

*External Examiners’ Handbook* Taught Programmes

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### WELCOME

The University of Stirling wishes to express its appreciation to you for agreeing to undertake the role of External Examiner for the University, and therefore for the valued contribution you will make to the University’s operation.

This contribution relates to our quality assurance processes, maintenance of the academic standards of the University’s degrees and other awards and assuring the quality of our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. No degree of the University is awarded without the participation of at least one External Examiner within the examining process.

This handbook has been produced with the aim of providing External Examiners with a range of information to assist in their undertaking of the External Examiner role. We hope you find the information useful and that it supports you to fulfil your role.

If you have any feedback on the handbook, or any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us using the contact details noted on page 16.

Iona Beveridge Academic Registrar

# UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

## Background

The University of Stirling is a leading UK teaching and research-intensive university, established by Royal Charter in 1967. Since its foundation, the University has embraced its role as an innovative, intellectual and cultural institution with a pioneering spirit and a passion for excellence in all that it does.

The University collaborates with international governments and policymakers, businesses, industry, and charitable organisations, to tackle and provide solutions to some of the toughest global societal challenges.

Stirling’s leading researchers, scholars and global student population are attracted by the University’s unique learning environment, exceptional facilities, beautiful campus and student- centred approach, where ability, not background, is recognised and valued. Equality and diversity, and treating everyone with respect, are central to the University’s ethos and activities.

The University is located in the city of Stirling; a gateway to the Scottish Highlands. The 330-acre campus encompasses a loch, a golf course and the 18th-century Airthrey Castle. It is undoubtedly one of the most attractive campuses in Europe; ranked 1st in Scotland and the UK, in the International Student Barometer 2016.

## Our strategy

Our [Strategic Plan](https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/global-assets/documents/Download-our-Strategic-Plan.pdf) details our ambitions for 2016 to 2021 to:

* + - Be one of the top 25 universities in the UK
		- Increase our income by £50 million
		- Enhance our research profile by 100 percent

## Structure and organisation

A major strength of the Stirling modular degree structure is its flexibility which the University regards as a significant benefit to student recruitment, progression and retention. At undergraduate level students are admitted to the University rather than to a faculty, providing a range of opportunities to students once registered and facilitating inter-disciplinary study and incorporating a wide range of 4 year honours and 3 year bachelor and ordinary degrees. Approximately half of the undergraduate population graduates in a different degree programme from the one anticipated on entry. These arrangements allow students to experiment intellectually and change their study modes and pathways without loss of time.

## Faculties

The University is arranged academically into five faculties:

* + - Faculty of Arts and Humanities
		- Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport
		- Faculty of Natural Sciences
		- Faculty of Social Sciences
		- Stirling Management School

## Semester system

The University’s academic year is divided into two semesters. The Autumn Semester runs from September to December and the Spring Semester from January to late May. There is a reading/study block mid-way through the semesters and an exam period at the end of each, in December and April/May. Repeat/deferred assessment diets take place in May, June and August.

Though the University has two semesters students registered on Masters programmes are registered for their dissertation from July to August.

## Undergraduate programmes

The Stirling undergraduate degree structure is modular, comprising a series of recognised pathways based on progression and the use of prerequisites. Most modules have a single semester duration, although a few modules cover the whole year. Modules are typically 20 credits with dissertations being 60. However, there are some exceptions to this with 10 credit and 40 credit modules. Full time students normally take 3 modules (60 credits) a semester, there is a maximum workload of 80 credits per semester, which arises when the student needs to make up an earlier fail. Modules are classified within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework: in general, undergraduate modules in semesters 1-3 are level 8, whilst those in semesters 4-8 are levels 9 or 10. The degree programme table for individual honours degrees state the modules required for a degree in a given subject.

## Postgraduate programmes (Taught)

The University offers a range of postgraduate taught programmes, delivered in a variety of study modes, leading to a range of qualifications at Masters, PG Diploma and PG Certificate level. Modules are typically 10 or 20 credits, with dissertations being 60 however there are some exceptions to this. Modules are classified within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework: postgraduate modules are level 11.

