Annex K: External Examiners and External Advisers for Taught Courses

NB: Where the text states ‘School’ this should be understood to refer to ‘School’ or ‘Department’ at the sub-divisional level, as appropriate.

1. Introduction

1.1 External Examining is a key part of the way the University manages the quality of its courses of study. In providing informed and impartial oversight the University’s External Examining system ensures:

- the academic standards of each award and its component parts are set and maintained by the University at the appropriate level and that student performance is properly judged against this;

- the assessment process measures student achievement appropriately against the intended outcomes of the course, and is rigorous, fairly operated and in line with the institution’s policies and regulations;

- the University is able to compare the standards of its awards with those of other higher education institutions.

1.2 The University’s External Examiner system also enables the identification of good practice in learning, teaching and assessment, highlighting areas for enhancement and informing the improvement of courses.

1.3 This Annex establishes the procedures to be followed in appointing External Examiners and sets out the responsibilities and reporting requirements of External Examiners.

1.4 Partner Institutions are required to follow the procedures outlined in this Annex. The appointment of External Examiner(s) for Partner Institution courses is explicitly the responsibility of the University.

1.5 The University also makes use of External Advisers in the consideration and approval of new and amended courses of study, as part of Periodic Course Review and as part of approving new Partner Institutions. Guidance in relation to the use of such External Advisers is provided in Section 16.

1.6 Specific guidance on the use of External Advisers in relation to Partner Institution courses can be found within Annex L of the Code of Practice for Taught Courses: Quality Assurance Procedures for Courses of Study at Validated Institutions and Partner Colleges Leading to University Awards.

2. Links to Other University Policies and Procedures

2.1 Other University policies and procedures may need to be consulted when considering the requirements of this Annex:

2.1.1 Annex J of the Code of Practice for Taught Courses: Boards of Examiners
2.1.2 Annex C of the Code of Practice for Taught Courses: Approval and Withdrawal of Taught Courses

2.1.3 Annex F of the Code of Practice for Taught Courses: Periodic Review

2.1.4 Annex L of the Code of Practice for Taught Courses: Quality Assurance Procedures for Courses of Study at Validated Institutions and Partner Colleges Leading to University Awards.

3. Principles – External Examiners

3.1 No University qualification shall be awarded without the participation in the examining process by at least one External Examiner, who should be a full member of the relevant Board of Examiners.

3.2 External Examiners are responsible to the Senate which authorises the award of qualifications.

3.3 All External Examiners will be provided with information regarding the requirements of their role.

3.4 All External Examiners will be provided with the opportunity to undertake Boards of Examiners training (see 5.1.2 below).

4. Nomination and Appointment of External Examiners for Taught Courses

4.1 When submitting nominations for External Examiners, Schools or Divisions should consider the following:

4.1.1 External Examiners should be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the relevant sector reference points (Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, Subject Benchmark Statements, Characteristics Statements) for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality.

4.1.2 Only persons of appropriate seniority and/or experience in the fields covered by the course of study (or parts thereof) who are able to command the respect of academic and, where appropriate, professional peers should be appointed. They should be suitably qualified and experienced in the subject or specialism within the subject, to which the appointment relates.

4.1.3 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.

4.1.4 External Examiners may be appointed from outside the higher education system on the basis of demonstrable professional qualifications and experience particularly in the case of vocational awards.

4.1.5 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.
4.1.6 External Examiners should be able to demonstrate experience relating to course design and student assessment relevant to the level of the award.

4.1.7 External Examiners should be able to demonstrate awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of the relevant curriculum.

4.1.8 The nominee must be able to demonstrate familiarity with the standard to be expected of students in order to achieve the award to be assessed.

4.1.9 External Examiners should be able to demonstrate competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

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

4.1.11 External Examiners will not normally be appointed from a department 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.

4.1.12 Where the delivery and/or assessment of a collaborative course 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.

4.1.13 For further guidance on this please refer to Annex O section 15 of the Code of Practice for Taught Courses: Approval and Quality Assurance Procedures for Collaborative Partnerships.

4.1.14 The number of External Examiners must 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 a course covers a wide range of subject areas.

4.2 Conflicts of Interest

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

i. They are 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 course of study where they are or have been an External Examiner for a research degree awarded by the University of Kent);

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

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

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

v. has been significantly involved in recent (within the last five years) or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the course 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 course(s);\(^1\)

vii. there is a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate courses 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.

4.2.2 Concurrent Appointments: In addition to the above conflicts of interest, in order to have sufficient time for the proper performance of their functions, External Examiners will not normally be expected to hold more than two concurrent appointments as an External Examiner for taught courses.

