Code of Practice

External Examining

Version: 8.00

Status: Draft

Date: 14/12/2021

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

This Code of Practice chapter sets out the principal responsibilities of External Examiners appointed to modules and programmes offered by UCEM. It covers:

- procedures relating to appointment;
- induction;
- reporting and other duties;
- involvement with Boards of Examiners (made up of the Module Board Board and Progression and Award Boards for UCEM programmes);
- remuneration; and
- circumstances relating to the termination of appointment.

These statements have been informed by UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: External Expertise (Quality Assurance Agency, 2018) and benchmarked against other such guidelines in the sector. They apply to all programmes offered by UCEM at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. They are supported by an External Examiner site within the UCEM Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) containing further documentation and guidance.

2. The role of External Examiners

As the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) guidance explains within the guiding principles *'degree-awarding bodies engage independent external examiners to comment impartially and informatively on academic standards, student achievement and assessment processes for all provision that leads to the award of credit or a qualification' (QAA 2018, p5).*

The role of an External Examiner is to:

- Advise on whether UCEM programmes meet relevant frameworks such as the framework for higher education qualifications and relevant qualification and subject benchmark statements.
- Comment on whether UCEM programmes meet industry needs and the requirements of any relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs).
- Advise on the comparability of student work and achievement with those at other institutions.
- Assist UCEM in ensuring that assessment processes are rigorous and fair and are conducted in line with UCEM policies, procedures and regulations.
- Assist in enhancing the quality of learning, teaching and assessment by commenting on areas for improvement and also through identifying areas of good practice for wider dissemination.
- Comment on the design of new programmes or changes to existing programmes.

Through acting as a 'critical friend', the role of the External Examiner (EE) is one of the most effective means of monitoring standards and maintaining the academic and professional relevance of programmes through quality enhancement.

3. Programmes requiring External Examiners

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.

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, on whose behalf appointments are made by the External Examiner Appointments Subcommittee of the Quality Standards and Enhancement Committee (QSEC).

UCEM operates a two-tier system with the Board of Examiners being made up of a Module Board and then a Progression and Award Board. All External Examiners are allocated modules for which they have oversight and are therefore invited to the relevant Module Boards. External Examiners may be invited to take on the role of Award Board Examiners where they will be responsible for certain awards and invited to attend the Progression and Awards Board. Resubmission Progression and Award Boards are held following the resubmission period. External Examiner attendance at the Resubmission Progression and Award Boards is organised on a rota basis and it is anticipated that External Examiners would attend one Resubmission Progression and Award Board over their tenure.

4. External Examiner Appointment

UCEM ensures that it appoints External Examiners in line with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance on External Expertise as follows:

- *Have a higher degree of competence and experience in the fields covered by the course of study, or parts thereof, and have a good understanding of the UK higher education sector (Academic EEs only).*

- *are appropriately experienced in course design and student assessment at the level of the award (Academic EEs only).*

- *have the necessary academic experience and subject knowledge to assess standards in an effective manner, identify good practice and recommend enhancements to enable informed course development (All EEs).*

- *are experienced in acting as an external examiner or are supported by the provider in undertaking their duties, for example, through training and mentoring (All EEs).*

- *are impartial in judgement and wholly independent of the provider and its staff (including the governing body), and any relevant partners (All EEs).*

- *do not personally benefit from any student outcomes, nor have any connection to any student being assessed (All EEs).*

- *have had sufficient experience in quality assurance to enable them to discharge their role effectively (Academic EEs only).*

- *are drawn from a relevant variety of institutional or professional contexts and traditions in order that the course benefits from wide-ranging external scrutiny (All EEs).*

- *comply with all relevant employment legislation, including safeguarding, as appropriate (All EEs).*

- *normally hold a limited number of concurrent external examining engagements (for example either one or two) (All EEs).*

Before appointing an External Examiner, a review is undertaken to ensure that there is no conflict of interest. UCEM will not appoint an External Examiner under the following circumstances due to actual or perceived conflicts of interest:

- They are or have been in the last five years a:
    - Member of the UCEM Board of Trustees or deliberative committee
    - Member of a collaborative partner institution
    - A UCEM employee including an Associate Tutor
    - A UCEM student.

- They have a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a UCEM member of staff or student on the programme concerned.

- They work for an institution where UCEM has a member of staff acting as External Examiner.

- The succession of an External Examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home department and institution or the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department and institution.

- They already hold two External Examiner appointments for taught programmes or modules.

For the purposes of avoiding reciprocal arrangements UCEM holds a register of staff commitments to external examining, which is reviewed and updated when a change arises with a full review on an annual basis by the External Examiners Appointments Subcommittee.

Where a new or replacement External Examiner is required nominations will be made by the relevant Programme Leader. Nominations are put forward for approval by the External Examiner Appointments Subcommittee and reported to QSEC. UCEM provides the appointee with a briefing in respect of the terms of the appointment and their role, powers and responsibilities.

