

MATHEMATICAL, PHYSICAL AND LIFE SCIENCES

DIVISION Procedures for the nomination of external examiners

Revised September 2015

The QAA requires evidence of the strong and scrupulous use of independent external examiners in summative assessment procedures. One aspect of this is the procedure by which the supervisory body –the Divisional Board in the case of taught course examinations – goes about the appointment of external examiners.

Within the Division, departments have nominating committees, which nominate external examiners. The Divisional Board, as the Supervisory Body, approves nominations for external examiners, and forwards the nominations to the Examination Schools for approval by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education) and the Proctors.

A Extracts from Education Committee's Policy and Guidance on Examinations and Assessment¹

"SUMMARY OF RELEVANT REGULATIONS

On the nomination of a supervisory body, or of a nominating committee acting on its behalf, the Board of Examiners for each University Examination *must* include a person as an external examiner who is approved to act as an external arbiter of standards; and it *may* also include a person as an external examiner to provide academic expertise not otherwise obtainable from within the University. All such nominations in either category must be designated as an external examiner by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Proctors. [*Examination Regulations*, 2015, p.16-17, ll. 46-5]

Unless they are appointed to examine in separate subjects or in separate parts of an examination divided into Part I and Part II, no two persons who are, or have been during the two preceding years, on the teaching staff of the same college or university or other institution shall be nominated to serve at the same time as external examiners in the same examination. [*ibid.*, p.17, ll.11-15] ...

POLICY REQUIREMENTS

It should be noted that individuals may be nominated to serve as external examiner in two categories: either (1) as an external arbiter of standards or (2) to provide academic expertise not otherwise obtainable within the University. The same individual may only serve in both categories at the same time with the permission of the Proctors, since it should be noted that, outside courses with very small numbers of students, this is likely to impose an excessive load on the external examiner concerned.

Bodies responsible for nominations should have available for scrutiny, in the first instance by the Proctors, brief details of each individual proposed as an external examiner (e.g. current post, relevant experience etc) along the lines of the summaries boards forward when they are nominating external electors to professorships or external members of review committees.

Appointments of external examiners should normally observe the UK-wide set of criteria for appointing external examiners set out in the Quality Code, Part B, Chapter B7: The Expectation and Indicators and reproduced as Appendix 1 [reproduced below]".

¹ Policy and Guidance on Examinations and Assessment, 2015:
<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgexaminers/>

MPLS procedure for the Divisional approval of the nomination of external examiners

It is accepted that for some more specialist examinations, for example the graduate taught courses, there may be a limited pool of external examiners; where appropriate under 5 (b) and (c), the Division's criteria set out what should 'normally' be the case, and it would be up to a nominating committee to make the case for departure from the norm.

1. Using the form provided by the Examination Schools, the departmental committee responsible for nominating examiners shall send proposals for external examiners, duly authorised and providing such information as is required in the Examination Regulations, and along with supporting information demonstrating their suitability to act in this capacity as set out in (5) below, for approval by the MPLS Associate Head of Division (Academic).
2. In the case of joint degrees, the committee responsible for the nominations shall forward its nomination for external examiners to the MPLS Associate Head of Division (Academic) as set out in (1) above.
3. The Associate Head of Division (Academic) shall consider the nominations against the Divisional criteria set out below, and having endorsed them, forward the nominations to the Examination Schools for the attention of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and Proctors.
4. The Divisional Office shall ask departments to report the composition of the committee responsible for the nomination of examiners at the same time as it asks for the names of other departmental office holders, during the summer vacation.
5. The Divisional criteria for the appointment of external examiners are as follows:
 - (a) Those nominated as external examiners shall meet the criteria laid down in the Examination Regulations and the Education Committee Policy and Guidance on Examination and Assessment (to be found at: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgexaminers/> as amended from time to time, including the 'The Expectation and Indicators; External Examining' quoted in 'Appendix 1' below.
 - (b) With regard to the 'Person Specification' section in the UK-wide criteria for appointing external examiners, the Division additionally expects that:
 - (i) Those nominated as external examiners should have sufficient knowledge of the standards expected in the examination(s) at this University for which they are being nominated.
 - (ii) They should be a recognised expert, both in teaching and research, in the subject area in which they are being asked to examine.
 - (iii) As a minimum, they should normally have served as an internal examiner for their area of expertise at a UK HEI with at least a national reputation for excellence in that subject, and preferably also have served as an external examiner for similar examinations (although that last is not an absolute requirement).
 - (iv) They should be active in the subject, and if retired, should normally have done so no more than two years before the start of their period of

appointment.

- (c) With regard to the 'Conflicts of Interest' section in the UK-wide criteria for appointing external examiners, the Division additionally expects that those nominated as external examiners should not teach any course of instruction which forms part of the teaching programme for the examination concerned.
- (d) Bodies responsible for nominations should provide to the MPLS Associate Head of Division (Academic) brief details of each individual proposed as an external examiner (e.g. current post, relevant experience etc, addressing the above points and those set out in the regulations and Education Committee's Guidance and the UK-wide criteria for appointing external examiners' quoted in 'Annexe J' below.) along the lines of the summaries boards forward when they are nominating external electors to professorships or external members of review committees.
- (e) The Division accepts that for some more specialist examinations, for example the graduate taught courses, there may be a limited pool of external examiners; where appropriate under 5 (a) to (c) the Division's criteria set out what should 'normally' be the case, and it would be up to a nominating committee to make the case for departure from the norm.

Appendix 1: The Expectation and Indicators

(Taken from the Quality Code – Chapter B7 – External Examining)

Indicator 5

Degree awarding bodies apply the following UK-wide set of criteria for appointing external examiners and make every effort to ensure that their external examiners are competent to undertake the responsibilities defined by the institution.

Degree awarding bodies use the criteria to ensure that potential conflicts of interest are identified and resolved prior to appointing external examiners or as soon as they arise.

Person specification

a. Degree awarding bodies appoint external examiners who can show appropriate evidence of the following:

- i. knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality
- ii. competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof
- iii. relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate
- iv. competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures
- v. sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers
- vi. familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed
- vii. 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)
- viii. meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies
- ix. awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula
- x. competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

Conflicts of interest

b. Degree awarding bodies do not appoint as external examiners anyone in the following categories or circumstances:

i) a member of a governing body or committee of the appointing body or one of its partners, or support providers, or a current employee of the appointing body or one of its partners, delivery organisations or support providers

ii) anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study

iii) anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study

iv) anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study

v) 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

vi) 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)

vii) a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution

viii) the succession of an external examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home department and institution

ix) the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution.

Terms of office

c. The duration of an external examiner's appointment will normally be for four years, with an exceptional extension of one year to ensure continuity.

d. 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.

e. External examiners normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time."