# YOUR APPOINTMENT AS EXTERNAL EXAMINEER

You have been appointed as External Examiner following faculty nomination and University approval in accordance with the [University assessment policy (6.4.2)](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-academic-and-corporate-services/academic-registry/academic-policy-and-practice/quality-handbook/assessment-policy-and-procedure/). The University operates its External Examiner arrangements in line with the [University’s Policy on External Examining](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-academic-and-corporate-services/academic-registry/academic-policy-and-practice/quality-handbook/examination-and-degree-classification/) and the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education, chapter B7: External Examining](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-existing-uk-quality-code/part-b-assuring-and-enhancing-academic-quality)

## Terms of an appointment

You must sign and return your agreement to the terms of the appointment and to the duties and responsibilities of the role, as set out in this Handbook and in the [University Quality](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-academic-and-corporate-services/academic-registry/academic-policy-and-practice/quality-handbook/#q-4) [Handbook.](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-academic-and-corporate-services/academic-registry/academic-policy-and-practice/quality-handbook/#q-4) This is a requirement of appointment.

In accepting the appointment as an External Examiner for the term of tenure specified in your appointment letter you also agree to the following terms:

1. Agreement for your name and institution to be included on the relevant programme specification published by the University and made available to students. If you are unwilling for your name to be publicised in this way you should note that your name will still need to be made available to students on request.
2. Not to undertake any other work for the University of Stirling, or its partners, without consulting with the University of Stirling Academic Registry team first for approval.
3. To notify the University of any changes to your details or circumstances.
4. To provide the University with original right to work evidence and that the appointment is subject to the University’s receipt of such satisfactory evidence.
5. To work in line with the University’s Privacy Notice for External Examiners.

## Period of appointment

External Examiner appointments usually begin on the 1st of September of an academic year and usually end on the 31st August (undergraduate) and the 30th November (post graduate) of the fourth academic year of their appointment. The University normally appoints External Examiners for a maximum of four consecutive years. However, in exceptional circumstances an appointment may be extended by up to 12 months.

# THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER’S ROLE

The role of an External Examiner is to ensure that the standard of awards from the University of Stirling are comparable with similar programmes or subjects in other UK higher education institutions, are appropriate in relation to the SCQF and national subject benchmark statements, and that the processes for assessment, examination, and awards are sound and fair.

## Preparing you for your role

The relevant faculty will provide you with the following documentation on the programmes/subject area that you will contribute to:

* + 1. Information on the programmes/modules including but not limited to their
			- regulations
			- method of assessment;
			- structure and content of the curriculum;
			- learning outcomes;
			- assessment structures, assignments and examination papers in relation to agreed learning outcomes;
		2. Marking schemes;
		3. Dates of Boards of Examiners’ meetings;
		4. Arrangements for the sampling of scripts, including principles for selection of samples;
		5. Arrangements for accessing any work contributing to the final award, to determine that internal marking has been carried out according to marking schemes and that classifications are of an appropriate standard;
		6. Faculty principles for the selection of candidates for viva voce, oral and practical examinations and the external examiner’s role in conducting these examinations with students.

The [Undergraduate Regulations](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/faculties-and-services/academic-registry/regulations/undergraduate/) and [Postgraduate Taught Regulations](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/faculties-and-services/academic-registry/regulations/postgraduate-taught-regulations/) will provide you with the information concerning the structure and administration of our examining and awarding bodies.

## Your duties

Your duties and responsibilities are detailed in the [Quality Handbook (6.4)](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-academic-and-corporate-services/academic-registry/academic-policy-and-practice/quality-handbook/#q-4) and include:

* + 1. reporting on standards for awards and whether the standards set are appropriate for the University’s awards or award elements;
		2. reporting and comparing the performance standards across their programmes or modules, and on their comparability to the standard of achievement on similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions;
		3. reporting on the extent to which the University’s processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are sound and have been conducted fairly;
		4. approving proposed draft examination papers, coursework and other forms of assessments.
		5. assisting the University in the calibration of academic standards through the review and evaluation of the outcomes of assessment processes;
		6. to be a member of, and attend, appropriate examination boards to ensure fairness and consistency in decision-making processes;
		7. reviewing, evaluating and moderating assessments
		8. commenting on proposed changes to the curriculum, assessment procedures, assessment regulations and on new programme proposals in their subject area.

