

External Examining Policy and Procedure

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. This policy and procedure outlines the principles and requirements relating to external examining of taught awards at Health Sciences University, including the arrangements for the nomination, appointment and induction of external examiners, their remit, and the roles and responsibilities of specific staff across the University.
- 1.2. The policy and procedure is intended for Health Sciences University staff and new and existing external examiners.
- 1.3. The application of the policy and procedure set out in this document is supported by the following:
 - The External Examiner's Handbook (for new and existing external examiners)
 - Associated templates and forms (listed at the end of this document)
 - Policies and Procedures with direct relevance (listed at the end of this document)

2. Responsibilities

- 2.1. **Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC)** is responsible for oversight of all external examiner appointments, the application of policy and procedure relating to external examiners and the application of external examiner annual reporting within the broader annual monitoring and quality assurance framework.
- 2.2. **The People and Development team** are responsible for ensuring the appointment of external examiners meet the requirements as set out in employment law, including the provision of UK right to work checks.
- 2.3. **Heads of School/Centre** are responsible for retaining oversight of external examiner arrangements across the courses within the school/centre, and for reviewing and granting approval for nominations for new external examiner appointments

- 2.4. **Course Leaders** are responsible for liaising directly with and offering information and support to external examiners throughout nomination and appointment. Course Leaders are required to provide a response to the external examiner annual report, and ensure that this is made available to learners.
- 2.5. **The Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance)** is responsible, on delegated authority from ASQC, for the review and approval of external examiner appointments. The Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) is also responsible for the oversight of the procedures and processes relating to external examining and the management and provision of all information relating to external examiner appointments, and for the management of external examiner reporting procedures.
- 2.6. **The Deputy Academic Registrar** is responsible for oversight of external examiner involvement with assessment review and assessment board procedures
- 2.7. **Course Administrators** are responsible for liaising directly with and providing support, information and documentation to external examiners throughout appointment.

3. Policy Principles

- 3.1. The system of external examining is one of the key mechanisms through which Health Sciences University ensures that academic standards and assessment practices are appropriate, and comparable and consistent with national standards.
- 3.2. External examiners provide independent verification that the awards of the University are at an appropriate academic standard, that the performance of learners is comparable to those on similar courses within the sector and that our assessment process measures learner achievement appropriately against the intended learning outcomes of the course.
- 3.3. External examiners provide an independent view of the effectiveness of Health Sciences University Assessment process and play a key role in ensuring the quality of learning opportunities is maintained and enhanced.
- 3.4. All courses leading to an award of the University, including the award of credit, must have at least one independent external examiner. No award may be made without participation in the assessment process by at least one external examiner, who is a full member of the relevant Assessment Board. Separate arrangements may apply where a certificate of completion (without the award of HE credit) is made.

4. Criteria for appointment and the appointment process

- 4.1. External examiners are appointed in accordance with specific criteria designed to ensure appropriate qualification, ability to provide impartial, independent advice, subject specific knowledge and awareness of good practice. The criteria ensure all appointed external examiners are capable of confirming the integrity and rigour of assessment practice and comment on learner achievement in relation to academic standards.
- 4.2. All new external examiner appointments, reallocation of duties and extension of term of appointment must be approved by the Head of School/Centre and Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) acting on behalf of Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC). Oversight of all external examiner appointments is included in the Terms of Reference for ASQC.
- 4.3. The duration of an external examiner's appointment will normally be for four years, with an exceptional extension of one year where this will ensure continuity. External examiners are required to inform the University if, during their appointment, they become involved with the University in such a way that their independence is undermined. The University may also terminate an appointment if responsibilities are not being met as agreed at the time of appointment.
- 4.4. The University has a responsibility to prevent illegal working in the UK, as required under the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act. Under this Act, the University is required to check the right to work documentation of all external examiners, including those who are already working for another UK employer.

5. Remit, preparation, training and support

- 5.1. All external examiners will be expected to fulfil the role in alignment with the principles set out in section 17 and within the External Examiner Handbook. The specific duties of each examiner will be set out in writing on appointment. In addition, external examiners may be invited to comment on curriculum changes during periodic review or modification of courses and units.

- 5.2. Experienced external examiners may be asked to mentor other examiners who are new to the role. See section 15 for more information
- 5.3. External examiners are full members of the Assessment Board. External examiners are required to be present at all relevant Assessment Boards at which decisions on recommendations for awards are made.
- 5.4. All new external examiners will be provided with key documentation and an induction to ensure they have the information they require to fulfil their role. External examiners will also be provided with the names and contact details for key staff who will act as their support throughout their appointment. Additional information, in the form of annual briefings and ad-hoc communications will be shared throughout the appointment period.

