Annex K: External Examiners for Taught Programmes

1 No University qualification shall be awarded without participation in the examining process by at least one External Examiner, who should be a full member of the relevant Board of Examiners. External Examiners are responsible to the Senate which authorises the award of qualifications.

Nomination and Appointment of External Examiners

2 In considering recommendations from Schools for the appointment of External Examiners, the following will be taken into account:

2.1 Only persons of appropriate seniority and/or experience in the fields covered by the programme of study (or parts thereof) who are able to command authority should be appointed. They should normally hold a post at Senior Lecturer level or above at a research-intensive HEI. Persons who have recently retired from such posts may be considered for appointment provided that there is evidence that they are familiar with current expectations in UK Higher Education. External Examiners may also be appointed from outside the higher education system on the basis of demonstrable professional qualifications and experience particularly in the case of vocational awards. The University will normally only appoint UK-based External Examiners. A non UK-based External Examiner will only be considered under exceptional circumstances where a special justification is submitted along with the External Examiner appointment form for approval. Only persons who can offer an informed view on UK HE academic standards should be appointed.

2.2 The School must be satisfied that the nominee can demonstrate familiarity with the standard to be expected of students in order to achieve the award to be assessed.

2.3 The nominee must meet any applicable criteria set by relevant professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

2.4 In order to have sufficient time for the proper performance of their functions, individuals will not normally be expected to hold more than two appointments as an External Examiner for taught programmes/modules concurrently.

2.5 An External Examiner should not be appointed from a department/school in an institution where a member of the inviting School is serving as an examiner; exceptions may, however, occasionally be unavoidable in the case of subjects taught in only a very small number of institutions.

2.6 Where the delivery and/or assessment of a collaborative programme of study is conducted in a language other than English, at least one of the External Examiners appointed must be fluent in the language used. For further guidance on this, refer to Collaborative Provision: Policies and Procedures: Part 2, Section 2.6, Programmes Taught and/or Assessed in a Language other than English.

2.7 Where there is one or more of the following conflicts of interest, a person may not be appointed as an External Examiner:

   i. He or she is a member of a governing body or committee of University of Kent or one of its collaborative partners, or is a current employee of Kent or one of its collaborative partners (N.B. an individual would not be excluded from becoming an External Examiner of a University of Kent taught programme of study where he/she is or has been an External Examiner for a research degree awarded by the University of Kent);
UNIVERSITY OF KENT  
CODE OF PRACTICE FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

ii. has a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study in question;

iii. is required to assess colleagues who are also students on the programme of study;

iv. is, or will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study;

v. has been 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 or modules in question;

vi. is a former Kent staff member or student unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the nominee have completed their programme(s);

vii. there is a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution;

viii. the nominated External Examiner is from the same department in the same institution as the preceding External Examiner;

ix. the appointment of more than one External Examiner from the same department of the same institution.

3 Schools should submit nominations for appointment on the appropriate pro-forma for approval by the Dean on behalf of the Faculty and by the Vice-Chancellor on behalf of Senate and Council. The pro-forma must be accompanied by a curriculum vitae of the nominee together with information about similar appointments which the nominee holds or has held.

4 The number of External Examiners shall be sufficient to cover the full range of studies. More than one External Examiner may be needed where there is a large number of students or where the programme covers a wide range.

5 The period of service with the University for an External Examiner shall normally be four years, with an exceptional extension for a further one year in special circumstances.

6 An External Examiner will normally be appointed on one occasion only. He or she may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances, but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since the last appointment.

7 Each External Examiner, on appointment, should be sent a letter of appointment by the Quality Assurance Office together with information about the role and functions of External Examiners and about the University's procedures in relation to Boards of Examiners as set out in this Code of Practice. These shall together constitute a contract of employment.

8 External Examiners should be sent detailed information about the relevant programmes of study and systems of assessment by the School concerned.
Role and Responsibilities of External Examiners

