

# External Examiner Guidance



## 1. Introduction

Externality is a significant feature of higher education in the UK and is embedded in a number of key quality management processes, one of those being external examining. Degree-awarding bodies engage external examiners to:

- Comment on and ensure the consistent application and maintenance of their standards.
- Confirm alignment with the UK recognised standards.
- Identify good practice.
- Provide recommendations for enhancement of the student learning experience.

At Bath Spa University, External Examiners operate at two levels: module External Examiners who are appointed to modules within a subject; and Chief External Examiners who are appointed to oversee the awards conferred under a particular regulatory framework, those being the Undergraduate Academic Framework and the Taught Postgraduate Academic Framework.<sup>1</sup> Academic Governance and Quality is responsible for the coordination of Chief External Examiners in liaison with other relevant departments where appropriate.

External Examiners are appointed for a four academic year period and cover programmes delivered both directly at Bath Spa University and those delivered by the University's Educational Partnerships, as follows:

- Awards with Integrated Foundation Year - Levels F, 4, 5 and 6
- Foundation Awards - Level 5
- Undergraduate Awards - Levels 5 and 6
- Initial Teacher Training Awards - Levels 6 and 7
- Postgraduate Taught Awards - Level 7

## 2. Purpose

From the University's perspective the External Examiner process demonstrates that Bath Spa University adopts an approach to managing quality which takes account of external expertise in a reliable, fair, and transparent manner. The procedure ensures that External Examiners have sufficient standing, credibility, and breadth of experience and are equipped with the necessary information and support to fulfil their role. Engagement of External Examiners on the delivery and monitoring of provision provides assurance to the University and other stakeholders that provision is in accordance with the national qualification frameworks, Characteristics Statements, Subject Benchmark Statements, and any other requirements such as those from Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and the QAA [External Examining Principles](#). External Examiners are provided with opportunities throughout the academic year to provide impartial and independent advice on academic quality and

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<sup>1</sup> For Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Awards external examiners are appointed to a subject as opposed to specific modules. Subject-level external examiners for ITT Awards follow the same procedures outlined in this guidance. The only difference is that ITT external examiners all attend a single Progression and Award Board as opposed to Module Assessment Boards.

standards. The process enables engagement with the External Examiners at School and subject level through full and serious consideration of External Examiner comments and recommendations.

### 3. Nomination and Appointment

#### **Module External Examiners**

External Examiners are appointed from institutions, industries and professions, as subject experts overseeing one or more modules. Programme teams are responsible for the timely nomination of External Examiners for modules within both new and continuing programmes. Programme teams nominate External Examiners using a Nomination form which includes details about the External Examiner, their career and experience and a rationale of why the programme team are nominating them. Nominees are considered and approved by the relevant School Quality Management Committee (SQMC) following assurance that the nomination process has been conducted in accordance with the Bath Spa University criteria for appointment, and in consultation with Academic Governance and Quality. The criteria for appointment includes confirmation that the proposed External Examiner has appropriate expertise, does not pose a conflict of interest which may affect the requirements for independent and impartial judgement, and that the workload is sustainable.

Once the External Examiner nomination has been approved by the SQMC, Academic Governance and Quality will send the External Examiner an appointment letter. The letter will include information on the following:

- the programme(s) the modules assigned are within
- the name of the relevant School or partner provider
- the length of appointment including the academic year from which the appointment starts
- fee information
- information on the role and expectations
- contact details of the Academic School and programme team.

The External Examiner will also be sent a form to complete requesting financial details and information related to right to work requirements which must be completed prior to starting duties.

Following right to work confirmation, the Academic School team will organise a username and password for access to the University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

#### **Chief External Examiners**

Academic Governance and Quality (AGQ) is responsible for the nomination and appointment of Chief External Examiners in liaison with other relevant departments where appropriate. AGQ ensures that the proposed Chief External Examiner has appropriate expertise and does not pose a conflict of interest which may affect the requirements for independent and impartial judgement. The University Education Committee approves Chief External Examiner appointments.

## **Mentoring**

Mentoring arrangements are required for all Module External Examiners who do not have previous external examining experience. Programme teams are responsible for identifying an appropriate and experienced external examiner to act as a mentor, for the first year of appointment of the new post-holder. Mentor nomination forms are approved by the SQMC, and it is recommended that the mentor form is submitted to the SQMC at the same time as the external examiner nomination form.