6. Key interactions with the course(s)

- 6.1. External examiners provide assurance that the assessment process is properly designed and applied. The review of course documentation and proposed assessment briefs prior to them being delivered ensures that this aspect of the role is not entirely retrospective. Samples of learner's assessed work, which have been independently marked, must be made available for external examiner review in order for them to confirm that the required standards for the level have been met.
- 6.2. External examiners must have access to the relevant members of staff who form the course team, but must not be used to resolve disagreements relating to internal assessment. External examiners are required to review assessed learners' work, once this has been moderated in accordance with the Marking and Moderating Policy for all Higher Education courses and units (Health Sciences University awards), to review internal consistency and external comparability of standards. Moderation by external examiners should not result in changes to the marks for individual learners, and where changes are recommended on the grounds of academic standards, these must be presented to the Assessment Board.
- 6.3. In order to build a good understanding of the course, and to enable external examiners to make a judgement on the learning experience, external examiners will have the opportunity to meet with learners on the course.

7. Reporting

- 7.1. External examiners report annually to the University on issues pertaining to standards and quality of the provision to which their appointment relates and receive a fee on receipt of their annual report. External examiners may also report confidentially directly to the Vice Chancellor on serious issues of concern which have not been resolved satisfactorily.
- 7.2. External examiner reports are made available to the learners on the associated course(s). The reports and feedback from external examiners form an integral part of the Annual Monitoring procedure as set out in *Course and Unit Monitoring Policy and Procedure*. The content of all external examiner reports is also reviewed as a whole and informs the annual Assurance Report presented to the Academic Board and Board of Governors.

8. Educational Partnership provision

- 8.1. Where courses leading to an award of Health Sciences University are delivered in partnership with another institution, the selection, approval and engagement of external examiners will remain the responsibility of the University, unless an exception is specifically outlined in the partnership agreement.

9. Apprenticeship provision

- 9.1. Where external examiner appointments are being made for Apprenticeship courses, the selection, approval and engagement of external examiners will be in accordance with this policy and procedure. Additional requirements may be defined as part of the nomination and appointment procedures.

10. Sector engagement

- 10.1 Health Sciences University recognises the importance of the role of external examiners for higher education institutions and encourages its own staff to actively engage with and seek external examining opportunities within the sector.

Procedure

11. Nomination and approval procedure

- 11.1. External examiner nominations must be made in the academic year prior to the tenure of the current examiner ending, or in the academic year prior to the start of a new course. Approval should be completed

and the examiner in post for September of January (depending on the course start).

- 11.2. Course Leaders are responsible for nominating new external examiners, utilising the approved external examiner nomination form and person specification. A nominee may also provide a CV and this can be appended to the form for additional information. Incomplete forms will not be accepted.
- 11.3. Nominations must meet the criteria as set out in the 'Health Sciences University External Examiner Person Specification'.
- 11.4. In order to avoid conflicts of interest, external examiners may not be appointed if:
- they are a member of the University's governing body or a committee of the governing body or serve on the governing body or a committee of the governing body of one of our collaborative partners
 - they are a current employee of the University or one of our collaborative partners
 - they have previously acted as an external examiner at the University
 - they have a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the course
 - they may be required to assess colleagues who are recruited as learners to the course;
 - they would personally benefit from any student outcomes, or if they have any connection to any learner being assessed
 - they are 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 course; (normally a period of five years should have passed since the nominee's engagement with the University although depending on the nature of the previous interaction, a shorter period may be considered)
 - they are a former staff member or student of the University unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their courses
 - there is a reciprocal arrangement within the School/Centre involving cognate courses at another institution
 - the previous external examiner for that course came from the same department and institution
 - the appointment would mean there was more than one external examiner within a School from the same department of the same institution.
- 11.5. The following criteria will also be given consideration as part of the approval process;
- They have had less significant prior involvement with the institution, for instance through involvement in a course consideration panel,
 - The number and nature of other external examinerships they are already undertaking
 - Whether they have experience of external examining (if they do not, a mentoring arrangement will be required- see section 4.19)
- 11.6. The nomination should be reviewed and approved by the Head of School/Centre. School approved nominations should then be sent to the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) for final approval. The Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) may seek additional oversight from an academic colleague as part of the approval process.

12. Appointment Procedure

- 12.1. On approval, an appointment letter, signed by the Vice Chancellor, will be provided to the external examiner by the Quality team. This letter includes the terms of appointment. External examiners are required to review and respond to the appointment and provide the required documentation in order to satisfy the Right to Work checks. This forms the basis of the contract for the external examiner role.
- 12.2. Once Right to Work checks are confirmed as complete, the external examiner will be granted access to the relevant University IT systems. Induction arrangements will commence only once the appointment procedure is complete.

