



**UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE
BIRMINGHAM**

University College Birmingham

Code of Practice on External Examining

(Revised August 2025)

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1. Principles

- 1.1 This Code of Practice is based on the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) chapter (B7) on external examining in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.
- 1.2 External Examiners are appointed to provide the University with impartial and independent advice and informed comment on the institution's academic standards and student achievement in relation to those standards, through oversight of the assessment process at the module and programme/award level.
- 1.3 All University programmes of study, and modules therein, leading to an award of credit at foundation, undergraduate or postgraduate level must have one or more External Examiner(s) appointed to carry out the role of External Examiner as laid out in this Code of Practice.
- 1.4 All External Examiners appointed by the University are required to adhere to the clauses contained in this Code of Practice.
- 1.5 Within the University it is the responsibility of the Executive Dean or their nominee to ensure the information in this Code of Practice is adhered to and communicated to the nominated Examinations Officer and all academic staff designated as internal examiners.
- 1.6 The information contained in this Code of Practice also applies to External Examiners appointed to all programmes accredited and validated by the University through collaborative provision arrangements. Schools should ensure that, where they have a collaborative provision arrangement in place, staff from that organisation are aware of their responsibilities with respect to this Code of Practice.

2. Appointment of External Examiners

- 2.1 The number of External Examiners appointed to each programme of study should be sufficient to ensure the appropriate expertise is available to cover all areas of the syllabus under assessment and will be sufficient to abide by the terms of any PSRB.
- 2.2 All nominations for External Examiners must be submitted using the University's standard nomination form by HE Quality.
- 2.3 All nominations for External Examiners should meet the criteria for appointment as listed in Appendix A of this Code of Practice.
- 2.4 If, in exceptional circumstances, a nomination is put forward which does not meet all the criteria for appointment the School should provide a detailed statement in support of the nomination. This will then be considered by the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Digital) or their nominee.
- 2.5 Completed nomination forms will be returned to HE Quality to be forwarded for signature by the Executive Dean or nominee and then submitted to the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Digital) or their nominee for final approval and formal appointment on behalf of Academic Board. All completed nomination forms should be submitted with a full academic CV and a scanned colour copy of their right to work documents as listed in Appendix B of this Code of Practice.
- 2.6 All nominations should state clearly the programme(s) or module(s) to which each External Examiner is appointed. On appointment, External Examiners should be made fully aware by HE Quality of their role and duties at module and/or programme level. Where more than one External Examiner is assigned to a programme their individual responsibilities should be made clear.
- 2.7 The annual flat fee paid to External Examiners is set by HE Quality and should be representative of the workload of the role. Information on the annual fee will be set

out in the External Examiner's letter of appointment. Where a programme is closing and only a few students remain on the final year, UCB reserves the right to reduce the fee in accordance with the workload, this will be outlined in an email at the beginning of the academic year.

- 2.8 All External Examiners will be appointed for a fixed term of 4 years and will only be confirmed when the original right to work documents have been checked, copied and validated during the online induction. HE Quality may, in exceptional circumstances, request an extension of the appointment for one additional year. All requests for an extension of appointment will be considered by the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Digital) or their nominee for approval.
- 2.9 It will be the responsibility of HE Quality, to request and hold information regarding where current University staff hold appointments as External Examiners to ensure there is no potential reciprocity in the nominations made. This list should be consulted when considering nominations for new External Examiners. An annual update of this list will be undertaken by HE Quality and their records updated.
- 2.10 The University reserves the right to terminate an External Examiner's appointment at any point during their term if they fail to fulfil appropriately their roles and responsibilities as set out in this Code of Practice or upon failure to provide the original right to work documents for checking before duties commence. This may include but is not limited to; unexplained absence from Board of Examiners meetings, the non-completion of scrutiny of work samples, failure to complete the annual report in a timely and satisfactory fashion. Termination of appointment is viewed as a 'last resort' and the University does actively work with its external examiners to ensure this action would be in exceptional circumstances.
- 2.11 The integrity and security of the learning process is a fundamental tenet of the UCB approach to quality. Whenever possible, where programmes are replaced or discontinued UCB will seek to maintain the 'contract' with those students by seeking to give sufficient notice that the last cohort of students are able to complete the final phase of their programme. If for strategic reasons the final cohort of students are