## Contact with students

Though your name, position and home institution will be included in the relevant student handbooks students are advised that it is inappropriate for them to make direct contact with you. If you are contacted by a student you should decline to comment and refer the student back to the University. You are asked to also alert the faculty if you have been contacted by a student. Faculty contact details are provided in section 12.

## Programme visits

You will be given the opportunity to meet students on the programmes/modules that you are examining. This can be arranged by the faculty.

# ASSESSMENT REGULATIONS

## Assessment

The University’s system of assessment has been designed in line with the following principles:

* + - Consistent, equitable and confidential practices across the University is essential to the integrity of its assessment processes and to the comparability of its students’ expectation and experience
		- Examinations and assignments must be designed to assess the learning outcomes for the module and the programme, the assessment should be judged on the basis of a student’s achievement of the learning outcomes
		- Assessment criteria must be explicit
		- The assessment load should be balanced, ensuring it is compatible with providing adequate opportunity for students to:
			* develop as learners;
			* demonstrate achievement of the relevant learning outcomes;
			* recover from occasional poor performance.
		- In order that students may have the opportunity to develop as wide a range of skills as possible, and to prevent repetitiveness, the University is committed to providing a variety of assessment methods. No degree programme should rely upon only one or two forms of assessment

## Online moderation

It is the University’s policy that formally assessed work should be systematically moderated and/or second-marked, whichever is appropriate, and that anonymous marking is operated for all examinations and coursework. These procedures are designed to standardise marking and remove any unintended bias from the process. To ensure we have all the moderation completed on time assessments are not sent via post, but are accessed via Canvas our online learning management system. Your appointment letter from the Timetabling, Exams and Graduation Team will provide you with the information that you require to access Canvas.

Where an online review of the assessment documentation has not been possible, and the University considers it appropriate, you will be provided with copies of assessments in an alternative format. Any such arrangements with be communicated by the faculty.

# EXTERNAL EXAMINERS ANNUAL REPORT

## Annual report form

You should feel free to comment on any aspect of the assessment and examining process, programme content or academic standards. External Examiners’ reports are a key element in the quality assurance process and in the maintenance of academic standards of the University’s taught programmes.

You are required to submit a report annually following completion of the examining process. The report is to be submitted electronically, via the University’s template (form ARO 006) and should be emailed to teg@stir.ac.uk. Receipt of your report will be acknowledged by the Timetabling, Exams and Graduation Team, and it will trigger payment of the annual fee. The Timetabling, Exams and Graduation Team will send reminders if you do not submit your report on time and the relevant programme teams will be notified. Please let us know as soon as possible if you are having trouble submitting your report.

## Report deadline dates

Timely submission of an annual report is important to ensuring that your feedback is properly recorded and responded to. The annual report is designed to prompt external to comment on all aspects of the examining system, including organisation, provision of briefing documentation, marking, systems of moderation, academic standards and the conduct of boards of examiners. We therefore ask that you submit an annual report by the deadline detailed below:

* + - Undergraduate reports: 31st July
		- Postgraduate reports: 30th November

## Report themes

The annual report requests comments, within the provided template, on:

* + - areas of good practice for commendation and areas for enhancement.
		- academic standards, assessment processes, performance standards and recommendations for awards;
		- opportunity for further comments including but not limited to issues raised in previous reports,
		- arrangements for professional practice, and a final year overview.

Though your annual report, under the Freedom of Information Scotland Act, may be released outside the University this should not deter you from making an accurate and honest report.

## Consideration and responses to external examiner reports

The report provides the University with key evidence to enable it to achieve its aims in maintaining standards of academic attainment, comparable with those in other universities in the United Kingdom; verifying that standards are appropriate for its awards; ensuring that the assessment system is fairly operated in the marking, grading and classification of student performance.

All faculties are required to respond formally to External Examiners’ reports with Programme Directors considering any matters as part of the annual programme review process. External Examiners’ reports, and faculty consideration and responses to these reports, are also considered as part of the programme of learning and teaching review.

## Making a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor

In the event of and External Examiner having concerns which they consider are not being appropriately addressed by the University, a confidential written report may be sent directly to the Principal and Vice Chancellor, Professor Gerry McCormac. This can be sent by post addressed to the Principal, University of Stirling, FK9 4LA or by email to principal@stir.ac.uk. Any such matters arising will be considered and responded to as appropriate.

