- an invitation to attend UCEM during the day before either the Results Board (for legacy programmes) or Module Board or Progression and Award Board (for UCEM programmes) to review a sample of assessment scripts;
- a written report on any issues raised within the External Examiner's report (see Appendix C);
- an annual forum incorporating briefing for new External Examiners where demand is sufficient.

### 9.1 Information at Module / Unit Boards

UCEM External Examiners participating in Module / Unit Boards will be provided with the following information:

- assessment regulations relevant to the modules units under consideration;
- module / unit results and associated statistical data;
- module /unit reports from the Module / Unit Leader;
- moderation reports from the Module / Unit Leader;
- matters arising from previous minutes;
- a sample of student coursework for inspection prior to the meeting of the Board, including high/medium/low mark scripts;
- access to the final assessment scripts sorted by candidate number;
- a copy of the assessment questions, outline answers and marking guides;
- Module / Unit Board Agenda.

Further information about the conduct of Module / Unit Boards is contained within UCEM Code of Practice: *Boards of Examiners*

### 9.2 Information at UCEM Progression and Award Board / Legacy Results Boards

UCEM External Examiners participating in Progression and Award Boards and External Examiners participating in Results Board for legacy programmes will be provided with the following information:

- the academic regulations relevant to the Programme being considered;
- programme results by student;
- standard deviation statistics relevant to the results for approval;
- a sample of student work (Legacy Results Boards only);
- matters arising from previous minutes;
- details of prizes that the Board may approve;
- Progression and Award Board agenda.

Further information about the conduct of Progression and Award Boards is contained within UCEM Code of Practice: *Boards of Examiner*

## 10. Length of Term and Termination of Contract

An External Examiner appointment will normally be for a period of **four years**. This may be extended by **one year** in exceptional circumstances<sup>3</sup>. Such circumstances may include ensuring that there are not two new appointees in a single academic year/semester or to mentor an inexperienced External Examiner. **The appointment is subject to annual renewal, triggered by the receipt of the Examiner's report.**

Any proposed amendment to the responsibilities of an appointed External Examiner must be submitted to the External Examiners Appointments Subcommittee by either the relevant programme leader or Head of Faculty for approval. A proforma is available for this purpose (see Appendix C)

At the end of the term of office the External Examiner will be formally thanked by the Boards of Examiners and will be requested to submit an overview report looking back over the term of office as a supplement to the annual report.

An External Examiner may be appointed to another programme after a minimum period of five years has elapsed or may be re-appointed to the same programme in exceptional circumstances after the same minimum five-year period has elapsed.

An External Examiner, who wishes to terminate their duties with UCEM, should write to the Head of Assessment stating the reasons for termination and the effective date of termination.

An appointment may be terminated where the External Examiner is not seen to be performing duties satisfactorily, i.e. by not returning comments on draft assessments, not attending Boards of Examiner meetings sufficiently regularly, or the failure to submit a correctly completed annual report in a timely manner.

Alternative arrangements can be made for External Examiners to view a sample of work and make comments remotely if there is good reason why they cannot be present at a meeting of an examination board. If the External Examiner can attend but not in person, arrangements will be made for the Examiner to attend via teleconference.

Signed by Chair's Action :   
.....  
Jane Fawkes  
Chair of Quality Standards and Enhancement Committee

Date: 19/1/18  
.....

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<sup>3</sup> Plus possible further extensions of one year at a time in the circumstances referred to in section 3, above

## Appendix A Related Policies

### Reference

Quality Assurance Agency UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality Chapter B7: *External Examining* (2011), [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

### Benchmarked guidance

Higher Education Academy (2012) – *A Handbook for External Examining* (2012), [www.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk)

Higher Education Academy (2015) – *A Review of External Examining Arrangements Across the UK*, HEFCE

Universities UK/GuildHE (2011) *Review of External Examining Arrangements in Universities and Colleges in the UK* (The Finch Report)

[www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2011/ReviewOfExternalExaminingArrangements.pdf](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2011/ReviewOfExternalExaminingArrangements.pdf)

Sheffield Hallam University – External Examiner Absence Form (2017)

[University College London – Procedures when an External Examiner is Unable to attend \(2016\)](#)

Ulster University – Non-attendance of External Examiner at Board of Examiners' Meeting (2017)

### Related Policies and other relevant documents

UCEM Academic and General Regulations for Students

UCEM Code of Practice: *Boards of Examiners*

UCEM Code of Practice: *Learning, Teaching and Assessment*

UCEM Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2016-20

UCEM Code of Practice: *Admissions and Recognition of Prior Learning*

UCEM Code of Practice: *Programme Monitoring, Amendment, Review and Discontinuation*

UCEM External Examiner Nomination Form

[UCEM External Examiners Handbook](#)

UCEM External Examiner Interim Report Form

UCEM External Examiner Annual Report Form

UCEM External Examiner Annual Report Response Form

University of Reading – *Guide to Policies and Procedures for Teaching and Learning*

