

## **College Policy and Guidance on the Role of External and Intercollegiate Examiners**

### **Introduction**

1. The appointment of External and / or Intercollegiate Examiners [referred to throughout this document as “external examiners”] and the scrutiny by them of the marks and awards made by the boards of examiners is a fundamental process of the College. This process provides independent and external input into the College assessment processes and is an important part of the College’s Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy.
2. The UK Quality Code for Higher Education states:  
  
“[External Examiners] are able to provide carefully considered advice on the academic standards of the awards, programmes and/or modules to which they have been assigned, and can offer advice on good practice and opportunities to enhance the quality of those programmes / modules. They are also able to offer an informed view of how standards compare with the same or similar awards at other higher education institutions (primarily in the UK, and sometimes overseas as well) of which they have experience”  
  
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Quality%20Code%20-%20Chapter%20B7.pdf>
3. The term “external examiner” is used to describe, generally, both External Examiners and Intercollegiate Examiners. External Examiners are those that are External to both the College AND the University of London as a whole. Intercollegiate Examiners are those that are external to the College only and may therefore be members of staff at other Colleges of the University of London.

### **Nomination of External Examiners**

4. In the nomination and appointment of external examiners regard must be given to the following:
  - (a) only persons of seniority and experience should be appointed; external examiners will normally have a minimum of three years’ experience as an internal examiner;
  - (b) in order to have sufficient time for the proper performance of their function, individuals should not normally act as an external examiner for more than two other institutions;
  - (c) an external examiner should not normally be appointed from a department in an institution where a member of the relevant College department is serving as an examiner, although exceptions may on occasions be unavoidable, for example, in the case of subjects taught only in a very small number of institutions;
  - (d) former members of staff or students of the College shall not be appointed as external examiners at the College before a lapse of at least three years or, for former members of staff, sufficient time for students taught by that member of staff to have passed through the system, whichever is the longer;

- (e) persons invited to act as external examiners should be invited to advise the Academic Registrar if they have any connections (e.g. as a close relative) with any candidate on the relevant course which would make it desirable for their appointments to be reconsidered.
5. An external examiner will be appointed annually for four consecutive years unless either the examiner requests that the appointment be terminated earlier or Academic Board approves a request that the appointment be terminated earlier (see paragraphs 24-25). Appointments may be extended for one further year at the request of the Chairman of the relevant Board or Sub-Board of Examiners, and with the agreement of the examiner. Exceptionally appointments may be extended for one further year beyond this, upon approval of Academic Board. This will normally only be in cases where programmes are being discontinued and one further cycle is needed for all students to complete the programme.
  6. Boards or Sub-Boards should make their nominations of external examiners in the subjects in which they are examining by 31 January in the academic year in which the assessment will take place, for appointment by the Academic Board.
  7. Boards and Sub-Boards should indicate when making their nominations of external examiners on which Sub-Boards and Joint Sub-Boards these examiners will act. This should include details of programmes and modules that will fall within the external examiner's remit.
  8. Fees for external examining are agreed in advance with the examiners and are normally based on guidelines approved by Academic Board or its nominated sub-committee.

### **Role of External Examiners**

9. The primary duty of an external examiner is to report on:
  - whether the academic standards set for its awards, or part thereof, are appropriate;
  - the extent to which its assessment processes are rigorous, ensure equity of treatment for students and have been fairly conducted within institutional regulations and guidance;
  - the standards of student performance in the programmes or parts of programmes which they have been appointed to examine;
  - where appropriate, the comparability of the standards and student achievements with those in some other higher education institutions;
  - good practice they have identified.
10. Intercollegiate Examiners are also asked to provide informed comment on the consistency in the standards of awards of the University of London.
11. Each individual examination paper or other form of assessment constituting 50% or more of the assessment of a module must be approved by at least one external examiner.