Any changes to the terms of an External Examiners appointment must be approved by the External Examiner Appointments Committee.

5. Length of Term

An External Examiner appointment will normally be for a period of four years from the commencement of the first semester. This may be extended by one year under certain circumstances. 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 External Examiner's report.

At the end of the term of office the External Examiner will be formally thanked by the Board of Examiners and will be requested to submit an overview within their annual report looking back over the term of office.

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.

5.1   Dealing with Conflicts of Interest

Notwithstanding the information contained in section 4, 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 Academic Registry as soon as it is known. 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.

Conflicts of interest may also build up over time through repeated engagement with the same provider.

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.

6.   Interruption of appointment

There may be circumstances where an External Examiner is unable to undertake their duties in the current year of appointment (for example due to pregnancy or illness) and wishes to interrupt their appointment for a defined period, up to a maximum of twelve months. This period of interruption will still count towards their four-year period of appointment. There will be no fees paid to the External Examiner during the period of interruption.

To request to interrupt their appointment External Examiners must provide written notification to the Head of Academic Registry and allow reasonable notice for UCEM to appoint an interim External Examiner from the home institution of External Examiner that has interrupted their appointment. In the event that a suitable interim cannot be found UCEM may have to terminate the External Examiner appointment.

If at the end of the period of interruption the External Examiners is unable to return to their duties, then the interim External Examiner may be appointed for the remaining tenure.

7.   Termination of appointment

7.1 External Examiner resignation

An External Examiner, who wishes to resign from their duties with UCEM, must write to the Head of Academic Registry stating the reasons for termination of appointment (in line with the External Examiners Statement of Appointment) and the effective date of termination.

7.2 Termination of appointment by UCEM

UCEM reserves the right to terminate an External Examiners appointment or not re-appoint in the following circumstances, without notice:

- 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.
- A conflict of interest arises during the term of appointment which cannot be managed effectively.

- If UCEM believes that there has been unprofessional conduct on the part of the External Examiner.
- UCEM perceives there to be an irretrievable breakdown of the relationship.
- If the programme closes or changes are being made to the programme that make the appointment no longer applicable.

In the above cases and once all reasonable steps have been taken to alleviate the situation a decision to terminate or not to re-appoint an External Examiner is approved by the Chair of the External Examiner Appointments Subcommittee and Chair of the Quality Standards and Enhancement Committee.

8. 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/webinar 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 External Examiner Appointments Subcommittee; 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.

External Examiners will be provided with access to the following information via the External Examiner VLE area:

- QAA and HEA resources for External Examiners including details of QAA's Concerns scheme;
- UCEM Code of Practice;
- UCEM Academic and Programme Regulations;
- Programme Specifications;
- Boards of Examiners Terms of reference;
- Access to the online External Examiner report form, and guidance on how to submit;
- programme reports;
- copies of previous External Examiners' reports for their allocated programme (if available);
- schedule of key dates for the next academic year;
- a copy of the assessment scrutiny flow chart process.

The following information will also be made available to enabling them to undertake their duties:

- a complete set of draft summative assessment papers prior to the scrutiny meeting with a proforma report form;

- an invitation to attend UCEM during the day before the UCEM Module Board or Progression and Award Board to review a sample of assessment scripts.

9. External Examiner Responsibilities

9.1 Programme development

External Examiners may be consulted on proposals for the introduction of new programmes or in relation to changes to existing programmes in line with the Code of Practice chapters on Programme Development and Validation and Programme Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation.. External Examiners normally should be consulted about proposed amendments to programmes that may affect assessment or progression.

9.2 Scrutiny of draft summative assessment

External Examiners are invited to scrutinise and approve summative assessments.

Draft summative assessment and where appropriate marking guides are provided to External Examiners and they normally have a two week period to make comment and propose changes. Any accessibility issues should be reported to a member of the Timetabling and Operations team.

9.3 Assessment sampling

An appropriate sample of marked assessment scripts should be made available to the External Examiner in advance of the Board of Examiners meeting. If an External Examiner wishes to look at a particular assignment outside of the sample, they should contact a member of the Academic Standards team with this request.

Any accessibility issues should be reported to a member of the Academic Standards team.

External Examiners should have seen sufficient assessment to assure themselves that internal marking and the identification of award classifications are of an appropriate and consistent standard.

The record of the internal moderation process must be made available to the External Examiners. It is the role of the External Examiner to ensure that UCEM's policy on moderation of marks has been correctly applied and not to second mark assessments.

The outcome of this review is that the External Examiner confirms the marks for the module or requests that the work be remarked or recommends that the marks are adjusted.

