

# GUIDANCE FOR THOSE SEEKING THE APPOINTMENT OF A NEW EXTERNAL EXAMINER



## 1 Introduction

External examiner appointments must be approved on behalf of the Academic External Examiners Sub-Committee. ***An Assessment Board which does not include approved external examiners is not authorised to confirm the assessment of students or to recommend the conferment of an award upon a student.***

In order to gain approval you must complete the relevant sections of the nomination form and give it to your School Leader for Quality Assurance ***at least three months*** before you wish the approval to come into operation.

The form must be completed in typescript.

## 2 What do I need to do first?

You need to start searching for an external examiner ***at least 6-9 months*** before you need the person to take up appointment.

When you are searching for an external examiner you need to take into account the criteria for selection. Once you have found somebody who you think may be suitable, it is wise to ask a few questions to determine whether or not they are likely to be acceptable. If you do not do this you may waste a lot of time getting your nominee to complete the form only to find that he or she is unlikely to be approved and you will then need to start the process all over again.

The criteria for appointment are attached as appendix 1 but here are the core questions that it is probably sensible to ask before requesting the nominee to provide more detailed information:

***Have you any experience of internal/external examining?*** Applicants are expected to have some previous experience of external examining. If they do not then they may still be accepted as part of a team of experienced external examiners or if they have extensive internal experience. The Sub-Committee will expect to see details of support offered to nominees with no previous examining experience, and have the right to request further detail of the support to be offered.

***Are you currently external examining elsewhere?*** External Examiners normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time, i.e. the nominee can only have one existing duty to be eligible to take on the UEL role.

***Do you have any links with UEL?*** Applicants cannot have any close links within the last five years. For example, they should not have been a member of staff within the last five

years or employed on a consultancy basis. Membership of a validation or subject review panel, however, is not considered inappropriate (as long as the duty has been completed).

If you do not know the person you will also need to discuss with them their academic/professional background to determine whether they have the subject expertise needed to examine your subject area.

Once you have ascertained that the person is likely to be suitable, you can request them to complete relevant parts of sections A and B of the nomination form. You can do this by sending the form to them or by requesting the information over the phone. A copy of the application form can be downloaded from our website.

Once you have detailed information you can evaluate whether or not your nominee meets fully the criteria for appointment (see appendix 1). In some cases it is possible that the nominee will not quite meet all the requirements but you still feel that they are the best person for the job. If this is the case, the nomination may still be approved provided that you provide a supporting statement explaining how the issue will be dealt with. If a supporting statement is not provided it is likely that your nomination will be referred back to you requesting further information and this will slow down the approval process. Please provide the supporting statement in section B15 of the nomination form.

### **3 Under what circumstances will inexperienced external examiners be approved?**

One of our criteria for appointment is that external examiners should have enough recent external examining experience or comparable related experience to indicate competence in assessing students in the subject area. This should normally be in an external context. Taken literally this might appear to limit the opportunity for many staff to become external examiners. The guidelines attached as appendix 1 make clear the circumstances in which an inexperienced external examiner may be appointed.

The following additional guidance may be helpful.

- If the applicant will be part of an experienced team then the lack of experience is not, in itself, a bar to appointment, but you should explain how you will make arrangements for the new external examiner to gain advice and guidance from the more experienced members of the team. The school will need to arrange a mentor for the nominee and provide details of who will be the mentor in section B15 of the form.
- If you are recommending an inexperienced external examiner in a new team you will still need to make arrangements for them to work alongside an experienced examiner for at least one year.

If you are unsure whether or not your nomination is likely to be acceptable, please ask the External Examiners Administrator in the Quality Assurance & Enhancement Office.

#### **4 How does our university view nominations from professional practitioners?**

Our university welcomes nominations from professional practitioners. They have a very important role to play in helping to ensure that our modules and awards are professionally relevant. In particular, they are often essential in helping to judge practical competence on placements.

Most professional practitioners will not have previous teaching or examining experience in higher education. This will not, in itself, preclude them from appointment providing that they are part of a team of external examiners that includes those with teaching and examining experience. In reaching a judgement the External Examiners Sub-Committee looks at the overall balance of the team of external examiners. That is why it is essential that you complete that part of the nomination form that indicates who the other examiners are.

#### **5 When should external examiners take up their appointment?**

New examiners should take up their appointments on or before the retirement of their predecessors. External examiners should remain available after the last assessments with which they are to be associated in order to deal with any subsequent reviews of decisions.

#### **6 How long is the normal term of office?**

Normally, where assessments take place in the summer term, appointments will run from the October before the first assessments to the September after the last assessments. The examiner's normal term of office will be one which allows the examiner to assess four successive cohorts of students: this will normally mean four years.

#### **7 What fee should we offer the external examiner?**

There are separate guidelines on external examiner fees. A copy of the guidance notes can be requested from the External Examiners Administrator.

#### **8 What do I do once I have completed the form?**

Once you have completed all relevant sections of the form you should submit it to your School Leader for Quality Assurance. There is a process within your school for vetting the form. It is possible that you may be asked to provide clarification on some points. Once the school is happy that the nomination is suitable it is signed by the School Leader for QA. It is also signed by the Dean of School to authorise the fee. It is then forwarded to the Quality Assurance & Enhancement office, together with any supporting evidence that the school wishes to submit.

The External Examiners Administrator in the Quality Assurance & Enhancement Office arranges for the nomination to be considered by the External Examiner Sub-Committee. This process is managed by correspondence to make it as speedy as possible but a response is needed from all members before a decision can be reached. If members wish

clarification before approving the application, the External Examiners Administrator will contact you direct.

Once the nomination has been approved a contract will be issued. A copy of the contract will be sent to the Head of Subject, Dean of School, School Office Manager and School Leader for Quality Assurance. You will therefore know that the examiner has been formally appointed.

