



External Examining Policy

VERSION CONTROL STATEMENT

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Purpose

1. External Examining forms a core element of the University's academic quality assurance arrangements. The University of Stirling External Examining system has been developed with reference to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the associated Advice and Guidance on External Expertise, and the External Examining Principles that were published in 2022. The purpose of this policy is to set out the University's External Examining requirements and arrangements.

Scope

2. The policy is applicable to all University of Stirling undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision.
3. Postgraduate Research External Examining requires to take place as specified in the [Postgraduate Research Regulations](#) and the [Code of Practice: Research Degrees](#).
4. External Examiners make a key contribution to the University's quality assurance, assessment and award arrangements. Final decisions on University of Stirling degree awards however, rest with the University, not an External Examiner. In the unlikely event of a dispute, where an External Examiner challenges the recommendations or decisions of a Board of Examiners, the matter shall be referred to Academic Registry in the first instance via quality@stir.ac.uk.
5. Except in exceptional circumstances, no degree of the University shall be awarded without at least one External Examiner participating in the overall examining process. When, exceptionally, required input from an External Examiner is not available, degree awards and classifications may nevertheless be confirmed by the Deputy Principal (Education) under delegated authority from Academic Council.
6. In the case of a degree award that requires to be considered out with the normal Awards Boards process, if the component module outcomes have been confirmed through the appropriate module board procedure and therefore have been subject to scrutiny by an External Examiner, then the degree award can be considered and confirmed without the input of an External Examiner if required. Where in these circumstances the outcomes of the component modules or elements of a programme have not been confirmed through the standard procedure, the input of an External Examiner must be included in the award consideration.
7. In respect of collaborative provision, external examining procedures for programmes offered by a partner organisation should be the same as, or demonstrably equivalent to, those used by the University for its own programme. The procedures should be clearly specified and documented in the collaborative memorandum of agreement and rigorously applied.

Points of Policy

8. The specific aims of the External Examining system are to:
 - verify that the academic standards for each award or award elements, for which the External Examiner, is responsible, are set and maintained by the University at the appropriate level, and that the students' performance is properly judged against these;
 - assist the University in maintaining levels of students' academic attainment comparable to those in other universities in the UK;

ensure that the assessment process measures student achievement against the intended outcomes of the programme appropriately and that the assessment system is operated fairly in the marking, grading and classification of student performance.

Role of External Examiners

9. In order to achieve the aims of the External Examining system, External Examiners must be able to:
 - Participate effectively, and in line with policy requirements, in the University of Stirling assessment process for the award of degrees; and
 - Comment and give informed, expert input on programme content, balance and structure.
10. Furthermore, all External Examiners are required to:
 - report whether the standards set are appropriate for the University's awards or award elements by reference to published national subject benchmarks, the University's programme specifications, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and other relevant information;
 - report on the standards of student performance in the programmes or modules which they have been appointed to examine, and on their comparability to the standard of achievement on similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions;
 - report on the extent to which the University's processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are sound and have been conducted fairly;
 - review, evaluate and moderate examination and other assessment instruments and practices, particularly at the final year or award level;
 - assist the University in the calibration of academic standards through the review and evaluation of the outcomes of assessment processes;
 - be a member of, and attend, appropriate examination boards to ensure fairness and consistency in decision-making processes;
 - prepare and submit an Annual Report in line with the format provided by the University.

Remit and Requirements of External Examiners

11. External Examiners contribute to the assessment process for all component modules of a programme at SCQF level 9, 10 and 11. It is not expected that External Examiners should review resit examination papers or be involved in modules below level 9, except where necessary for professional or statutory purposes.
12. Draft examination papers and associated example or model answers as appropriate, should be sent to the External Examiner for comment and endorsement. External Examiners are not normally expected to endorse coursework or assignments, except for modules that have no examination, in which case coursework or assignments should be considered and endorsed by the External Examiner.
13. Where an oral or observed examination forms part of the assessment design for a taught module, the examiners for the examination may include the External Examiner as appropriate.
14. An External Examiner has the right of access to any work that contributes to the assessment of an award and the degree classification, dependent on availability.