## Appendix B External Examining process

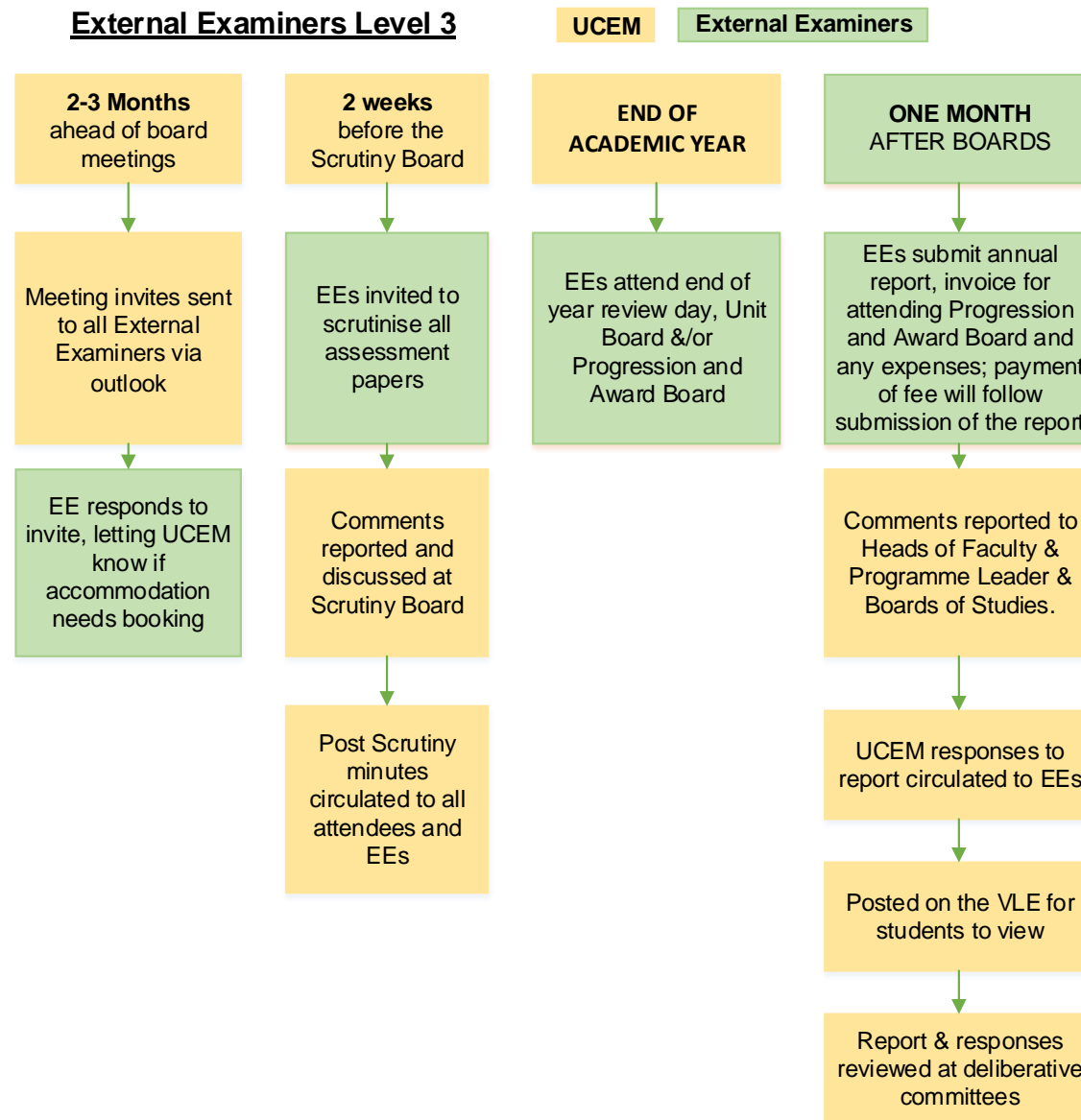
The flowcharts on the following pages set out the UCEM external examining process for programmes at levels 3 and levels 4 to 7 respectively.

The overall process can be summarised as follows:

1. External Examiners are notified of key dates by UCEM's Examination Team and are sent invitations to attend meetings of the Boards of Examiners. A schedule of key dates is also available on the External Examiner VLE site.
2. Copies of draft assessments are sent out via email to External Examiners for scrutiny.
3. External Examiners attend meetings of the Boards of Examiners.
4. At the end of the first semester External Examiners complete and submit the Interim Report by the specified deadline to UCEM for consideration by the Programme Leader, Head of Faculty and Head of Assessment (this is not applicable to Level 3 programmes)
5. At the end of the academic year External Examiners complete and submit the relevant external examiner pro-forma for the final External Examiner's Report ensuring that all sections are completed and that the report is submitted by the specified deadline to UCEM and for externally validated programmes to the University of Reading as well.
6. On receipt of the completed External Examiner's Report a meeting will be organised by the Head of Assessment with members of the Programme Team to review the report and to prepare a draft response.
7. The draft response will be passed to the Head of Faculty for approval and sign-off prior to being sent to the External Examiner with a covering letter. Processes 5 and 6 should be completed within 28 days of receiving the External Examiner's report.
8. The report and response are included in the draft programme report presented at Annual Programme Review meeting.
9. The External Examiner's Report and Response is made available to PSRBs on request.
10. Any issues of institution wide significance raised in the External Examiner's Report are reported at relevant UCEM deliberative committees including, where appropriate, Academic Board.
11. The report and response are reviewed by the appropriate Board of Studies.

