2I: External Examiners

**DEFINITION**

1. External examiners are people drawn from higher education and industry who are suitably qualified and experienced to be able to offer the University an independent assessment of academic standards, the quality of assessment and how standards compare with the same or similar awards at other higher education institutions.

**RESPONSIBILITIES AND TYPES OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

2. The role of external examiners is to ensure that the University’s academic standards are maintained and meet sector expectation and requirements. They do this by providing impartial and independent advice, as well as informative comment on the University’s assessment processes, identifying areas of concerns as well as highlighting areas of good practice.

3. The University appoints external examiners at module and award level.

**MODULE EXTERNAL EXAMINER RESPONSIBILITIES**

4. Module external examiners are responsible for confirming academic standards at module level on the basis of a sample of student work and should be confident that:

   i. the marking carried out by internal examiners is accurate, consistent and fair to students;

   ii. assessment is conducted in accordance with the regulations of the University and any requirements of professional and statutory bodies;

   iii. students are fairly placed in relation to the rest of the cohort;

   iv. assessment will enable students to demonstrate the achievement of the module learning outcomes; and

   v. assessments are set at an appropriate level.

**AWARD EXTERNAL EXAMINER RESPONSIBILITIES**

5. Award external examiners are responsible for confirming the standards of the University’s awards on the basis of attending progression and award boards and should be confident that:
i. board decisions are reached in accordance with University policies; and

ii. students are considered equitably and objectively.

**APPOINTMENT**

**AUTHORITY**

6. The Head of Quality Management has delegated authority from Academic Board for the appointment of external examiners nominated by the schools/services. Nomination for appointment are considered against explicit criteria (paragraphs 13 and 21).

**PROTOCOLS**

7. Newly appointed external examiners will normally commence on the 1st August and cease at the end of the academic session four years later. External examiners shall remain available until the conclusion of all business relating to the final academic session of their tenure.

8. An external examiner shall not normally be associated with the University for more than four academic years consecutively. In exceptional circumstances, an appointment may be extended by one year to ensure continuity.

9. To ensure external examiners are able to carry out their role effectively they should not normally hold more than the equivalent of one appointment elsewhere.

10. External examiners must be able to command the respect of their academic and professional peers and therefore should:

i. have appropriate standing, credibility, expertise and experience within the discipline to assess and advise the University regarding the maintenance and security of academic standards in the context of higher education as a whole;

ii. have knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;

iii. be able to judge students impartially without being influenced by previous association with the module or award, the staff, or any of the students; and

iv. be competent and have experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience, relevant higher education quality processes including assessment policies and assessment boards.

11. In order to maintain the integrity of the external examining role they must be independent and impartial to the University; therefore to avoid any potential conflicts of interest they must not:

i. be personally associated with the sponsorship of students;

ii. be required to assess colleagues recruited as students to the course;

iii. be in a position to influence significantly the future employment of students on the course;

iv. be likely to be involved with student placements or training in the examiner’s organisation.
v. be a near relative of a student or member of staff at the University or of a collaborative partner institution (for externals appointed to cover provision delivered by a partner institution);

vi. be part of a reciprocal external examining arrangement between their course/department and the academic school of the University being appointed to;

vii. have been a member of staff, a governor or student of the University or of a collaborative partner institution in the last five years;

viii. have been an External Examiner for the University or a collaborative partner institution in the last five years;

ix. be appointed from an institution that the University currently has five external examiners (module and award combined) appointed from;

x. act concurrently as members of any panel set up to review established or new courses;

xi. be from the same institution as another module external examiner already appointed to that subject area or has been the source of module external examiners for that subject area in the last five years (applicable to module external examiners only); or

xii. be from the same institution as another award external examiner currently appointed by the University or has been the source of award external examiners in the last five years (applicable to award external examiners only).

12. Exemptions may be permitted from the requirements stipulated in paragraphs 11 viii-xi where the course is complex and involves a large number of discrete subject areas, or where a subject area is so specialised that the number of institutions, or professional bodies, from which appropriate examiners can be drawn is very limited. In such instances, good cause must be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Head of Quality Management.