unable to complete their current programme due to early closure, UCB will transfer those students onto another suitable and similar programme for their benefit. In circumstances where programmes are ended it will be necessary to end the contract of the External Examiner for this programme. Should the External Examiner only have this one programme responsibility, their contract will end before their 4-year term is completed.

- 2.12 If an Examiner wishes to resign from their appointment they should do so in writing to the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Digital) and the HE Quality Manager via HE-Quality@ucb.ac.uk giving a three-month notice period where possible.
- 2.13 The University Academic Board will receive an annual report on information relating to all External Examiner appointments.

3. Induction

- 3.1 On appointment each External Examiner will receive a confirmation of appointment letter from HE Quality, specifying the programme(s) or module(s) to which the External Examiner is assigned and details of the fee to be paid.
- 3.2 All newly appointed External Examiners will be given an online induction. The first part of the induction will be a discussion about the role and responsibilities of an External Examiner and to show them around the VLE, especially where draft documentation and moderation sheets will be shared and how to locate marked student work for each module. During this induction, right to work documents will be checked and validated for University records. The second part of the induction will be with the teaching team, who will discuss the programme(s) in more detail and to answer any questions they may have.
- 3.3 The University will send all newly appointed External Examiners:
- A copy of this Code of Practice

- A copy of the University 'Guidance for External Examiners'
- Web links to relevant University regulations and policies
- The web link to the External Examiner online resource for University College Birmingham Examiners (<https://www.ucb.ac.uk/about-us/external-examiners/>)
- Guidance on claiming fees and expenses
- Links to the relevant national regulatory framework (QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education).
- A copy of the previous External Examiner's report and UCB response letter

3.4 HE Quality will supplement this information with documentation specific to the External Examiner's appointment. Schools are required to send the following information via HE Quality upon request to newly appointed External Examiners, as a minimum:

- Programme handbooks (to include programme and module specifications)
- Guidance on marking and moderation practices
- Details of Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements where appropriate.

3.5 HE Quality should ensure that appropriate support mechanisms are in place for External Examiners, particularly in the case of less experienced External Examiners who may benefit from the mentoring scheme.

3.6 HE Quality should inform External Examiners of the dates of meetings they are required to attend (e.g. Board of Examiners meetings and student meetings) at the earliest opportunity.

3.7 HE Quality should also provide, in advance of the assessment period, the process and timescale for scrutiny of draft module documentation and moderation sheets for student work with clearly stated deadlines.

4. Enhancement of quality

4.1 External Examiners should have the opportunity to contribute to the enhancement of

the student learning experience during their term of appointment.

- 4.2 Schools are encouraged to utilise the External Examiner's experience through discussions with academic staff on the structure and content of programmes of study. External Examiners may also be asked to comment on any proposed changes to programmes of study or to provide advice following changes to PSRB requirements or similar.
- 4.3 Informal confidential meetings between External Examiners and groups of students are also required and guidance on these meetings is set out in Section 9: Student Involvement. Feedback from these meetings will help to inform the programme report due at the end of each academic year.
- 4.4 External Examiners are requested, through their annual report, to comment on particular strengths, distinctive or innovative features in relation to standards and assessment, and to provide suggestions for the enhancement of the provision under scrutiny.