External Examiners are asked to comment as part of their annual report on whether marking criteria is properly and consistency applied, that marking and grading are fair and reliable and the quality and standard of feedback given to students is consistent.

9.4 Academic Misconduct

In exceptional circumstances External Examiners may be consulted over cases of suspected academic misconduct.

9.5 Attendance at meetings of Boards of Examiners

External Examiners are full members of the Board 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 chapter on Boards of Examiners.

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.

Circumstances may arise where an External Examiner may not be able to attend a meeting of either a Module Board or a Progression and Award Board. 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 provided by the Academic Standards team to confirm that they have reviewed the necessary paperwork.

9.6 Mitigating circumstances

External Examiners normally are not expected to adjudicate on cases of mitigating circumstances submitted by students. These are considered by the UCEM Mitigating Circumstances Panel which meets prior to the Boards of Examiners. The recommendations of the Mitigating Circumstances Panel are presented at the meetings of Module Boards; however, to ensure the confidentiality of such mitigating circumstances the exact nature and student names would not be disclosed 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 chapter on Boards of Examiners.

9.7 Awarding prizes

The External Examiner may be asked to advise the Progression and Award Board on prizes to be awarded to outstanding candidates.

9.8 Confirmation of results

Following the Board of Examiners meeting the External Examiners are required to confirm in writing that they are satisfied that for the modules or programmes they have been invited to examine the outcomes of the assessment are fair. External Examiners sign a proforma to confirm the marks and that the decision has been made in accordance with the regulations.

9.9 Viva voce examinations

External examiners may be required to conduct viva voce examinations or to agree in advance whether this option will be used in certain circumstances.

9.10 The role of External Examiners in quality enhancement

A key part of the role of the External Examiner is identify areas of good practice for wider dissemination as well as identifying areas for further enhancement. External Examiners are asked to comment on strengths of the programme and to identify any areas for improvement or development.

The feedback from External Examiners is used to inform annual programme review and areas for enhancement are included within quality enhancement plans.

10. 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 Academic Registry or the relevant Dean/Associate Dean – School of the Built Environment/Programme Leader/Module 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 by the date specified. This should be submitted on an online form available on the External Examiner VLE area. The External Examiner will be asked to comment upon:

- Academic standards and student performance.
- The assessment process.
- The operation of the Board of Examiners.
- Access to information and support when fulfilling their duties.
- Areas for enhancement and areas of good practice for wider dissemination.

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.

11. Consideration of External Examiners' Reports

On receipt External Examiner Reports are circulated to the Programme Leader and the Academic Quality Unit (AQU). The Programme Leader drafts a response to the report. All responses are reviewed by the a representative of AQU before going forward to the Associate Dean - School of the Built Environment for sign-off. The response is then issued to the External Examiner along with a covering letter. All actions as a result of External Examiner feedback must be addressed in a timely manner and are logged and tracked on the programme quality enhancement plan.

The report and response will inform the annual monitoring process and will be made available at the Annual Programme Review, Programme Committee meeting and Programme Review Panel and to 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.

AQU compiles an annual report on all External Examiner feedback which is presented to QSEC and Academic Board.

12. Procedures in the case of serious concerns

External Examiners retain the right to submit a confidential report direct to the Principal of UCEM via principaloffice@ucem.ac.uk, 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 (opens new window) and/or inform the relevant PSRBs.

13. Student participation

External Examiners' names, position and institution will be made available to students via the VLE. 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.

External Examiners Reports will be made available to students via the VLE except for the confidential reports made directly to the Principal.

Student Representatives are invited to consider the External Examiner Report and UCEM's Response as part of Student Representative meetings.

14. Fees

External Examiners are paid an annual fee encompassing scrutiny of assessment, attendance at Module Boards and completion 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.

UCEM will arrange travel and accommodation for External Examiners as required in order for them to carry out their duties. Other reasonable subsistence expenses are payable in line with UCEM's expenses policy. .

Signed by: *HEdwards*

Helen Edwards
Chair of the Quality Standards and Enhancement Committee

Date: 20th December 2021

Appendix A   Related Policies

References

Quality Assurance Agency UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: External Expertise (2018)

Benchmarked guidance

Higher Education Academy (2012) – A Handbook for External Examining (2012) (opens new window)

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) (opens new window)

Related Policies and other relevant documents

UCEM Academic and Programme Regulations

UCEM Code of Practice: *Boards of Examiners*

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

UCEM Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2020-25

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

UCEM Code of Practice: *Programme Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation*

UCEM documentation relating to External Examiners' appointments

The following documents are available on request (via externalexaminers@ucem.ac.uk)

1. External Examiner Nomination Form
2. External Examiner's Statement of Appointment
3. Proposed Change to External Examiner's Responsibilities Form
4. External Examiner Absence Form
5. External Examiner's End of Year Report Questions
6. Response to External Examiner Annual Report Template