

## 10.1 External Examiners

**Please note this information applies to External Examiners for The Open University accredited programmes. Information relating to External Examiners for University of Hertfordshire (UH) accredited programmes can be found on the University of Hertfordshire website. ([www.herts.ac.uk](http://www.herts.ac.uk))**

The purposes of the Open University's external examiner system are to ensure that:

- Degrees awarded by the Partner Institutions meet or exceed the academic standards specified in external points of reference such as the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications*, subject benchmark statements, the QAA Code of Practice, and (where appropriate) the requirements of professional bodies.
- The academic standards of awards are consistent with those in comparable HEIs.
- The assessment system is fair and is fairly operated in the awarding and classification of degrees. The external examiner may be consulted in the course of any investigation into any suspected irregularity in examination performance of the production or assessed work.

### Selection of External Examiners

The Centre for Collaborative Partnerships (CICP) has responsibility for appointing appropriate External Examiners for programmes validated by them.

### Induction of External Examiners

At the time of their appointment, all external examiners will be provided with the following:

- The Open University's Guide to External Examining
- Name and contact information for the relevant Programme Lead and Chair of the relevant Programme Examination Board
- Copies of relevant programme information including Programme Specifications, student guides, assessment criteria and Academic regulations
- Access to learning materials as appropriate. This may include hard copies or temporary access to the eLearning materials
- Copy of the previous year's External Examiner reports
- Relevant expenses and claim forms
- The opportunity to meet students or members of the wider programme team
- Key dates of Board meetings and agreement for timing of receipt of work.

### Role and Responsibilities of External Examiners

#### Approval of summative assessment

The external examiner(s) has the right, if they wish to do so, to request that they are consulted as part of the process for setting summatively assessed coursework or examination papers.

### **Assessment of examination scripts, summatively assessed coursework and other assessed work.**

An external examiner has the right to see all examination scripts, projects and other assessed work. In those cases where it is agreed with the external examiner that the inviting department that a sample of scripts/assessed work should be sent to the external examiner, rather than the external examiner seeing all summatively assessed work, the principles for such selection should be agreed by the chair of the board of examiners with the external examiner in advance. The range of, and rationale for, the sample moderated by the external examiner should be recorded in the minutes of the Board of Examiners.

The guiding principle for any selection of scripts/assessed work is that external examiners should have enough evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and are consistent. This should constitute a minimum of the top, middle and bottom papers within a cohort as well as borderline and fail if appropriate.

It is the normal principle that external examiners should not act as second markers of scripts/assessed work but as moderators. Issues with marking should have been resolved prior to presentation at Programme Examination Board.

External examiners may only change the marks for individual pieces of assessment where they have moderated the full run of that assessment task. Where external examiners have moderated a sample of work for an assessment task and are not content with the marks awarded (for example they feel that marks are over-harsh, over-generous or inconsistent), they should make recommendations on the systematic steps to be taken to address their concerns (this might include for example recommending that work be double marked in full, that work be re-marked, or increasing or reducing the marks awarded to all the candidates concerned in a systematic fashion whose rationale and procedure are recorded).

### **Meetings with students**

External examiners are encouraged where possible and practicable to meet with groups of students in order to obtain feedback on the student learning experience and the programme(s) as a whole. While there is no requirement for external examiners to conduct such meetings, Education for Health recognises the added value such meetings can provide for external examiners and students. Where such meetings take place, the discussions at such meetings should not inform the consideration of the individual students at a board of examiners and this must be made clear to students when they are invited to such meetings.

### **Role as member of board of examiners**

An external examiner is a full member of the board of examiners and is required to attend final examiners' meetings in accordance with the expectations outlined in this Handbook. If an external examiner cannot attend a meeting where his/her presence is required:

- permission for the external examiner to be absent must be obtained from the chair of the relevant Programme Examination Board, and if granted the reason for absence should be documented
- there must be clear evidence for the views of the external examiner on the marks awarded;
- the external examiner should be available for consultation;
- the external examiner should receive a copy of the minutes of the meeting and related documentation.

The following are typically regarded as good reasons for absence:

- illness or bereavement or similar personal difficulties;
- an unavoidable clash of commitments;
- a very small number of students on a programme where the external examiner has seen all the assessed work and no complications have arisen.

The views of an external examiner must be particularly influential in the case of disagreement on the mark to be awarded for a particular assessment, or on the final classification to be derived from the array of marks of a particular student at the examiners' meeting. In such circumstances the final decision rests with the board of examiners as a whole, with the views of the respective examiners being made known to the board.

The signature of an external examiner must be appended to the final list of results as evidence that he or she:

- accepts the classification/award decisions;
- accepts that procedures have been followed, to the best of his/her knowledge.

However, this does not prejudice any future review of the marks in the context of an appeal.

### **Assessment irregularities**

The external examiner may be consulted in the course of any investigation into any suspected irregularity in examination performance or the production of assessed work.

### **Assessment process and curriculum design**

- External examiners should be encouraged to comment on the assessment process and the assessment criteria.
- External examiners may often be able to give valuable advice to internal examiners.
- External examiners should use the opportunity afforded by their visits to discuss the design, structure and content of modules and the degree programme(s); the modes of learning, teaching and assessment employed; and the assessment procedures. They may be invited to comment on proposals for new programmes and should be invited to comment on proposals for new modules.

Any comments or suggestions made by the external examiner should be discussed by the relevant module or programme development committee and an explicit decision made about whether or not to introduce changes. This discussion and its outcome should be minuted.

### **External examiners' reports**

External examiners are required to make written reports annually using the template supplied by CICIP. These reports are submitted electronically. Reports should be submitted as soon as possible at the end of each academic year.

When completing the Annual Report Form, external examiners should not refer to specific members of staff or students.

Following the receipt of an external examiner's report the relevant Programme Lead is responsible for acknowledging receipt of and circulating a copy of the Report to the chair of the relevant Programme Examination Board and other internal staff as appropriate.

If matters of concern are raised it is the responsibility of the chair of the relevant Programme Examination Board, working with the Programme Lead to ensure that appropriate action is taken. Reports from external examiners should be discussed at both module and programme development committees and responses discussed and agreed by the Academic Board.

The Programme Lead is responsible for informing the external examiner in writing of the actions to be taken in response to their report. If action is not to be taken, an explanation should be given of the reason for this. If an external examiner is not content with the response received they may raise this with the chair of the Programme Examination Board. External Examiners may also make an additional and separate confidential report to the Chief Executive.

If an external examiner has serious concerns related to academic standards and has exhausted the internal procedures (including referral to CICIP) without these serious concerns being addressed to their satisfaction, they may raise these issues with the QAA through its Concerns scheme, details of which are available at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Complaints/concerns/Pages/default.aspx> .