

EXTERNAL EXAMINER POLICY (UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT PROGRAMMES)

POLICY DETAILS:

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Approving body	Academic Council
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Date of next review	<i>See departmental schedule</i>
Author	Academic Quality Office
Responsible Executive Group area	Registrar and Secretary
Related policies and documents	Code of Assessment Examination Board Policy Handbook for External Examiners
Benchmarking	University of Glasgow The QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education

THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART

EXTERNAL EXAMINER POLICY

CONTEXT AND GENERAL APPROACH

External Examiners are crucial in assisting GSA in ensuring the quality and standards of its programmes are met.

GSA expects its External Examiners to provide informative comment and recommendations upon whether or not:

- GSA is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements;
- The assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programmes(s) and is conducted in line with GSA's policies and regulations;
- The academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which the External Examiners have experience.

External Examiners, therefore, provide GSA with informed and appropriate external references for the comparison of academic standards. They offer independent, objective and impartial judgments and provide professional advice and expertise in the form of findings and reports which are given serious consideration.

GSA values the opportunities that arise, in relation to maintaining academic standards, inviting knowledge exchange and exploring collaborative working, from the contribution of its staff to external examining and, as such, actively encourages academic staff to devote time to such activities. The annual Career Review and Development process serves as an opportunity for line managers to review and discuss undertakings, whilst the Activity Planning process promotes and supports the allocation of time to such duties.

The External Examiners Policy should be read in conjunction with GSA's Code of Assessment, and the Examination Board Policy. This policy aligns with the GSA Code of Assessment but it does not supersede or replace any of the Code's content.

The QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which GSA embraces, promotes an inclusive approach by embedding consideration of equality and diversity matters throughout. GSA demonstrates its commitment to diversity and promoting equality by ensuring that due regard is given to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 in the implementation and application of this policy. In line with this, the External Examiners are required to consider issues related to equality and diversity throughout.

PRECEPTS AND PROCEDURES

1. NOMINATION AND APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

Nominations

- 1.1 In September 2017, the University of Glasgow and GSA agreed that responsibility for approving the appointment of the External Examiners for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes would be transferred to Academic Council.
- 1.2 External Examiners for validated programmes are nominated by Programme Leaders, in consultation with Heads of Schools and are appointed by GSA following approval by Academic Council.
- 1.3 External Examiners for programmes not covered by the validation arrangement with the University of Glasgow are also appointed by Academic Council. In such cases, the same policy applies.
- 1.4 Twelve months prior to the end of an External Examiner's tenure Schools are expected to begin the process of seeking a replacement for nomination.
- 1.5 Nominations will be made to the relevant Boards of Studies and recommendations are subsequently made to Education Committee by the Boards of Studies, normally from Semester one. Recommendations are also approved by Academic Council.
- 1.6 Boards of Studies receive nominations completed by the relevant Programme Leader or their equivalent that include:
 - External Examiner Nomination Form (EE1 form)
 - Curriculum Vitae (CV) of nominee
 - Supporting statement from Programme Leader (included in the EE1 form)

Please note: in order to ensure GDPR compliance, the CVs of nominated External Examiners will no longer be shared with Education Committee and Academic Council. However, Boards of Studies must continue to undertake detailed scrutiny of CVs as per the requirements outlined in this policy, and ensure that the Nomination Form is signed off by the relevant Programme Leader as well as the Convener of the Board of Studies. Education Committee and Academic Council will continue to receive Nomination Forms for all new External Examiner appointments.

- 1.7 Boards of Studies shall ensure that:
 - (a) Programme Leaders identify several suitable candidates for vacant External Examiner Appointments, considering nominations with the Head of School in relation to the diversity of the School-level pool of existing External Examiners.
 - (b) The diversity of External Examiners regarding programmes reporting to that Board is considered prior to the Boards of Studies making an appointment recommendation to Education Committee. The Convener of the Boards of Studies will, as outlined above in

(a), make this consideration in an appropriate manner, either prior to the meeting of the Boards of Studies, and reporting the outcome as appropriate or undertake the consideration at the Boards of Studies. This option is offered in light of any issue of confidentiality.