13. Revision, Extension, Resignation or Termination of Appointment

- 13.1. Revisions and reallocations to external examiner duties are requested via the submission of a 'Revision form'. The form should be completed by the Course Leader and the external examiner. The Head of School/Centre is required to review and approve the reallocation request and then forward to the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) for final approval. The Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) may seek additional oversight from an academic colleague as part of the approval process.

- 13.2. Should it be deemed appropriate for an extension to tenure to be requested, this must be made in writing by the Course Leader. The request must provide a rationale for extension (for example that the existing external examiner is asked to continue duties whilst a closing course runs out) and must confirm that the external has agreed to the extension. Extension requests should be submitted in the first instance to the Head of School/Centre for review and approval, and should then be sent to the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) for final approval. The Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) may seek additional oversight from an academic colleague as part of the approval process. Extensions can only be granted for a maximum of one year.
- 13.3. If an external examiner resigns before the end of the agreed term of office, the Course Leader is required to take immediate steps to identify and nominate a replacement, in accordance with the procedure set out above. A brief description of the reasons for resignation should be provided to the Head of School/Centre and Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance).
- 13.4. If a conflict of interest should arise during the period of appointment, the external examiner must draw this to the attention of the Course Leader and Head of School/Centre as soon as possible. The nature of the potential conflict of interest will be given consideration and if necessary, a new external examiner nomination may be required.
- 13.5. At the end of the normal appointment period the external examiner will be sent a letter of thanks. The Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) will act on behalf of the Vice Chancellor, utilising a template letter.
- 13.6. External examiners are required to undertake the responsibilities and duties set out within the appointment letter and person specification at the time of appointment. External examiner appointments may be terminated at any time in the following circumstances:
- by either party upon giving the other one month's written notice; or
 - by the University, by giving written notice with immediate effect
 - in the event of a breach by the external examiner of the terms of the appointment, such as -
 - failure to attend Assessment Board meetings without the prior agreement of the Chair and without arranging an alternative means to input to the meetings
 - failure to submit an annual report within the specified time
 - submission of more than one inadequate annual report
 - failure to carry out other duties agreed to at the time of appointment
 - in the event of a conflict of interest arising during the term of office which cannot be resolved or addressed by other means.
- 13.7. Recommendations for termination of contract for non-performance of duties in line with the criteria above must be made by the Head of School/Centre, using the termination form, and approved by the Deputy Vice Chancellor. If termination is approved, the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) will arrange for a termination of appointment letter to be sent to the external examiner, signed by the Vice Chancellor. Terminations of appointment will be reported to ASQC.

14. Induction

- 14.1. Following confirmation of approval of a new external examiner, the relevant Course Administrator will arrange for information to be shared, and will organise an induction session.
- 14.2. Induction may be offered to more than one external at a time where this is deemed appropriate. Induction sessions will cover:
- the individual examiner's role and the extent of their discretion
 - background information about the institution, including the mission, vision and values
 - a meeting with the Course Leader (and where appropriate other members of the course team)
 - review of the Assessment Regulations and relevant Assessment Policy and Procedures, Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure, Fitness to Practice Policy and Procedure and the Disciplinary and Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policies and Procedures
 - an outline of the standard examining and reporting structure, timelines, format, procedures and institution's responses, including the annual report template and dates of relevant meetings
 - information and documentation relating to claims procedures and expenses allowances
 - Information/advice on the use of the VLE or equivalent electronic systems.
- 14.3. Induction must be completed prior to the examiner commencing their role. External examiners will be given the opportunity, as part of induction, to request any additional materials or information to assist them with the role.

15. *Mentoring and additional support*

- 15.1. Where an inexperienced external examiner is appointed, mentoring arrangements should be agreed as part of the approval procedure. Mentoring should be undertaken by an existing external for another course, ideally in the same academic subject area and ideally who has been in post as an external examiner at the University for at least one academic cycle. The Course Leader is responsible for making arrangements for mentoring and confirming these as part of the nomination procedure. The Course leader must also ensure that the external examiner is provided with any additional support required in order to complete the role, and additional information about the academic standards and quality expected of courses at the relevant level in UK higher education may also be required. The external examiner should be encouraged to take advantage of national training opportunities available.

16. *Information to support the role*

- 16.1. The Deputy Academic Registrar, working with the relevant Course Administrators will ensure that all relevant documentation is provided to external examiners on an annual basis, to support their role.
- 16.2. The Deputy Academic Registrar and Course Administrators will also ensure that all external examiners have the required access to the VLE or equivalent systems for accessing assessments, and understand how to access the materials. This will be checked on an annual basis, ahead of the assessment period.
- 16.3. At the start of each academic cycle, a briefing will be provided for all external examiners outlining key changes to Policy and Procedure and sharing updates relating to the University as a whole.