**MODULE EXTERNAL EXAMINER APPOINTMENT**

13. Module external examiners must be appointed to:

i. All modules at FHEQ level 5 and above;

ii. Any modules at FHEQ level 4 that contributes towards the classification of an award; and

iii. All modules at FHEQ level 4 for awards made at that level (e.g. HNC) or where required by a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB).

14. For collaborative provision module external examiners will be appointed to FHEQ level 4 only as part of any mitigation of risk identified through a quality process, in line with section 2G (Collaborative Provision) and approved by the Head of Quality Management. Circumstances where this may be required include where potential risks to the overall security of the standards of the University's awards were identified during the due diligence process, course approval/review, partnership approval/review, assessment boards etc. or the University does not have the relevant subject expertise internally to effectively carry out the internal moderation exercise.
15. It is the relevant Dean’s responsibility to ensure that where required each module within their school/service has in place a module external examiner, before the module is taught.

16. Module external examiners must have relevant academic and/or professional qualifications and expertise appropriate to the modules being assessed, as evidenced by their:

   i. highest qualification being at least equivalent to the highest level of the modules being appointed to;
   
   ii. present post and place of work (or recent if retired from employment);
   
   iii. range and scope of experience in higher education or in a professional capacity which includes assessing students’ knowledge and skills at the appropriate level and of designing and marking assessments;
   
   iv. current or recent research or other scholarly activity in the field of study; and
   
   v. awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula.

17. Module external examiners may be recruited from industry, provided that they meet the above criteria and are in a position to comment on the academic standards of the modules in comparison to the wider higher education sector.

18. External examiner module allocations are approved at the point of appointment by the Head of Quality Management. This may be varied on an annual basis to reflect changes to courses. Where changes would result in significant changes to the external’s workload they would need approval from the Head of Quality Management. External examiners will be informed of their module allocations at the start of each academic year.

AWARD EXTERNAL EXAMINER APPOINTMENT

19. Award external examiners are appointed with responsibility for all awards.

20. It is the Head of Quality Management’s responsibility to ensure that sufficient award external examiners have been appointed to guarantee appropriate representation at all the University’s progression and awards boards.

21. Award external examiners must have academic or professional qualifications and expertise to effectively undertake the responsibilities of the role, as evidenced by:

   i. The present post or place of work (or recent if retired from employment). The position held must be an appropriately senior role such as Academic Registrar, Dean of School/Faculty, Dean or Head of Quality and other suitably senior posts which includes a substantial level of higher education quality assurance management; and
   
   ii. Experience of quality assurance in higher education specifically the application of assessment regulations and understanding of assessment board processes.
BRIEFING AND INDUCTION

22. New external examiners should be briefed on their task as soon as possible after appointment, preferably by attending the annual external examiners’ briefing day. The briefing should cover the role and responsibility of external examiners and an introduction to relevant academic policies and regulations. External examiners should also be informed of any module/course specific requirements that apply to the modules they are appointed to, e.g. exemptions.

23. Module external examiners with no previous external examining experience must be mentored during their first year in post. Mentoring may take on a variety of forms but may include mentoring by a senior member of the course team or from an existing external examiner.

24. External examiners must be provided access to the necessary material information they need in order to undertake their roles effectively. This should include the University’s assessment policy and regulations, relevant course specifications, module descriptors and course handbooks. This information should be provided at the start of every academic year.

ROLE OF MODULE EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

25. Module external examiners should for their allocated modules:
   i. be able to compare the performance of students with that of their peers on comparable modules and awards elsewhere in higher education;
   ii. be competent and experienced in the fields covered by the modules they are to be appointed to;
   iii. provide advice and feedback on the form and content of all proposed examination papers, coursework and other assessments before they are given to students to help inform the University’s practice as it occurs;
   iv. confirm module assessment marks to the progression and award board; and
   v. report to the University on the appropriateness and effectiveness of assessment and make any recommendations for enhancement.