## **Amendments and Extensions**

In line with national guidance, external examiners are normally appointed for a period of four years. On occasion, the School may approach a current Module External Examiner about an amendment to the modules to which they were originally appointed. This amendment may be the addition of modules, an amendment to the modules examined, or a reduction in duties. Similarly, the School may wish to request a one-year extension to the contract of an Module External Examiner due to exceptional circumstances. The process for amendments and extensions also go through the SQMC for approval.

## **4. Induction and Support**

All newly appointed Module External Examiners will be provided with details about the programme and modules to be examined from the programme team. The School should ensure the External Examiner has access to, or is provided with guidance and information on the following:

- how to access and use the VLE (via their ADID)
- the relevant Definitive Programme Documents
- the up-to-date marking guidelines and criteria;
- the predecessors' reports
- confirmation of the range of students' work for scrutiny, and information on the methods used and arrangements to provide samples for review
- policy and practice on assessment procedures for students with disabilities
- guidelines on dealing with plagiarism and other academic misconduct/unfair practice
- where applicable, information on partner organisations, where placements and work-based projects are formally assessed
- formally arrange a visit to the partner provider with the Link Tutor if an external examiner is covering an award delivered by a partner. This may be facilitated on-line for overseas partners.

Module External Examiners are enrolled on a Resource module on the VLE which provides an introduction to Bath Spa University and includes a bank of resources to provide useful information and support throughout the duration of the External Examiner's appointment.

New Chief External Examiners are offered a handover meeting with the outgoing incumbent. Further induction and support is provided and facilitated through the Academic Governance and Quality team.

## Contact Information

Academic Governance and Quality oversee the process of External Examining and can be contacted on [externalexaminers@bathspa.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@bathspa.ac.uk). Contact information for the Academic School, and programme team are made available to External Examiners in their appointment letter and welcome emails.

## 5. Roles and Responsibilities

For Module level External Examiners, including those for programmes at partner providers, the duties required are:

- to ensure Bath Spa University complies with external quality assurance mechanisms
- enhancement of academic standards across Bath Spa University
- to ensure comparability of standards across the duration of your appointment
- to safeguard the students at Bath Spa University
- to support inclusivity and equity in teaching, learning and assessment

These are achieved by:

- Agreeing proposed assignment tasks and assessment briefs, ensuring fairness and transparency in assessment
- Viewing a sample (typically 10% or a minimum of 8 pieces) of assessed work, representative of each grade plus all fails, judging students impartially based on the work seen. (please see the [Assessment and Feedback Policy](#) for the requirements for selecting a sample of students' work)
- Attending the meeting of the relevant assessment boards and ensuring that standards of awards recommended are comparable with the sector
- Ensuring that students are examined within the regulations of the University and award
- Commenting on any proposed programme and module modifications during the year, or on any programme redesign
- Meeting with students when possible, to garner their view of their programmes and its delivery
- Reporting annually to the University on the academic standards of the modules/awards examined (see section 6 for further details)
- Observing Bath Spa University's Data Protection and confidentiality requirements
- For examiners of programmes delivered by Educational Partners, visits to the partner organisation/s delivering the programme may be facilitated
- For examiners on professional programmes, visits to see students on practice placements may be facilitated

The External Examiner role does not include:

- Changing individual marks of a sample of work

For Chief External Examiners, duties required are:

- Confirming assessment regulations enable appropriate threshold levels of achievement and classification which are comparable with other HEIs
- Confirming that the regulations for assessment are appropriate

- Confirming the decisions of examiners relating to student awards, progression and classification have been consistent with the regulations

These are achieved by:

- Reviewing the set of Module External Examiner annual reports pertaining to the academic framework for which they are Chief External Examiner
- Reporting annually with a view on the appropriateness and operation of the regulations, with scope to make recommendations
- Attendance at Progression and Awards Boards

External Examiners should report to the University any change in circumstance, including any conflicts of interest which arise following their appointment.