12. External examiners have the right to inspect any examination script or other assessed material.
13. The Chair of the Board of Examiners will determine the distribution of duties between external examiners. External examiners may be asked to review a sample of examination scripts or other assessed material (including essays/reports/dissertations) and to take part in oral and practical examinations where these are specified. In those cases where it is agreed that the internal examiners should make a selection of scripts to be scrutinised by an external examiner, the principles for such selection must be agreed in advance.
14. External Examiners should have enough evidence to determine that internal marking, and determination of award and where appropriate classification is of an appropriate standard and is consistent. External examiners should see a sample of examination scripts and other assessed material from the top, the middle and the bottom of the range. They should normally have the opportunity to scrutinise all scripts and other assessed material from the final year of finalists whose overall result for the programme falls two percentage points or fewer below a classification border. Mark profiles from previous years for these students should also be made available. External Examiners should also see all scripts and other material assessed internally as first class (for undergraduates) or as distinctions (for foundation or Masters degrees) or as failures. To carry out these duties effectively external examiners should not normally be asked to act as second markers.
15. External examiners should have sufficient time to scrutinise examination scripts and other assessed work adequately, normally by receiving these at least seven days in advance of an Examination Board meeting. This requirement will normally only be waived by request of the external examiner her/himself (if, for example, the external examiner prefers to review the scripts by visiting the College in person before the meeting).
16. External examiners should not recommend the amendment of marks for individual students or pieces of work unless they have seen all of the assessed work for the module in question. External examiners can recommend that all marks within a module be "re-scaled" if, as a result of their moderation, they consider that the general standard of marking within the module is too harsh or too lenient.
17. External examiners will be required to attend meetings of Boards of Examiners at which significant decisions are to be taken. The Chair of the Board of Examiners will ensure that external examiners are invited to attend such meetings. External Examiners should be given as much notice as possible of the date of the final meeting of examiners.
18. External examiners must approve each programme's report on finalists, normally at the meeting at which awards are recommended or awarded. In so doing external examiners must certify that the standard of the assessment was appropriate for a programme of study at a level consonant with the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and that the assessments had been conducted in accordance with the relevant regulations and Programme Specification

(FHEQ - <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/The-framework-for-higher-education-qualifications-in-England-Wales-and-Northern-Ireland.aspx>

Programme Specifications - <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/qa/programme/schools>).

19. In addition to attendance at relevant sub-board / postgraduate board meetings, it is the explicit duty of the College to invite all its external examiners to the relevant full Board of Examiners meeting, to give them adequate advance notice of these meetings and information on the powers of the Board.

### **Induction and Training of External Examiners**

20. Upon appointment each external examiner will be supplied with the programme's regulations and specification, programme handbooks and module specifications, the past year's External Examiners' reports and the responses made to these minutes of the last meeting of the Board/Sub-Board. These may be provided either electronically or in hard copy. External Examiners should also be given access to all College policies relating to assessment, including the Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study, Policy on Marking and Moderation, Policy on the Operation of Assessment Offences and this Policy and Guidance on the Role of External Examiner and relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statements. This may be by provision of links to web-based documents, with hard / electronic copies to be provided on request.
21. The Chair of the relevant Board or Sub-Board of Examiners is responsible for ensuring that external examiners are supplied upon appointment with any additional information on practices relating to assessment on programmes within the external examiner's remit, including specific details of the external examiner's role (including details of modules to be reviewed by that external examiner, details of any sampling policies developed in accordance with the College Policy on Marking & Moderation and any other duties that the external examiner will be expected to perform as part of their role).
22. External examiners will also be provided with any updates to assessment policies and procedures, and details of any programme or module amendments, during their period in office.
23. Wherever possible, an experienced internal examiner should be nominated to act as a mentor / direct point of contact to individuals who are new to the post of external examiner, in order to give formal and informal advice on the requirements of the role.

### **Termination of Appointment**

24. External examiners may terminate their appointment at any time, but are requested to do so in writing to the Academic Registrar and Chair of the relevant Board, giving three months notice, to enable a replacement to be found.
25. The College may, where an external examiner fails to fulfil their duties, terminate that examiner's appointment. A request to terminate an external examiner's

appointment may only be approved by Academic Board upon the recommendation of the relevant Board or Sub-Board of Examiners.

## Reporting

26. External examiners are required to make annual written reports to the Academic Registrar following the final Board meeting of the academic year. The Academic Registrar will arrange for any points requiring a response to be raised, at both subject and, if issues arise, at institutional level, with the Chair of the Board (or Sub-Board); these points will be copied to the Head(s) of the School(s) concerned and the Chair of the College Board of Examiners. Copies of the external examiners' reports should be transmitted to all appropriate teachers and examiners. If requested, Schools should respond to the points raised by the Academic Registrar and a copy of the report, the Academic Registrar's letter and the written response by the School is then included for consideration by the Chair/a panel of the relevant Degrees Committee. A further response may be requested by the Chair/panel if it is deemed that the initial response is not sufficient. Responses should also be sent by the School to the external examiner in question.
  
27. External examiners will be asked to comment upon
  - the academic standards demonstrated by the students and, where possible, their performance in relation to students on comparable courses;
  - the strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort;
  - the quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance;
  - the extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration;
  - the design, structure and marking of assessments;
  - the procedures for assessments and examinations;
  - whether external examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information;
  - the coherence of the policies and procedures relating to external examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform;
  - the extent to which the external examiner's comments in his/her previous report have been considered and appropriately acted upon.

Academic Board  
March 2012