For externally-validated awards the finalised Annual Programme Report following sign off by the Boards of Studies is sent to the University of Reading.

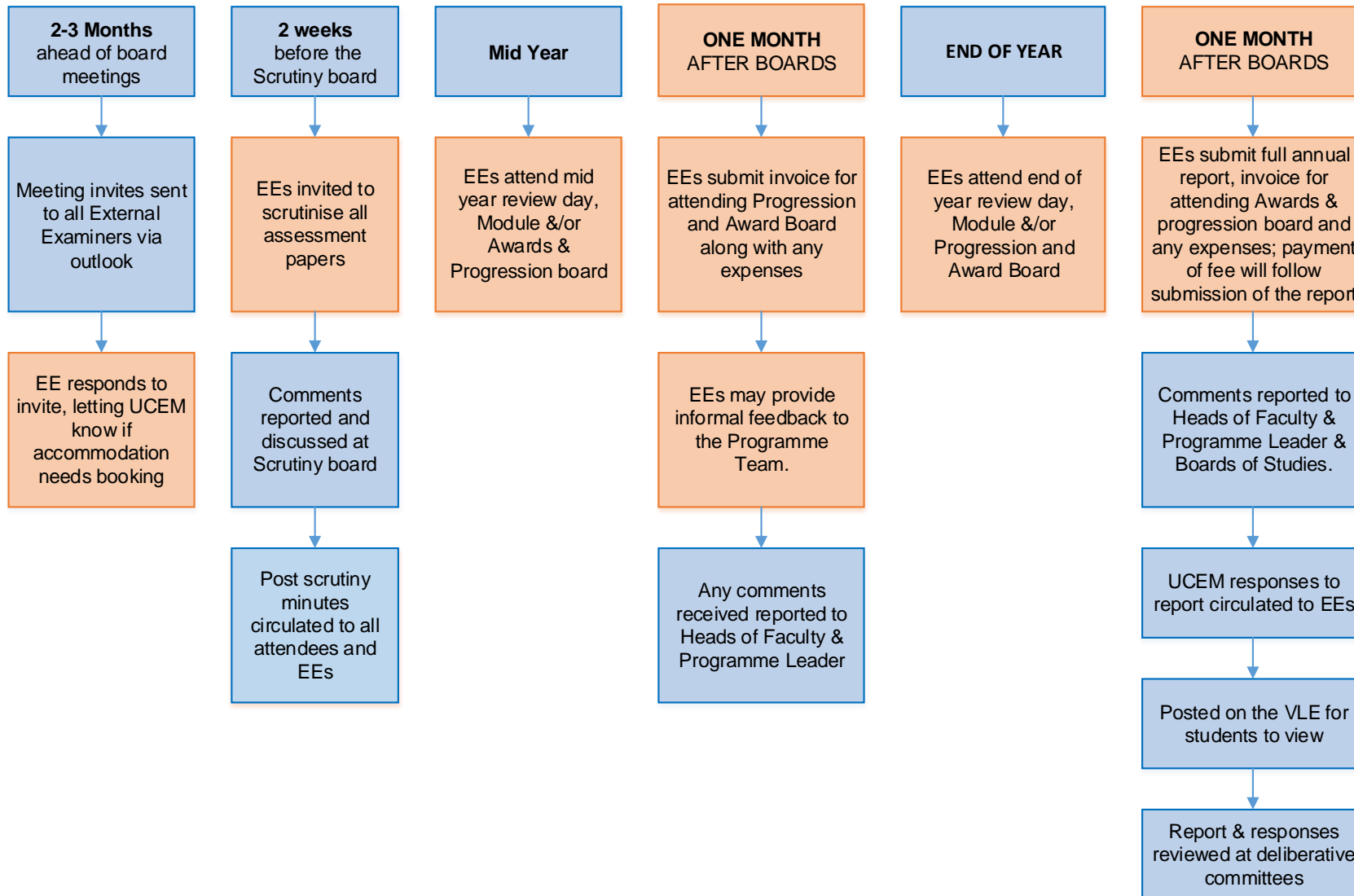
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### External Examiners Level 4.5.6 & 7

UCEM    External Examiners





## Appendix C UCEM documentation relating to External Examiners' appointments

The following documents are available in UCEM SharePoint:

1. [External Examiner Nomination Form](#) (click here)
2. Proposed Change to External Examiner's Responsibilities (click here)
3. External Examiner Absence Form (click here)
4. [External Examiner's End of Year Report](#) (click here)
5. [Response to External Examiner Annual Report](#) (click here)
6. [External Examiner Handbook](#) (click here)