***You should not, under any circumstances, ask a nominee to undertake any duties prior to receiving confirmation that the nomination has been approved.***

## **9 What should I do once the external examiner has been approved?**

At the time of appointment of a new external examiner it is wise to reacquaint yourself with the terms of reference of external examiners and with their rights and responsibilities. These are provided in the *External Examiners' Manual* which will have been sent to the examiner together with the contract. There are changes to the Manual from time to time so it is wise to make sure you are up-to-date with these. If you do not have a copy of the Manual please contact the Quality Assurance & Enhancement Office for a copy or access it via our Web pages.

New external examiners must be briefed on their task as soon as possible after appointment. This briefing comprises of two elements: a University level induction to look at University-wide policies and regulations; and a School briefing to look at School and Subject area level issues, meet staff and students. Issues to be covered in School inductions are provided in the External Examiners' Manual. New external examiners will be invited by the Quality Assurance & Enhancement office to our University Induction Day. The programme will provide an opportunity for the external examiner to meet School representatives, which should enable you to cover elements of the School briefing.

A checklist of the information that should be provided to the new external examiner on appointment by the school is attached as appendix 2, it also available via our website.

## Extract from the Quality Manual September 2015, Part 9

### 4 Criteria for the Appointment of External Examiners

The following are the minimum criteria for consideration of proposed external examiners. The notes beneath each criterion provide a checklist of issues considered both in selecting and nominating external examiners and are used during scrutiny of nominees for approval.

#### 4.1 ***An external examiner's academic/professional qualifications should be appropriate to the awards/subject area to be examined.***

The examiner:

- Should demonstrate competence and experience in the subjects covered at the Board.
- Have relevant academic or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being examined, or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate.

#### 4.2 ***An external examiner should have appropriate standing, expertise and experience to maintain comparability of standards.***

The examiner should:

- Show evidence of knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance and enhancement of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality.
- Have sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers/professional peers as appropriate.
- Demonstrate fluency in English (or for programmes delivered and assessed in a language other than English, fluency in the relevant language).

Standing, expertise and breadth of experience may be indicated by:

- The present [or last, if retired] post and place of work.
- The range and scope of experience across Higher Education/ professions.
- Current and recent active involvement in research/scholarly/ professional activities in the subject area of study concerned.

#### 4.3 ***An external examiner should have enough recent external examining or comparable related experience to indicate competence in assessing students considered at the Board. The examining experience will normally be in an external context.***

The examiner should be able to demonstrate:

- Competence and experience in designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject.
- Competence and experience in operating assessment procedures.
- Awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula.
- Familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award in which students are to be assessed.

- Where relevant, evidence of meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

If the proposed examiner has no previous external examiner experience at the appropriate level, the application should be supported by either:

- Other external examining experience.
- Extensive internal examining experience.
- Other relevant and recent experience likely to support the external examiner role.

Proposed examiners without experience as external examiners should, where possible, join an experienced team of external examiners and the school will allocate a mentor. Where there is only one external examiner they should work initially alongside another experienced external examiner in a related area. This initial period should include involvement in the final stages of assessment for the award.

**4.4 *External examiners should be drawn from a wide variety of institutional/professional contexts and traditions in order that the Subject Area Award/ Subject Area Progression Board benefits from wide-ranging external scrutiny.***

There should not be:

- More than one examiner from the same institution in the team of external examiners in a subject area or associated subject area.
- Reciprocal external examining between awards/subject areas or departments/Schools.
- Sequential replacement of an external examiner by an individual from the same institution.
- An external examiner in the subject area from an institution which has been the source of external examiners in the recent past [normally three years].

In order to facilitate this, Schools should hold details of the external examiner appointments held by members of staff at other institutions.

**4.5 *Examiners should not be over-extended by their external examining duties.***

External examiners should hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time. An examiner should not be allocated in excess of 15 modules.

The Sub-Committee will expect to see convincing arguments in support of proposals for a heavier workload for an examiner.

**4.6 *There should be an appropriate balance and expertise in the team of external examiners for each subject area.***

The proposed examiner should complement the external examining team in terms of expertise and examining experience. There should be an appropriate balance between academic and professional practitioners. If the subject area contains modules associated with programmes leading to a professional award at least one practitioner with appropriate experience should be in the team. The phasing of appointments to the team should be structured to ensure continuity.

Lead External Examiners should have sufficient external examining experience to take an overview of the range of awards for which the Board is responsible.

**4.7 External examiners should be impartial in judgement and should not have previous close involvement with the institution which might compromise objectivity.**

Over the last five years, the proposed examiner should not have been:

- A member of staff, a governor, a student, or a near relative of a member of staff associated with the subject area or award.
- An external examiner on a cognate subject area or award in the institution.
- Involved as external examiner for the modules or associated awards when they were approved by another validating body.

The proposed examiner should not be:

- Personally associated with the sponsorship of students.
- Currently a member of a governing body or committee of UEL or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee or teacher on a programme leading to a UEL award at a collaborative partner institution.
- In a close personal, professional or contractual relationship with a member of staff or student in the area associated with the Board.
- Required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students in the area associated with the Board.
- In a position to influence significantly the future employment of students in the area associated with the Board.
- Significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment in the area associated with the Board.
- Likely to be involved with student placements or training of UEL students in the examiner's organisation.

<b>Checklist – Information to be provided to the External Examiner on Appointment by the School</b>
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A schedule for receipt of relevant documentation (following discussion with the external examiner). [ ]

The dates of assessment board meetings and any other dates where the external examiner will be required to be at UEL. [ ]

Module specifications and module guides. [ ]

Programme handbooks (where relevant). [ ]

School procedures and assessment policies. [ ]

Relevant forms pertinent to the School. [ ]