17. *Responsibilities of external examiners*

- 17.1. The full details of the role and responsibilities of external examiners is set out in the External Examiner Handbook which should be reviewed alongside this policy and procedure.
- 17.2. As well as ensuring the role is fulfilled in accordance with the terms set out and agreed to upon appointment, external examiners are required to complete their duties in accordance with the policy and procedure set out within the academic framework.
- 17.3. This includes;
- The review of proposed assessment briefs and examination papers, with an opportunity to recommend updates and changes
 - Oversight of the proposed assessment guidelines, schedule and moderation plan
 - Confirmation of the proposed sample sizes for specific assessments
 - Confirmation of how any 'live' assessments will be made available to the external examiner for review
 - Arrangements for external examiners to meet with groups of learners to gain an understanding of the student experience
- 17.4. Sample sizes are determined within the Marking and Moderation Policy and Procedure and are designed to ensure that external examiners have the opportunity to review enough assessments to identify any trends. Where trends create a cause for concern in relation to marking practices, the external examiner must raise this with the course team in the first instance, in an effort to rectify prior to the Assessment Board.

18. *Assessment Boards*

- 18.1. Policy and Procedures relating to the arrangements for Assessment Boards is set out in the Assessment Boards Policy and Procedure.
- 18.2. External examiners are expected to attend Assessment Boards. If an external examiner is unable to attend, the Course Leader, Course Administrator and Chair of the Assessment Board should be informed as early as possible in order that alternative arrangements can be made.
- 18.3. In the exceptional case of an external examiner being unwilling to endorse the outcomes of the assessment process following the Assessment Board, arrangements will be made for the external examiner to meet with the Chair of ASQC and the Chair of the Assessment Board to seek to understand and resolve the issues of concern. The external examiner should be asked to make clear whether the concerns are such that they are unable to confirm the outcomes for the learners on the relevant courses; if this is not the case and the concerns are more general in nature the external examiner should be encouraged to sign off the outcomes and raise the concerns separately in a confidential letter to the Vice Chancellor. Where concerns raised result in a delay of the release of marks to learners, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Head of School/Centre and Academic Registrar will agree the most appropriate way to communicate with those affected, including determining the timescale by

which results would be released.

19. External examiners' annual report

- 19.1. All external examiners are required to make an annual written report, using the approved template which is provided on an annual basis. The report must be submitted electronically no later than two weeks after the Assessment Board has taken place. Payment of fees will be conditional upon the receipt of these reports.
- 19.2. External examiners' reports will be in the public domain, and therefore should not refer to staff or learner by name.
- 19.3. An external examiner may make a separate report directly and confidentially to the Vice Chancellor on any matter of serious concern that may put at risk the standard of the University's awards. Should an external examiner choose to make such a confidential report, the Vice Chancellor will ask the Head of School/Centre (or nominee if there is a perceived conflict of interest) to follow up the issues raised and coordinate a response. A report on the issues and response will be made to ASQC (anonymised as appropriate, if the issues relate to specific individuals).

20. Consideration of External Examiner reports

- 20.1. On receipt of external examiner reports, the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) will review and log any negative comments or concerns, and provide the report to the Course Leader for consideration and formulation of a written response.
- 20.2. Course Leader responses to external examiners should be prompt and outline all actions that will be taken as a result of feedback provided. If the Course team disagree with recommendations made by the external examiner, this should be raised with the Head of School/Centre in the first instance and escalated to the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) and Deputy Vice Chancellor if resolution cannot be agreed.
- 20.3. All external examiner reports and responses should be presented to the Course Steering Committee and included in the annual Course Monitoring procedures. Where applicable, reports and responses should be made available to relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). Themes, trends and concerns raised within external examiner reports and confirmation of responses are included in the annual assurance report presented to ASQC, Academic Board and the Board of Governors.
- 20.4. Course Leaders are responsible for publishing external examiner reports to the VLE to ensure learners have the opportunity to review the comments and responses.

21. Associated documentation and forms

External Examiner Person Specification

External Examiners for Taught Courses: Nomination Form

External Examiners for Taught Courses: Revisions to Appointment, including extensions External Examiner

Termination of Appointment Form

External Examiner annual report form

External Examiners Handbook

Marking and Moderating Policy and Procedure

Assessment Regulations

Assessment Board Policy and Procedure

Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure

Fitness to Practice Policy and Procedure

Disciplinary Policy and Procedure

Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policy and Procedure

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Ratified by	Academic Audit and Policy Committee/Academic Board
Originator/Author	Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance)
Owner	Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance)
Reference source	UK Quality Code 2018. UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance, particularly Externality; Assessment. Examples from other institutions used as source material (in particular Bournemouth University and University of Southampton) Mapped against the UKSCQA 'External Examining Principles' (and associated

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