(c) Minutes from the Boards of Studies will confirm that points a) and b) above have been addressed or clarify why this has not been possible or appropriate in a specific circumstance.

1.8 Nominations must meet the undernoted criteria. If a candidate does not meet all the criteria listed below, please contact the Academic Quality Office for further advice.

1.9 Nominations must meet specific criteria regarding person specification, conflicts of interest, and term of office. Recommendations from Boards of Studies to Education Committee shall explicitly confirm that nominations adhere to GSA policy.

The specific criteria are set out below:

(a) Person Specification:

GSA will only 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 judgments);
- (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.

(b) Conflicts of interest

GSA will not appoint as External Examiners anyone in the following categories or circumstances:

- (i) Member of a governing body or committee of either GSA, the University of Glasgow or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of GSA, the University of Glasgow or one of its collaborative partners;
- (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 courses 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;
Please note: GSA staff who perform EE duties in other institutions should keep their School informed in order to ensure reciprocal arrangements involving equivalent programmes do not occur.
- (viii) The succession of an External Examiner from an institution by a colleague from the same institution;
Please note: Exceptional circumstances may arise when a limited pool of expertise is available in a specific discipline or subject area. In such cases, the nominating School will be expected to provide a supporting statement (in writing) for consideration and approval by Academic Council.
- (ix) The appointment of more than one External Examiner from the same department.
Please note: Exceptional circumstances may arise when a limited pool of expertise is available in a specific discipline or subject area. In such cases, the nominating School will be expected to provide a supporting statement (in writing) for consideration and approval by Academic Council.

Appointment

- 1.10 At least one External Examiner will be appointed for each programme of study, or group of closely related programmes of study.
- 1.11 It is the responsibility of the Head of School to ensure that a sufficient number of External Examiners are appointed with adequate expertise to cover all major areas of the programme and the quantity of material being assessed. External Examiner appointments should be phased to ensure an element of continuity.
- 1.12 Once approval has been received from Academic Council, the Academic Quality Office confirms the appointment to Academic Registry, the Programme Leader, the Academic Support Manager in the relevant School, and Human Resources for information and action as appropriate.
- 1.13 The formal letter of appointment is issued to the External Examiner by the Human Resources department. The formal appointment letter will confirm which subject, programme and/or award(s) the External Examiner has been appointed to. A copy of this letter is held by Academic Registry.
- 1.14 External Examiners normally hold no more than two External Examiner appointments for taught programmes/courses at any point in time and at the proposed date of appointment the nominee should not hold an External Examinership for undergraduate or taught postgraduate degrees in more than one other institution.

Term of Office

- 1.15 External Examiners are appointed for a period of four years with an exceptional extension of one year to ensure continuity. Normally, the term of office should run over academic sessions (30 September – 01 October).
- (a) To request an extension, the Programme Leader should follow the Nomination Process as stated in points 1.2 – 1.9. In lieu of the EE1 Nomination Form, the Programme Leader should complete the EE2 Change to Appointment of Existing External Examiner Form.
- (b) The EE2 Change to Appointment of Existing External Examiner Form can be used to extend the period of tenure or to extend the external examiner's remit.
- 1.16 An External Examiner may be reappointed but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.

Induction

- 1.17 On appointment, External Examiners shall be clearly briefed to carry out their role.
- 1.18 Academic Registry, with appropriate input from Schools, will ensure that External Examiners have electronic access to the following:
- Programme and Course Specifications;

- External Examiners Policy;
- Examination Board Policy;
- GSA Code of Assessment;
- Any relevant GSA and programme regulations;
- Annual Programme Report and Quality Enhancement Action Plan from the PMAR of the previous session;
- The Head of School Summary Report from the PMAR process of the previous session;
- The External Examiner report(s) for the previous session together with any relevant correspondence and copies of the responses to the outgoing Examiner's report;
- The Higher Education Academy's Handbook for External Examining (new External Examiners);
- External Examiner's Report Pro Forma;
- External Examiner's Expenses Claim Form;
- The Handbook for External Examiners.