9 The role and functions of External Examiners are as follows:

- To participate as a full member of the Board(s) of Examiners of which he/she is a member.
- To monitor and report on the standards set by the University for its awards in the subject area concerned in comparison with those of other institutions and to confirm that they are appropriate for qualifications at this level and in this subject.
- To review and comment, in advance, on examination question papers (including those for referrals and deferrals) which contribute to the classification of an award.
- To attend all meetings of the Board(s) of Examiners of which he/she is a member and at which decisions may be taken about awards to students, except as set out in section 17 below, and, where considered appropriate, to endorse the decisions reached.
- To monitor and report on the achievement of students.
- To monitor and report on the proceedings of the Board of Examiners and in particular on whether these ensure that students are treated fairly and consistently within institutional regulations and guidance.
- To monitor and report on whether assessment enables achievement by students of the stated learning outcomes to be tested.
- To monitor and report on whether marking is undertaken rigorously and in accordance with assessment criteria, in particular by reviewing the marking of samples of student work (including work for referrals and deferrals).
- Where appropriate, to observe student work, for example in the performing arts (see note 1 below).
- To monitor and report on whether students are offered appropriate opportunity to realise learning outcomes through work based learning, placement and employer links and its associated assessment.
- To discuss with internal examiners and to report on steps which might be taken to enhance the experience of students, the assessment process and the proceedings of the Board of Examiners.
- To report on good practice identified within the School.
- To submit an annual report to the University within four weeks of the main annual meeting of the Board of Examiners (i.e. where a programme of study has more than one Board of Examiners meeting per academic year the annual report should not be completed until after the final meeting has taken place).

Note 1: Prior consent is required from the Quality Assurance Office where this will exceed a total of six visits in one academic year.

9.1 External Examiners are required to complete an annual report per programme of study for which they are responsible, except in such cases where two or more programmes are closely linked in terms of a large number of shared modules. In such cases one report may be completed for the linked programmes of study.

9.2 Each annual report must be completed in sufficient detail so as to be of effective use to the School or partner institution. Where a report is considered to be insufficiently complete the School concerned or the Quality Assurance Office may request the External Examiner to revise the report.
Termination of Appointment

10 The University reserves the right to terminate the appointment of an External Examiner without notice where the Vice-Chancellor (or his/her nominee) considers that the Examiner has not properly undertaken the duties set out above or if a conflict of interest arises that cannot be satisfactorily resolved.

Consideration of External Examiners’ Reports

11 External Examiners should submit their reports via the above link (see the webpage for instructions) where they will be available to the University Quality Assurance Office and thence to the Faculties Support Office, Dean of the Faculty and the relevant Head of School. Where the Dean considers that a report raises matters of urgency or importance which should not await the response of the School, he/she shall ensure that such matters are drawn to the attention of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching or the Dean of the Graduate School.

12 The External Examiner’s report and the School’s response to that report should be considered by the relevant School Education Committee or Graduate Studies Committee, as appropriate to the level of the programme (under non-reserved business and there should not, therefore, be any identifiable references to students e.g. by use of student name, ID number or any other distinguishable reference). The School response to the report should then be uploaded to the online reporting system and will be checked by the Faculties Support Officer prior to it being forwarded to the External Examiner. The Faculties Support Office should produce a summary of External Examiners’ reports, which will be considered by the relevant Faculty Education/Graduate Studies Committees and forwarded to the Education Board or Graduate School Board (as appropriate). A summary of general issues and themes arising from the reports should be presented to the Education Board or Graduate School Board (as appropriate).

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13.1 External Examiners are invited to make recommendations to the School (including, in particular, any steps which might be taken to enhance the experience of students, the assessment process or the proceedings of the Board of Examiners) and to the University (in relation to aspects of institutional policy). Where reports include such recommendations to the School, the School should explicitly address those recommendations in its response to the External Examiner.

13.2 External Examiners’ reports should be received in full (with the exception of any confidential report submitted as per section 14 below) and recommendations to the School and the School response should be considered by the School Education Committee or the Graduate Studies Committee, as appropriate to the level of the programme (as per 12 above), and by the Staff-Student Liaison Committees. Consideration at Liaison Committees will explicitly involve the relevant student representative(s).

13.3 Recommendations to the University will be summarised by the Quality Assurance Office and submitted to the Education Board or Graduate School Board (as appropriate) for consideration and response.
13.4 Where an External Examiner's annual report includes negative judgements on academic standards (i.e. in response to either question 1a or 1b on the External Examiners’ report template) the School is required to make a specific response to the negative judgement including, as appropriate, what action(s) the School will take as a result. The relevant extract(s) of the External Examiner's annual report and the School response must be submitted to the Education Board or Graduate School Board (as appropriate) for consideration and approval before that part of the response may be uploaded to the online reporting system (EERSS).

14 External Examiners may also, if they deem it appropriate, submit confidential reports to the Head of School or the Vice-Chancellor.

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15.1 Where an External Examiner does not submit his or her annual report within the required four weeks (see section 9 above) the Quality Assurance Office will write to the External Examiner (copied to the relevant School) reminding the Examiner of the deadline and requesting prompt return of the report. If the annual report is still not received after a further two weeks the Quality Assurance Office will write again.