26. Having seen sufficient examples of student work, module external examiners have the right to moderate the marks awarded by the internal examiners but not to change any individual mark in isolation.

27. Module external examiners may also be consulted on:
   i. The development of new modules; or
   ii. Module and course modifications in line with Academic Handbook section 2F Module Approval and Course Modification.

28. Module external examiners are required to report annually on the standards of their allocated provision and will also be asked to comment on:
   i. that the threshold academic standards set for the provision is being maintained;
ii. that the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against intended learning outcomes;

iii. that the academic standards and achievement of students are comparable to the sector;

iv. the strengths and weaknesses of the students;

v. the quality of knowledge and skills (both generic and subject specific) demonstrated by the students;

vi. the structure, organisation, design and marking of all assessments;

vii. the quality of student learning as indicated by student performance;

viii. the implications to be drawn from the assessments for the curriculum, syllabus, teaching methods, and for the resources for the course; and

ix. good practice and innovation relating to the learning, teaching and assessment and opportunities for enhancement.

ROLE OF AWARD EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

29. Award external examiners should endorse the outcomes of the progression and award boards they attended, both at the meeting and by submitting a report after every board attended.

30. The report submitted will invite comment on:

i. The application of assessment regulations; and

ii. Course profiles and patterns of student attainment.

UNIVERSITY MONITORING

31. The University aims to provide external examiner’s with a considered and timely response to their reports. For modules attached to courses following the standard academic calendar, reports must be responded to by the end of September; for all other modules reports must be responded within four weeks of submission.

32. The Learning, Teaching and Student Achievement Committee (LTSAC) will annually receive an analysis report of the issues raised by external examiners’ and the subsequent actions taken by the schools/service.

33. Academic Board will receive annually a report on: the appointment of new external examiners; the distribution of institutions appointed from; and the appointment of Solent University staff as external examiners. They will also receive separately an annual summary of emergent themes arising from external examiners’ reports.

34. External examiner annual reports will be used during annual and cyclical review of courses and provided at course committee meetings.

RAISING CONCERNS
35. An external examiner has the authority to report directly to the Vice-Chancellor where there is a concern about standards and performance, particularly if it is considered that assessments are being conducted in ways which jeopardise either the fair treatment of individual students or the standards of the University’s awards.

36. Where an external examiner has a serious concern relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a course or courses and has exhausted all published applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor, they may invoke the ‘QAA’s concerns scheme’ or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body. The scheme’s focus is explicitly on systemic failings in the University’s management of standards or quality. Therefore, the scheme must not be used for one-off cases of ineffective practice, or to raise a personal grievance or issues relating to an appointment.

**TERMINATION OF AND CHANGES TO AGREEMENT**

37. The University reserves the right to review the external examiner appointment annually. Changes to the agreement will be communicated to external examiners and a revised agreement will be issued.

38. The external examiner agreement makes provision for early termination where either the external examiner or the University wishes to terminate the appointment before the agreed termination date. A minimum of three months notice should normally be given by either party, together with an indication of the reason(s) for termination.

39. Termination by the University would normally be on the grounds of course suspension/closure, course reorganisation or breach of contract by the external examiner.

40. An external examiner will be considered to be in breach of contract and therefore the agreement considered for termination when any or all of the following criteria are met:

   i. They no longer meet the requirements of independence and impartiality as stipulated in this policy;

   ii. Non-EEA citizens whose right to work visa expires during the term of their agreement fails to provide evidence of their continuing right to work in the UK;

   iii. They have been unable to carry out their external examining duties due to a period of absence;

   iv. A module external examiner has failed to engage in the moderation processes;

   v. An award external examiner has failed to attend an assessment board, at which they were expected without due notice;

   vi. An award external examiner has failed to attend two consecutive assessment boards, at which they were expected;

   vii. A module external examiner has failed to submit an annual report six weeks after the relevant progression and award board, without the agreement of the University; and

   viii. An award external examiner has failed to submit a report six weeks after an assessment board that they have attended, without the agreement of the University.