15. The normal expectation will be that a sample of student work will be sent to an External Examiner and the principles for such a selection should be agreed in advance. Normally:
 - the sample will include a selection of examination scripts and assessments, where the range of marks are represented;
 - the proportion of work considered by an External Examiner will be based on the size of the module;
 - the selection will ensure that External Examiners have enough evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and are applied consistently;
 - the sample will include all failed cases, borderline cases, and some, but not necessarily all, top mark cases.
16. The External Examiner is required to act as a full member of Module Boards and Awards Boards, in line with the University's [Boards of Examiners Policy](#).
17. External Examiners can request to meet students on the programmes/modules which they are examining, if they so wish. Where this is requested, appropriate arrangements should be made by the relevant faculty as required, within the parameters of the institutional Business Travel and Expenses Policy.
18. External Examiners should be provided with adequate opportunity to hold meetings with internal examiners.
19. External Examiners may be asked to comment on the curriculum and on the assessment process, and to provide input on any changes to the curriculum and assessment arrangements, and the development of any new programme proposals.in their subject area.
20. External Examiners may be asked to give advice to and share practice with internal examiners, through their work with the relevant faculty, and to contribute to the faculty's quality assurance and enhancement work.

Concerns regarding Academic Standards

21. External Examiners retain the right to raise any matter of concern regarding academic standards with the Academic Registrar via academic.registrar@stir.ac.uk. Further details on how any such concerns will be addressed are provided in the 'External Examining Handbook' which is provided to all External Examiners for taught programmes.
22. In exceptional cases, if an External Examiner has a serious concern about the academic standards or quality of provision at the University, they may consider it appropriate to raise this directly with the Principal and Vice Chancellor. Where this is the case, a concern can be directed by post addressed to the Principal, University of Stirling, FK9 4LA or by email to principal@stir.ac.uk.
23. Alternatively, where an External Examiner has serious concern in respect of how the University manages academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities and/or the information made available about its provision, they can consider raising the concern through the Quality Assurance Agency's Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme. More information about this scheme is available here: [How to raise a concern in Scotland about academic standards and quality](#).

External Examiner Appointments

24. Faculties are responsible for regulating the number of External Examiners that are appointed to its programmes. There must consistently be at least one External Examiner per programme,

however for some programmes it may be appropriate for there to be more than one, for example, where the programme is large in scale or complex, the programme spans multiple disciplines, or there are particular professional or regulatory requirements. In all cases, the number of External Examiners must be not be excessive and must be clearly in line with quality requirements. Any notable revision in the number of appointed External Examiners would require a case to be made and approved through the route specified in paragraphs 25 to 27.

25. Faculties nominate External Examiners for appointment. Nominations must be submitted through the completion of the '[Taught External Examiner Nomination' Form](#). Guidance on appropriate nominations is available [here](#).
26. External Examiner nominations are considered through initial scrutiny by Academic Registry and approval by the Deputy Principal (Education) on behalf of Academic Council.
27. The consideration of nominations takes account of: appropriate subject expertise; genuine externality from the University; familiarity with the UK higher education sector; and examining experience. While the first two of these points are absolute conditions of appointment, the experience of one or more internal examiners may compensate for inexperience in relation to the second two.
28. The normal period of appointment is four years with an exceptional extension of one year to ensure continuity. Applications for an exceptional fifth year should be made via the submission of the '[Taught External Examiner Appointment Extension' Form](#) to Academic Registry.
29. An External Examiner may be re-appointed only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their end of any previous period of appointment.
30. Faculties must avoid simultaneous reciprocal appointments with other institutions.
31. An External Examiner may choose to resign prior to the completion of their contract. A minimum of six months' notice is required, and the Examiner must normally complete the academic year. Notification of resignation should be addressed to the Academic Registrar, citing reasons, and sent to academic.registrar@stir.ac.uk.
32. The University reserves the right to terminate the contract of an External Examiner at any time if it is determined by the Academic Registrar and/or Deputy Principal (Education) that any or all of, the following circumstances have arisen:
 - Non-submission of the External Examiners annual report
 - Non-attendance/participation at a required point 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 resolved 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.