5. Scrutiny of marking

- 5.1 External Examiners are appointed to act as a moderator of academic standards, to comment on the quality of academic provision and comparability of standards and student performance.
- 5.2 External Examiners should be provided with all draft examination papers and summative assessments that contribute to the final award for comment and approval. Where suggestions for amendment are provided by an External Examiner, Schools should reply to the External Examiner to confirm how their advice has been acted upon.
- 5.3 External Examiners are required to consider the consistency, transparency and accuracy of marking standards for a programme of study, through reviewing the

marking within each module, and between modules of the same level.

- 5.4 External Examiners should be provided with marking criteria used in relation to the assessment of a module, and a mark spreadsheet for each module to which they have been assigned (which can be accessed via the gradebook each module site on the VLE).
- 5.5 External Examiners should review a sample of all forms of assessment from across the full mark range. This exercise should be completed for all modules that contribute to the final award.
- 5.6 HE Quality should notify the External Examiner(s) in advance of the size and scope of the sample of work to be scrutinised, within the parameters outlined in 5.5 above, to provide sufficient evidence for the External Examiner to determine that internal marking is of an appropriate standard.
- 5.7 If an External Examiner does not agree with the marks awarded within a sample of work, they may propose a level of moderation (additional to that already undertaken under School policy) or re-marking. This must apply to all students who have undertaken the assessment. External Examiners are not permitted to alter the mark of any student. This is to be reported to HE Quality who will inform the Deputy Deans of Quality Assurance and Enhancement to investigate.
- 5.8 External Examiners should not normally be expected to adjudicate between internal markers. Disagreements between internal markers should be resolved before a sample of work is seen by the External Examiner. This may be through the use of a third marker, or consultation with senior colleagues within the School. In all cases it should be transparent to the External Examiner how the final mark was determined.
- 5.9 Where required by a PSRB, External Examiners may, as agreed with the School, complete further duties in respect of the assessment process as necessary. HE Quality should be notified of such arrangements (e.g. participation in clinical assessments) by

the School.

6. Board of Examiners meetings

- 6.1 External Examiners should be informed, in advance of the meeting of the Board of Examiners, of the recommendations to be made by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel/s, including relevant supporting information where appropriate.
- 6.2 External Examiners are full members of the Board of Examiners and should attend relevant meetings, relating to the provision to which they are appointed and are expected to attend a minimum of two boards per academic year.
- 6.3 Where an External Examiner is unable to be present at the relevant Board of Examiners meeting this should be agreed with HE Quality in advance (without contravening 6.2), and this will be via the completion of the Non-attendance Form obtained from HE Quality. A mechanism is in place for obtaining the External Examiner's agreement with the marks and awards confirmed at the Board of Examiners meeting. Where possible, online meetings will be utilised for Board of Examiners meetings.
- 6.4 External Examiners attend Board of Examiners meetings to scrutinise and endorse the outcomes of the assessment processes to which they have been appointed, confirming a set of results at module-level or the decisions taken (e.g. awards, withdrawals) at programme-level as appropriate.
- 6.5 The endorsement of the decisions taken by the Board of Examiners should be given through the signature of the relevant External Examiner(s) on the mark lists, award lists or similar documents.
- 6.6 Any instances where an External Examiner does not endorse a decision taken by the Board of Examiners this should be recorded and referred to the University's Academic Board for consideration. Schools should ensure that where this occurs the

final decision of the University's Academic Board is communicated back to the External Examiner.

7. Reporting

- 7.1 As part of their duties all External Examiners are required to complete a written annual report, using the template provided by the University. Given that the reports are at the heart of a central component of UCB's quality assurance process, it is essential that they are comprehensive, robust and evidence based. Concise or superficial reports may hinder our ability to substantiate claims of quality standards. In addition, where concerns are identified, insufficient detail may hinder timely intervention, which may negatively impact student outcomes and their overall learning experience. External Examiners should also be mindful that their report will be shared with academic staff, senior colleagues, relevant external bodies and students. Accordingly, the language used should be carefully considered to ensure it is appropriate for a diverse audience, with no identifiable reference to individual members of staff or students, either by using a name or student ID number, to ensure appropriate confidentiality is maintained.
- 7.2 External Examiners are required to submit their reports, via email directly to HE Quality, according to the deadlines set by the University.
- 7.3 If an External Examiner is appointed to programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate taught level, they are required to write and submit separate reports by the respective deadline.
- 7.4 In their annual report External Examiners are expected to provide comment on:
- The academic standard of the University's awards in accordance with the QAA Framework for HE qualifications applicable subject benchmark statements, comparison, with other similar HE institutions of which the External Examiner