4.3 Submission of Nominations

4.3.1 Schools should submit nominations for appointment on the appropriate pro forma.

4.3.2 Nominations should be approved by the Director of the Division prior to being submitted for consideration by the Vice-Chancellor or their nominee on behalf of Senate and Council.\(^2\)

4.3.3 Pro formas must be accompanied by:

- a curriculum vitae of the nominee
- proof of the nominee’s legal right to work in the UK

4.3.4 Where a Partner Institution nominates an External Examiner, forms should be submitted to the Quality Assurance and Compliance Office who will forward them to the Director of Division for consideration, prior to submission for consideration by the Vice Chancellor or nominee.

4.4 Period of Appointment

4.4.1 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.

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

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\(^1\) This will apply to Partner Institutions, as such a nominee cannot be a former staff member or student of the institution unless five years has elapsed and all students taught with or by the nominee have completed their course.

\(^2\) Normally appointments will be considered by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education and Student Experience.
5. Letter of Appointment/Termination of Appointment

5.1 Each External Examiner will be sent a letter of appointment by the Quality Assurance and Compliance Office, forming a contract for the services to be provided.

5.1.1 The Quality Assurance and Compliance Office will also provide information about the role and functions of External Examiners and the University's procedures in relation to Boards of Examiners as set out in Annex J of the Code of Practice for Taught Courses. Newly appointed External Examiners will be required to undertake Boards of Examiners induction and training and will be offered refresher opportunities on an annual basis.

5.2 Termination of Appointment

5.2.1 The External Examiner contract of employment states the required notice periods applicable to either party when terminating an appointment.

5.2.2 The University reserves the right to terminate the appointment of an External Examiner without notice where the Vice-Chancellor (or their 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.

6. Course Information Provided to External Examiners

6.1 Divisions are responsible for providing External Examiners with detailed information about the relevant course(s) of study, modules and systems of assessment. This should be provided ahead of the External Examiner’s first engagement with the course and also subsequently if there are any relevant changes to the course, modules or systems of assessment.

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

7. Role and Responsibilities of External Examiners

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

- To participate as a full member of the Board(s) of Examiners of which they are 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.
- To confirm that standards are appropriate for qualifications at that level and in that subject.
- To ensure that awards are in line with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), Characteristics Statements, Subject Benchmark Statements and where applicable Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) requirements.
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 they are a member and at which decisions may be taken about awards to students, except as set out in Annex J of the Code of Practice for Taught Courses, Boards of Examiners, and, where considered appropriate, to endorse the decisions reached. Attendance by virtual means will be permitted only with the advance permission of the DVC Education and Student Experience.

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 comment on whether students have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level and to comment on degree outcomes.

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, relevant to the course(s) for which they act as the External.

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 course 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 and Compliance Office where this will exceed a total of six visits in one academic year.

8. External Examiner Reports

8.1 External Examiners are required to complete an annual report per course of study for which they are responsible, except in such cases where two or more courses are closely linked in terms of a large number of shared modules. In such cases one report may be completed for the linked courses of study.
8.2 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 and Compliance Office may request the External Examiner to revise the report.

8.3 External Examiners are required to submit their annual report using the online External Examiners Report Submission System (EERSS)³.

9. Consideration of External Examiners’ Reports

9.1 Following submission External Examiner reports will be available to the University Quality Assurance and Compliance Office, the relevant Divisional administrator(s), and the Director of the Division (or nominee) for consideration.

9.2 Divisions should ensure a mechanism is in place for an appropriate member of academic staff (such as the Chief Examiner or/with an oversight of Directors of Studies) to make a response to the External Examiner’s report.

9.3 For Partner Institutions, the Quality Assurance and Compliance Office will arrange for a member of the institution to provide the response.

9.4 Where, following consideration, the Director of Division or nominee considers a report raises matters of urgency or importance, they should not wait to address these through the formal response, but should immediately draw the matters to the attention of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education and Student Experience.

9.5 External Examiners’ reports and the School/Division responses to these should be considered by the relevant Divisional Committee in a timely and appropriate manner.

9.6 Reports and responses should be considered 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.

9.7 Following consideration of the response by the appropriate Committee, the Division should ensure that a mechanism is in place for it to be uploaded to the External Examiner’s Report Submission System (EERSS).

9.8 The Quality Assurance and Compliance Office will review the response prior to it being forwarded to the External Examiner. Should the response be deemed not sufficient it will be returned back to the School/Division for revision and the Director of the Division (or nominee) will be informed of this.

9.9 Director of Division (or nominee) will produce a divisional summary of External Examiners’ reports each academic year, which will be submitted to the Quality Assurance and Compliance Office and considered by the Education and Student Experience Board along with a summary of general issues and themes arising from the reports.

³ Accessed at: [https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/extexaminers/eerss.html](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/extexaminers/eerss.html)
10. **External Examiner Report Recommendations**

10.1 External Examiners are invited to make recommendations to Schools including, in particular, on any steps which might be taken to enhance the experience of students, assessment policies and procedures and the proceedings of the Board of Examiners. They are invited to make recommendations to the University, in particular on aspects of institutional policy.