15.2 Where the report remains outstanding (and where there are no mitigating circumstances or technical issues with the reporting system), the Quality Assurance Office will inform the next meeting of the Education Board or Graduate School Board, as appropriate. The Board will request the relevant School to pursue the report (normally the Chief Examiner or Head of School).

15.3 In the event that the outstanding annual report is still not received after a further four weeks, the External Examiner may be removed from the post by the Vice-Chancellor (or his/her nominee) (see section 10 above) and a new person recruited to the role. Any student work held by the External Examiner must be returned by the Examiner or collection must be arranged by the relevant School.

Further Guidance

16 The School/collaborative partner shall ensure that students are provided with the name, position and institution of their External Examiner(s) (usually via the programme handbook). A list of current External Examiners shall be maintained by the Quality Assurance Office and made available online. In all cases, a clear statement should be included that under no circumstances should students contact External Examiners directly.

17 An External Examiner, as a full member of the relevant Board of Examiners (BoE), has the right to be present at all BoE meetings at which significant decisions are to be taken in regard to the specialisms with which he/she has been concerned (including where appropriate the setting of papers), and is required to be present at all final BoE meetings in the subject(s) in which he/she has been involved. At the end of such Board of Examiners meetings, the External Examiner is required to sign the pass list or other list of students progressing from one stage to the next to confirm that he/she endorses the decisions made at the Board. Where a Board of Examiners has been arranged, but the External Examiner then advises that he/she is no longer able to attend on that date, that absence may only be approved by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education, and only under exceptional circumstances. Where such absence is not approved, the Board of Examiners must be re-arranged for the earliest date possible. External Examiners are
invited, but are not required, to attend meetings of Boards of Examiners convened to consider referral results and deferral results. Boards of Examiners will have considered students’ cases following the initial assessment and will set out provisional decisions in each student’s case pending the results of the referrals and the deferrals. The decisions about awards to students following referrals and deferrals taken by Boards of Examiners in the absence of a relevant External Examiner will be subject to confirmation by the appropriate External Examiner.

18 Schools and External Examiners should use the opportunity afforded by the visits of External Examiners to discuss the structure and content of the programme, and the assessment procedures. Any comments or suggestions made by the External Examiners should be discussed by the School and an explicit decision made about whether or not to introduce changes.

19 A copy of the last report made by an External Examiner and the response of the School will, at the conclusion of the period of office, be copied by the School to the incoming External Examiner.

20 External Examiners should be encouraged to comment on the assessment process and the schemes for marking and classification. In some subjects participation in the devising of such schemes is essential. External Examiners may often be able to give valuable advice to Internal Examiners, especially the inexperienced, either directly or through the Head of School/Centre.

21 An External Examiner should only change a mark awarded to an individual candidate where (i) having seen all the scripts for the module in question, he/she has been invited by a Board of Examiners to consider a mark for an individual candidate, or (ii) where there is disagreement between two internal markers about the mark to be awarded. Alternatively, an External Examiner may ask that the marks for all candidates for a module be systematically adjusted where, having seen either all scripts or a sample of scripts, he/she considers this to be appropriate.

22 In the case of a disagreement on the mark to be awarded for a particular module between two independent Internal Examiners, the dispute shall be referred to the appropriate External Examiner, as designated by the Chair of the Board of Examiners, for resolution.

23 The External Examiner has the right to see all assessed work and should see at least a selection of such work. In those cases where it is agreed that the Chair of the Board of Examiners should make a selection of assessed work to be seen by an External Examiner, the principles for such selection should be agreed in advance. Assessed work thus selected should not include any work that has been subject to penalty for reasons of academic discipline. In view of the circumscribed timescale for referrals and deferrals, Boards of Examiners may at that time make recommendations on student progression and awards to students in advance of receiving the comments of the External Examiner on the work. In these circumstances, the recommendations of Boards of Examiners will be advised to the External Examiner. Pass lists and other lists of students progressing from one stage to the next may be published subject to confirmation from the External Examiner that due process had been followed; pass lists and other lists regarding awards
to students will not be published until confirmation is received from the External Examiner that due process had been followed.

24 Where a selection is made, External Examiners should normally see a reasonable sample of assessed work taken from each class band, and all fails.

25 Where an External Examiner specifically requests that the work for consideration should be sent to him or her in paper format, rather than be viewed electronically (e.g. via the Virtual Learning Environment), the School should normally accommodate that request. Where an External Examiner specifically requests that data or information (for example mark sheets) should be sent to him or her in paper format, rather than be viewed electronically, the School should normally accommodate that request.

26 Where an External Examiner has a serious concern relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme(s) and has exhausted all applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Head of School or the Vice-Chancellor (see 14 above), he/she may invoke QAA’s concerns scheme or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.