1.19 It is Academic Registry's responsibility to provide an appropriate induction for External Examiners upon appointment. This also provides opportunities for External Examiners to familiarise themselves with the institution and its assessment procedures.

1.20 It is the responsibility of Schools to ensure that all new External Examiners attend a School induction session. Further it is the responsibility of Schools to ensure that External Examiners established in their post attend a short update session. These sessions will normally be held on the first day of the visit.

1.21 Details, including the name, position, and home institution of External Examiners will be published on the GSA website. Schools are responsible for ensuring that students are briefed during their inductions that it is unacceptable for them to contact their External Examiner directly. In this event of this occurring, External Examiners should not engage and should refer the student to GSA.

Mentoring of New External Examiners

1.22 An External Examiner will normally be expected to have had some prior experience of external examining. Where this is not the case, the Head of School is responsible for ensuring that a suitable programme of induction and briefing is put in place to support the appointee in their new role.

1.23 A first-time External Examiner should be mentored in their first year of examining by an experienced External Examiner. It is the responsibility of the Head of School to arrange a mentor for the proposed External Examiner. The role of the mentor will be to:

- (a) Provide advice and guidance on relevant External Examiner processes and procedures, including the consideration of equality and diversity measures;
- (b) Highlight the approaches to moderation including sampling and consistency of marking;

- (c) Advise on the exam board procedure and the role of the External Examiner within this process;
- (d) Provide advice and guidance on writing the annual report;
- (e) Share current issues in HE and/or in the subject area which may be relevant.

1.24 There is no requirement for face-to-face meetings of the mentor and the mentee, other than at the time of visits to GSA for assessment board (where appropriate) and it is anticipated that most contact will be via email, telephone etc.

2. TERMINATION OF AN EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S APPOINTMENT

2.1 External Examiners that fail to fulfil their obligations, including behaviour that is unsatisfactory and falls below the standard expected by GSA and in terms of GSA's institutional and academic policies, will have their appointment reviewed.

2.2 GSA may terminate the appointment only as a last resort. Possible reasons for termination include, but are not limited to:

- Failing to attend GSA Final Examination Board (where attendance is required) without making alternative arrangements, submitting inadequate reports, or being persistently late with their reports;
- Change to an External Examiner's circumstances that creates a recognised conflict of interest such that is not appropriate to continue in the role. GSA should be updated and informed of any changes in circumstances that may give rise to a conflict of interest so that matters can be addressed appropriately;
- Relocation of an External Examiner which makes attendance at GSA impossible or subject to unreasonable expenses.

3. RESIGNATION OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS APPOINTMENT

3.1 External Examiners have the right to resign at any time. It is requested that if an External Examiner wishes to resign their post for any reason before the end of their term of appointment, preferably at least three months' notice is given to allow GSA sufficient time to ensure alternative arrangements can be made in order to safeguard standards.

3.2 The reasons for their resignation should be included as a brief note on the EE1 Nomination Form for the external examiners' replacement, however, sensitive personal data should not be shared.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES AND RIGHTS OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

Responsibilities of the External Examiner

4.1 The responsibilities of individual External Examiners relate to their role to act as independent and impartial advisers providing informed comment on the academic standards set, and student achievement in relation to those standards.

4.2 The External Examiner role includes:

- (a) Providing GSA with impartial and independent advice and informed comment on the institution's standards, and student achievement in relation to set standards;
- (b) Providing informative comment and recommendations upon whether or not the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the institution's policies and regulations;
- (c) Providing informative comment and recommendations upon whether or not the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other higher education institutions;
- (d) Providing informative comment and recommendations on good practice observed by the External Examiners and opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students;
- (e) Contributing to interim (where appropriate) and GSA Final Examination Boards to provide an expert view of the rigour and fairness of the assessment process by endorsing or not the decisions of the Examination Board and confirm that they are satisfied with the conduct of the assessment process. Further details are set out in the Examination Board Policy;
- (f) Submitting a report annually, to Academic Registry, at a time determined by GSA, to reflect the nature of the provision, the duration of teaching and assessment periods and their timing in the calendar/academic year.
- (g) Ensuring External Examiner Reports provide clear and informative feedback to GSA and confirm that sufficient evidence was received to enable the role to be fulfilled, state whether issues raised in the previous report(s) have been addressed to their satisfaction, address any issues as specifically required by any relevant professional body and give an overview of their term of office (when concluded).