## QAA Scottish concerns scheme

If you have a serious concern relating to systemic problems with the academic standards of a programme or the quality of learning opportunities, and all internal procedures have been exhausted, you can raise a concern through the [Quality Assurance Agency’s Scottish Concerns](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/how-to-raise-a-concern-in-scotland) [Scheme](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/how-to-raise-a-concern-in-scotland) or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.

# EXTERNAL EXAMINER FEES AND EXPENSES PAYMENTS

## Annual fee

You will receive an annual fee which will be processed on receipt of your annual report, (and where you have successfully presented your right to work documentation to the University for verification). This fee will be paid in line with the Payment Scheme detailed in 7.3.

## Expenses

Claims for reasonable expenses in relation to travel, accommodation and incidental expenses are processed as they are received. Expenses claims should be made on the External Examiner Expense Claim form. Receipts must be provided, as we are unable to process expense claims without them. The expense forms should be returned to Academic Registry for processing within three months of the date of expenditure being occurred.

## Payment scheme

External Examiners are paid in line with the payment scheme outlined below: Base payment per appointment £100

Payment per student registered on each 20 credit module examined 40p Payment per student registered on each 15 credit module examined 30p (other modules paid pro-rata according to credit value)

The University standard is that a 10% sample rate of scripts is reviewed. Therefore the effect of the per capita payment in practice would be £4 per 20 credit module sampled, £3 per 15 credit module sampled and £12 per 60 credit dissertation sampled.

The minimum payment per appointment for an academic year is £300. The maximum payment that may be made per appointment for an academic year is £800.

Please note all External Examiner payments are taxable at the Basic Rate unless the [*Starter*](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fpublications%2Fpaye-starter-checklist&data=02%7C01%7Cclaire.heard%40stir.ac.uk%7C195a4a77940d47e267b608d83e127523%7C4e8d09f7cc794ccb9149a4238dd17422%7C0%7C0%7C637327596277322842&sdata=0ZcOuDtV6ES%2FsFNuhqn8zvmKAGcCpL2R%2Bdx9R%2FwDHf0%3D&reserved=0)[*Checklist*](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fpublications%2Fpaye-starter-checklist&data=02%7C01%7Cclaire.heard%40stir.ac.uk%7C195a4a77940d47e267b608d83e127523%7C4e8d09f7cc794ccb9149a4238dd17422%7C0%7C0%7C637327596277322842&sdata=0ZcOuDtV6ES%2FsFNuhqn8zvmKAGcCpL2R%2Bdx9R%2FwDHf0%3D&reserved=0)is completed and returned with your acceptance.

# GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION (GDPR 2018)

## Privacy notice

The University Privacy Notice for External Examiners applies during the appointment process and throughout the period of their appointment.

## Retention schedule

The University External Examiner Retention Schedule details how your data will be held and for how long.

## Data protection and the marking of assessed work and exam scripts

During your appointment you will have access to confidential information relating to the University, its employees and its students. You must not, either during or after your appointment, use or disclose such information to anyone (other than in the proper execution of your role as External Examiner to the University).

Any marks, comments and opinions you express about individual students during the assessment process may be disclosed to the student concerned, if the student makes a Subject Access Request under the General Data Protection Regulation.

# FREEDOM OF INFORMATION SCOTLAND ACT

Under the Freedom of Information Scotland Act, the University will provide copies of External Examiner reports to third parties who make a lawful request for these. Therefore there should be no identifiable reference to individual staff or students (by name or ID number) in the report. Reports will normally retain examiners’ names. The University will consider any reasonable request from External Examiners to anonymise their reports. Such a request should be made in writing and submitted with the report.

# TERMINATION AND INTERRUPTION OF APPOINTMENT

## Resignation

An External Examiner may choose to resign prior to the expiry of his or her normal period of term. A minimum of six months’ notice is required, and the examiner must normally complete the academic year. This will allow sufficient time for a suitable replacement to be found. Letters of resignation should be addressed to the Deputy Principal, Education and Students, citing reasons.