has experience

- The rigour and transparency of the assessment process which measures student achievement against the intended learning outcomes of the programme and in line with the University's policies and regulations
- Any instances of good practice observed and opportunities to enhance the learning opportunities of the students
- Any issues specifically required by the relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB).

7.5 External Examiners are also expected to confirm whether:

- Sufficient evidence and information were available to them to fulfil their role
- Issues raised in previous reports have been addressed satisfactorily.

7.6 External Examiners in their final year of appointment are requested to give an overview of their term of appointment at the end of the report form.

7.7 External Examiners may, at any point during their appointment, submit a separate confidential report to the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Digital). This may be to raise confidential concerns such as instances where the External Examiner considers it is necessary to identify an individual member of the University. In such cases the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Digital) or their nominee will respond to the External Examiner on actions resulting from their report.

7.8 The University reserves the right to terminate an External Examiner's appointment if a satisfactory report is not received within a reasonable timeframe of the deadline and as stated in section 2.12 of this Code.

7.9 The University also reserves the right to request additional information from an External Examiner if the report submitted is of insufficient detail to assess their evaluation of the academic standards of the programme(s) or module(s) concerned.

- 7.10 Payment of the annual fee to External Examiners is conditional upon the timely receipt of a satisfactory annual report. Payment of fees will be withheld until the report is deemed to be of a satisfactory standard and the report may be returned for additional comment.

8. Consideration of External Examiner reports

- 8.1 All University College Birmingham External Examiner reports will be reviewed by the Deputy Deans (or nominee) before to consultation with the relevant programme team. A formal written response will then be prepared and approved by the Executive Dean of School (or nominee).
- 8.2 Where an External Examiner's suggestion is not to be acted on a detailed explanation should also be provided within the response letter.
- 8.3 Response letters should be sent to the External Examiner within 6 weeks of receipt of the report within the School. Where, for good reason, it is not possible to inform the External Examiner of the resulting actions within this timeframe an initial response acknowledging that this issue is under discussion can be given, provided a follow-up communication is sent.
- 8.4 A copy of each School response letter and completed summary sheet should be forwarded to HE Quality and, if required, to the appropriate staff within the School.
- 8.5 Schools may be requested to respond initially to the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Digital) where an issue has been raised with a School that necessitates a response by the University. In these instances, the response to the External Examiner will be sent by the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Digital).
- 8.6 The University's Student Services and Standards Committee, Academic Board and Accreditation Committee will consider all programme summary reports of External Examiner comments to identify, and where necessary act upon, any common themes

emerging at School or University level.

- 8.7 External Examiner reports and School responses will be used to inform the University's annual review and periodic review processes of programmes.

9. Student Involvement

- 9.1 Programme teams should ensure that students are informed of the name, home institution and position held by the External Examiner(s) appointed to the programme(s) of study.
- 9.2 HE Quality and Schools are required provide External Examiners with the opportunity, normally once per academic year, to informally and confidentially meet representative groups of students to gather their views of the programme. These meetings will typically take place online.
- 9.3 Where a meeting is arranged with an External Examiner, the programme team should provide students with clear guidance on the purpose of that meeting and its limitations, particularly emphasising that it cannot influence individual assessment outcomes.
- 9.4 Under no circumstances should students attempt to contact an External Examiner. External Examiners are not permitted to respond to communications from third parties including students or their representatives. If any such contacts is attempted the External Examiner must report the details immediately to the University, through HE Quality via HE-Quality@ucb.ac.uk.
- 9.5 If a student is found to have contacted an External Examiner, they may be subject to the University's disciplinary procedures.
- 9.6 External Examiner reports along with the School responses, should, be discussed with student representatives during Subject Boards and Board of Studies Meetings.