10.2 Where reports include recommendations to the School, the School/Division should explicitly address those recommendations in its response to the External Examiner. Where reports include recommendations to the Division, the comments should be addressed by the Director of the Division (or nominee).

10.3 Recommendations to the University will be summarised by the Quality Assurance and Compliance Office and submitted to the Education and Student Experience Board for consideration and response.

11. **Consideration by Student Voice Forum**

External Examiners’ reports should be received in full (with the exception of any confidential report submitted as per section 13 below) along with recommendations to the School and the response at the relevant Student Voice Forum. Consideration at the Student Voice Forum will explicitly involve the relevant student representative(s).

12. **Academic Standards**

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/Division is required to make a specific response to the negative judgement including, as appropriate, what action(s) will be taken as a result. The relevant extract(s) of the External Examiner’s annual report and the response must be submitted to the Education and Student Experience Board for consideration and approval before that part of the response may be uploaded to the online reporting system (EERSS).

13. **Confidential Report to the Vice-Chancellor**

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

14. **Non-Submission of an External Examiner Report**

14.1 Where an External Examiner does not submit the annual report within the required four weeks (see section 9 above) the Quality Assurance and Compliance Office will write to the External Examiner (copied to the relevant Division) 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 QACO will write again.
14.2 Where the report remains outstanding (and where there are no mitigating circumstances or technical issues with the reporting system), the QACO will inform the next meeting of the Education and Student Experience Board. The Board will request the relevant Division to pursue the report (normally via the Chief Examiner or Director of Division).

14.3 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 their nominee) (see 5.3.2 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 Division.

15. Further Guidance for Divisions

15.1 A list of current External Examiners shall be maintained by the Quality Assurance and Compliance Office and made available online for reference.

15.2 Divisions/Partner Institutions shall ensure that students are provided with the name, position and institution of their External Examiner(s). This will normally be provided via the course handbook. A clear statement should be included that under no circumstances should students contact External Examiners directly.

15.3 Boards of Examiners

15.3.1 External Examiners are full members of the Board of Examiners and Assessment Review Boards for the course(s) for which they have been appointed. As a full member they have the right to be present at all Board of Examiners meetings at which significant decisions are to be taken and are required to be present at all final Boards of Examiners meetings for the course(s) for which they act.

15.3.2 External Examiners should be provided with all relevant assessment results and trends data in advance of Boards of Examiners and Assessment Review Boards taking place, as outlined in Annex J.

15.3.3 Where an External Examiner specifically requests that such data and information is sent to them in alternative formats, rather than be viewed electronically, the School should normally accommodate that request.

15.3.4 Full details of the role of External Examiners in relation to Boards of Examiners and Assessment Review Boards can be found in Annex J of the Code of Practice for Taught Courses.

15.4 Schools and External Examiners should use the opportunity afforded by External Examiner visits, including attendance at the Assessment Review Board (as per Annex J), to discuss the structure and content of the course, 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.

15.5 External Examiners should be encouraged to comment on the assessment process and the schemes for marking and classification, including as part of the Assessment Review Board. 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 Director of Division.

15.6 Marking

15.6.1 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, they have 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.

15.6.2 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, they consider this to be appropriate.

15.6.3 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.

15.7 Sampling of Assessed Work

15.7.1 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 and follow section 15.7.4 below. Assessed work thus selected should not include any work that has been subject to penalty for reasons of academic misconduct.

15.7.2 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.

15.7.3 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 has 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 has been followed.

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

15.7.5 Where an External Examiner specifically requests that the work for consideration should be sent to them in alternative formats, rather than be viewed electronically (e.g. via the Virtual Learning Environment), the School or Division should normally accommodate that request.

15.8 Where an External Examiner has a serious concern relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a course(s) and has exhausted all applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Director of Division or the Vice-Chancellor (see 13.1 above), they
may invoke QAA’s concerns scheme or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.

16. **External Advisers**

16.1 The University will appoint External Advisers as required to provide impartial and independent scrutiny as part of the approval of new and revised courses of study, and as part of the Periodic Course Review process.

16.2 When appointing External Advisers the Conflict of Interest principles outlined in section 4.2 above will be applied.

16.3 For guidance in relation to the role and appointment of External Advisers acting as part of the approval of new courses of study, please refer to Annex C, Appendix D.

16.3.1 Where External Advisers will act as part of the approval of new or revised courses of study at Partner Institutions, please refer to Annex L of the Code of Practice for Taught Courses: *Approval and Quality Assurance Procedures for Collaborative Partnerships*.

16.4 For guidance in relation to the role and appointment of External Advisers acting as part of Periodic Course Reviews, please refer to Annex F of the Code of Practice for Taught Courses: *Periodic Course Review*.

16.5 The University will also appoint External Advisers to provide impartial and independent scrutiny of new prospective Partner Institutions. Guidance in relation to this can be found in Annex P of the Code of Practice for Taught Courses: *Approval and Quality Assurance Procedures for Collaborative Partnerships*. 