## Interruption

The University recognises that there may be occasions where an External Examiner may request to temporarily cease their appointment, for example due to illness or maternity leave. In some cases it may be appropriate for a new examiner to be appointed.

## Termination

The University reserves the right to terminate the contract of an External Examiner at any time if it is determined by the Deputy Principal, Education and Students that any or all of, the following circumstances have arisen:

* + - Non-submission of the External Examiners annual report
		- Non-attendance at the University without provision of an acceptable reason
		- Failure to fulfil the duties of the External Examiners role
		- Changes to an External Examiners visa status where the UKVI designation of "right to work" has been revoked
		- Where a conflict of interest has arisen during the term of office and cannot be resolve by other adjustments or by mutual agreement
		- Where a breach of confidentiality on the part of the External Examiner has arisen
		- Loss of professional standing due to misconduct at work or criminal proceedings
		- Unprofessional behaviour towards University staff or students

External Examiners will be informed of the decision to terminate their appointment by the Academic Registrar.

## Withdrawal of programme/withdrawal of module

Your appointment could also end early if the module(s) or programme(s) that you examine are withdrawn.

# LINKS TO SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

In addition to this Handbook you may find the following documents of support to you in your role:

[Undergraduate Regulations](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/faculties-and-services/academic-registry/regulations/undergraduate/) [Postgraduate Taught Regulations](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/faculties-and-services/academic-registry/regulations/postgraduate-taught-regulations/) [Quality Handbook](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-academic-and-corporate-services/academic-registry/academic-policy-and-practice/quality-handbook/#q-4)

[Strategic Plan](https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/global-assets/documents/Download-our-Strategic-Plan.pdf)

[University assessment policy](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-academic-and-corporate-services/academic-registry/academic-policy-and-practice/quality-handbook/assessment-policy-and-procedure/) [University Equality and Diversity Policy](https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/services/policy-and-planning/documents/EqualityandDiversityPolicy.pdf)

# KEY CONTACTS

Should you require any further information or advice on the External Examiner role, or the University’s academic quality arrangements, Academic Registry will be pleased to assist you. Please contact the relevant team as detailed below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Guidance on assessment policy, academic regulations or academic quality arrangements.External Examiner reports, fees and expenses. Feedback on this handbook. | Academic Quality and Governance team quality@stir.ac.uk |

Your faculty will provide information on the programme/subject area to be reviewed:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Faculty of Arts and Humanities**Communications and MediaEnglish, French, Spanish, Religion and Translation (Undergraduate)History & Heritage PoliticsLaw and Philosophy Postgraduate Taught | communications.media@stir.ac.uk literatureandlanguages@stir.ac.ukhistoryandpolitics@stir.ac.uk historyandpolitics@stir.ac.uk Lawandphilosophy@stir.ac.uk fahgs@stir.ac.uk |
| **Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport** Sport (Undergraduate and Postgraduate) Undergraduate NursingHealth Sciences (Postgraduate Taught) | fhss.sport@stir.ac.uk fhss.ug@stir.ac.uk fhss.pg.cpd.team@stir.ac.uk |
| **Faculty of Natural Sciences**AquacultureBiological and Environmental Science (Undergraduate)Biological and Environmental Science (Postgraduate Taught)Computing ScienceMaths | To be confirmed. |
| **Faculty of Social Sciences**Access StudiesApplied Professional Studies Applied Social Research | accessprogramme@stir.ac.uk cpdsocialwork@stir.ac.uk appliedsocialresearch@stir.ac.uk |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Dementia studies Education ITE Global Ageing Housing studiesProfessional EducationSociology, Social Policy & Criminology – Social WorkTESOL TQFE | demppg@stir.ac.uk ite@stir.ac.uk FoSSglobalageing@stir.ac.uk housingstudies@stir.ac.uk profeduc@stir.ac.uk SSPC@stir.ac.uk socialwork@stir.ac.uk tesol@stir.ac.uk tqfe@stir.ac.uk |
| **Stirling Management School** Undergraduate Postgraduate Taught | s.e.martin@stir.ac.uk donna.mckendrick@stir.ac.uk |

If you require support relating to University systems, or your access to systems, Information Services will be happy to help.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Support accessing or using your IT account or the University VLE (Canvas) | Information Services information.centre@stir.ac.uk |