These discussions should be formally minuted, published and made available to all students on the programme.

9.7 All students may request access to an External Examiner's report, and the actions resulting from the School's response. Schools should ensure they have a mechanism in place to respond to these requests.

9.8 Officers of the Guild of Students will attend University Quality Committees, where summaries of issues raised by External Examiners along with responses of both School and University levels are discussed.

10. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) & Freedom of Information Act

10.1 The GDPR regulates the processing of personal data, both as electronic and paper records. The University requires all staff and agents to abide by the provisions of the GDPR.

10.2 All personal information supplied by the External Examiner for the purposes of their appointment will be held securely for the duration, and for 1 year after the end, of the contract, and in accordance with the GDPR. As stated in 9.1 the name, home institution and post held will be included in programme information made available to students (e.g. programme handbook).

10.3 The University has been designated a Public Authority for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Upon receipt of a request for copies of External Examiners' reports the University has a statutory obligation to consider their release subject to any applicable exemption under the provisions of the Act.

11. Causes for Concern

11.1 Through the normal reporting process, as laid out in Section 7 of the Code, the University should be able to respond to any concerns an External Examiner may raise in relation to their duties or which may arise during their tenure.

- 11.2 In exceptional cases External Examiners may have serious concerns about academic standards and quality of provision which cannot be resolved through the normal reporting process. In such an instance an External Examiner may write, in confidence, directly to the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Digital).
- 11.3 If an External Examiner still has a serious concern about academic standards or quality of provision, and has exhausted all internal procedures, including writing to the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Digital), they can use the Higher Education Funding Council for England's procedure for raising an issue about quality.

Appendix A – University Criteria for Appointment of External Examiners

Person specification

- A. Institutions appoint External Examiners who can show appropriate evidence of the following:
- 1) Knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality
 - 2) Competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof
 - 3) Relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate
 - 4) Competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures
 - 5) Sufficient standing (normally holding a position of Senior Lecturer or higher), credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers
 - 6) Familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed
 - 7) Fluency in English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that External Examiners are provided with the information to make their judgements)

- 8) Meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies
- 9) Awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula
- 10) Competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

Conflicts of interest

A. Institutions do not appoint as External Examiners anyone in the following categories or circumstances:

- 1) A member of a governing body or committee of the appointing institution or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the appointing institution or one of its collaborative partners
- 2) Anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study
- 3) Anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study
- 4) Anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study
- 5) Anyone 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(s) or modules in question
- 6) Former staff or students of the institution unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the External Examiner have completed their programme(s)

- 7) A reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution
- 8) The succession of an External Examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home department and institution
- 9) The appointment of more than one External Examiner from the same department of the same institution.

Terms of office

- 1) The duration of an External Examiner's appointment will normally be for four years, with an exceptional extension of one year to ensure continuity.
- 2) An External Examiner may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.
- 3) External Examiners normally hold no more than two External Examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time.

Appendix B – Right to work evidence

Eligibility to Work in the UK

Overview

You'll need to prove your right to work in the UK to UCB before you start working for us.

How you do this depends on your nationality and what kind of permission you have to work in the UK.

If you're a British or Irish citizen

If you're a British or Irish citizen, you can prove your right to work in the UK with either of the following:

- a British passport
- an Irish passport or passport card

Your passport or passport card can be current or expired so long as the photograph is an accurate likeness to you currently.

If you're not a British or Irish citizen

If you're not a British or Irish citizen, you can prove your right to work with:

- a share code – to prove your immigration status
- your [eligible immigration documents](#)