Support for External Examiners

33. When an External Examiner appointment is confirmed, Academic Registry will provide the External Examiner with the 'External Examining Handbook' which includes a range of supporting information including on:
 - The University;

- Academic Regulations and Policy;
- The External Examiner role and requirements of the role.

34. Faculties are responsible for providing External Examiners with supporting documentation on the programmes/subject area to be reviewed, including:

- information on the programmes/modules and their method of assessment for which the External Examiner will have responsibility;
- structure and content of the curriculum;
- learning outcomes;
- marking schemes;
- dates of boards of examiners' meetings;
- arrangements for the sampling of scripts, including principles for selection of samples;
- assessment structures, assignments and examination papers in relation to agreed learning outcomes;
- arrangements for access to 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;
- 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.

35. Faculties should ensure that External Examiners are given adequate notice of their required attendance/contribution at Boards of Examiners meetings and other activities as appropriate.

36. Faculties should encourage and support their External Examiners to visit the faculty, making arrangements within the parameters of the institutional Business Travel and Expenses Policy.

37. External Examiners should be provided by the Faculty with opportunities to become familiar with the institution and discuss their responsibilities and other matters prior to the first cycle of examination. This is particularly important in the case of External Examiners with little or no previous experience of the role, or who are from outside higher education.

38. Faculties should include the names, positions and institutions of their External Examiners within the information provided to students together with a statement advising students that it is inappropriate for them to make direct contact with External Examiners.

39. Faculties may occasionally have cause to appoint a substitute External Examiner for a period of less than four years to cover periods of unforeseen absence by an External Examiner, due to illness or other exceptional circumstances. In such cases, the faculty should follow the procedures as set out in this section with a clear statement of the temporary period.

40. A central register database of External Examiners is maintained by Academic Registry which details length of appointment, area(s) of responsibility, fee and contact details.

External Examiners' Reports

41. For taught programmes, External Examiners are required to submit Annual Reports and a report at the end of their period of service. No fee shall be paid to an External Examiner until required reports have been received. Individual staff and students must not be named in External Examiner reports. Reports will be redacted by the University where individuals are identified.

42. Academic Registry sets a deadline for the submission of reports for undergraduate and postgraduate External Examiners. Reports are addressed to the Academic Registrar and

submitted via the Academic Quality and Governance team. Receipt of the report is acknowledged by Academic Quality and Governance. Outstanding reports are pursued by Academic Quality and Governance, working in liaison with the relevant faculty. Where required, further follow-up will be issued via the Academic Registrar or the Deputy Principal (Education).

43. Upon receipt, each External Examiner's Annual Report is provided to the relevant faculty by Academic Registry. Faculties are required to:

- consider the reports and cascade within the faculty as appropriate, including to relevant faculty committees, to ensure effective consideration and follow up. forward action points to other relevant committee(s) within the faculty as appropriate. Student representatives should be given the opportunity to be fully involved in the consideration of External Examiner reports;
- respond to External Examiners (by end of August for undergraduate reports and by beginning of January for postgraduate reports) to confirm action taken in response to issues raised within reports or reasons for not taking action. A copy of the response must be added to the dedicated External Examining SharePoint Site;
- produce an External Examining Faculty Summary Report on issues arising from all External Examiner reports together with action taken; the report should be submitted to the External Examining SharePoint site in August and January each year for undergraduate and postgraduate taught external examining respectively.

44. External Examiners Reports are made available digitally to staff and students via the External Examiners Report SharePoint site (except for any confidential reporting made to the Academic Registrar or Principal).

45. Academic Registry is required to produce an institutional summary report on themes and issues arising from reports and actions taken for consideration by the Education Committee and/or the Assessment and Attainment Sub Committee.