## 6. Annual Reporting

### **Module External Examiners**

External examiners are required to submit a report annually at the end of each academic year cycle. The annual report provides them with the opportunity to comment under the following headings: Student Performance; Marking and Assessment; Teaching, Learning and Curriculum; Employability; Strengths and Areas for Development; Graduate Attributes; Other Matters; and Response to Previous Year's Report. External examiners in their final year of appointment are asked to reflect on their tenure and give an overview. Where delivery is at more than one provider, provider- specific comment is also requested. Module-level External Examiners are also asked to complete a declaration relating to academic standards and the rigour and fairness of assessment. The External Examiner Report form is subject to change each year; Academic Governance and Quality will provide the latest version for completion by 31<sup>st</sup> July for Undergraduate and Initial Teacher Training awards, and 30<sup>th</sup> November for Postgraduate Taught awards.

Programme teams are required to respond to the external examiner comments and recommendations in the space provided within the report template. Alongside responding to the recommendations for action, programme teams should consider how the strengths and areas of good practice identified could be developed further for the enhancement of the student experience.

The annual reporting process forms a critical part of the University's approach to quality assurance and enhancement. The comments, recommendations and responses provided in annual reports inform conversations at local and central levels of the University relating to strategy and enhancement of student experience. In addition to exception-based discussions at institutional committees, External examiner reports are a key evidence base for a number of quality and standards procedures and mechanisms. As such, reports are made available widely across the University, including to students via the VLE, and to incoming External Examiners. Reports may also be requested by external organisations such as professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

### **Chief External Examiners**

All External Examiner reports are forwarded to the Chief External Examiner(s) of the relevant framework to review and provide an overview which includes aspects of good practice identified across reports and other areas which may benefit from enhancement or

development. Chief External Examiner annual reports are submitted after final Progression and Award Boards and are reviewed by the Education Committee.

External Examiners have the right to address any matters of serious concern about the potential threat to quality and standards to the Vice Chancellor, should they wish, in a separate document to their report. They may also wish to raise concerns or issues informally with the Head of Academic Governance and Quality, as an interim or preliminary route. If all of Bath Spa University's internal procedures have been exhausted External Examiners can use the Office for Students Complaints and Notifications scheme.

## 7. Fees and Expenses

External Examiners receive an annual fee which is paid on receipt of their annual report. This is coordinated and processed by Academic Governance and Quality. The fee amount is indicted in the letter of appointment and may be subject to the normal statutory deductions. External Examiners are paid through Bath Spa University payroll system by electronic transfer into their nominated bank account. The payroll deadline is the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month for payment to be credited on or around 21<sup>st</sup> of the month.

External Examiner expenses are coordinated and processed by the respective Academic School and are not subject to statutory deductions. School Administration teams will provide External Examiners with the relevant form and guidance for expense claims.

The role of the mentor attracts an additional fee which is paid along with the External Examiner's annual fee once the mentor has completed the mentoring role.

## 8. End of Term/Termination

The standard term of appointment for external examiners is four academic years. At the end of an external examiner's final year of appointment, following submission of their final annual report, Academic Governance and Quality will send a formal letter notifying them that the contract has ended.

If an external examiner needs to interrupt their appointment for a period of time, or if they are unable to fulfil their duties, this should be communicated in writing to the academic programme team contact and Academic Governance and Quality to enable alternative temporary arrangements to be made.

Both parties reserve the right to terminate an appointment prior to completion of the appointed term of engagement, given sufficient notice. External examiners have the right to resign at any time providing due notice to allow the University sufficient time to make alternative arrangements in order to safeguard standards.

Possible reasons for termination by the University include, but are not limited to:

- Change to an external examiner's circumstances that creates a recognised conflict of interest
- Non-fulfilment of external examiner duties

- Failure to provide annual reports in a timely manner for consideration by the University
- Failure to attend relevant Module Assessment Boards without sufficient notice and agreement by the University
- Unprofessional conduct
- Discontinuation of the programme for which the External Examiner was appointed

## 9. GDPR/Confidentiality

External Examiners have access to confidential information and must ensure that personal data are always held securely and not disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. External Examiners are made aware of expectations around confidentiality in the appointment letter. External Examiners are reminded of the confidentiality of Assessment Boards at the start of each meeting.

External Examiners are both data subjects (because the University holds their personal data) and data processors (because they access the names, academic work and grades of the University's students). Bath Spa University is committed to upholding external examiners' rights and responsibilities within its [Privacy Policy](#).