Rights of the External Examiner

4.3 External Examiners have the right and should expect to:

- (a) Receive information core to the External Examining role, such as: programme structures; learning outcomes; details of learning, teaching and assessment processes; draft exam papers, other forms of assessment.
- (b) Be informed of major changes to programmes and should be consulted in advance about proposed changes, particularly where they affect programme titles, learning outcomes, assessment criteria or the assessment process.
- (c) Attend meetings of the GSA Final Examination Board and to have access to student work that is being assessed.

- (d) Correspond directly with the Director of GSA on matters of major concern that pose a serious risk to the quality and standards of an award.
- (e) Be kept informed each year about the consideration of their annual report by GSA, and any action taken as a result of it.

5. ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 This section should be read in conjunction with the Code of Assessment.
- 5.2 All External Examiners are required to attend the final phases of assessment leading to an end award of the University.
- 5.3 External Examiners may also be required to attend an interim visit. The interim visit allows External Examiners to:
 - See final year student work in progress and to comment on the appropriateness of student projects;
 - Meet with the staff team to discuss the programme and any issues related to it;
 - Meet with the student cohort as a group;
- 5.4 In addition, it provides an opportunity for the Programme Leader or Head of Department to highlight any areas of concern related to individual students.
- 5.5 Prior to the assessment period, Academic Registry will provide External Examiners with electronic copies of:
 - (a) Programme and Course Specifications;
 - (b) Assessment timetable;
 - (c) Material updated since the previous assessment;
 - (d) GSA Code of Assessment;
 - (e) Examination Board Policy;
 - (f) Student Conduct Policy and Misconduct Procedure;
 - (g) External Examiners' report pro forma;
 - (h) External Examiner Expenses Claim Form.
- 5.6 The External Examiner may recommend the adjustment of marks/grades on particular programmes, based on their overview of internal marking processes. External Examiners may not by themselves alter the marks/grades awarded to individual, or an entire cohort, of students. Any recommendations for marks/grades adjustments require the approval of the Examination Board as a whole; and the External Examiner does not have the right to take a final decision on any proposed alterations.
- 5.7 Further details are set out in the Examination Board Policy.

6. ATTENDANCE AT GSA FINAL EXAMINATION BOARDS

- 6.1 External Examiners are expected to attend the GSA Final Examination Board where awards are being made. Further details are set out in the Examination Board Policy.

7. EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORTS

- 7.1 External Examiners are required to report annually within one month of the GSA Final Examination Board (Final Year Students) to the Director of GSA via Academic Registry. Academic Registry will subsequently ensure that an electronic copy of the report is sent to the Senate Office of the University of Glasgow for information.
- 7.2 It is essential that reports are received on time in order to meet quality assurance and enhancement requirements. The report follows the guidelines published by the QAA and includes questions on:
- the adequacy of information supplied on the course structure and content;
 - whether the course structure and content meet the needs of the students;
 - whether the stated aims and learning objectives for the course are appropriate to the subject matter, the level of the course, and the students;
 - whether the examination together with any other assessment instruments used, adequately covered the content of the course and the learning objectives;
 - the quality of teaching, together with any other forms of assessment used, as evidenced by the students' work;
 - the appropriateness of learning and teaching methods;
 - the method(s) of assessment;
 - the assessment process;
 - the administration of assessment;
 - the marking standards applied by internal examiners;
 - whether the standards set are appropriate published national subject benchmarks, the national qualifications framework, institutional programme specifications and other relevant information, where available.;
 - the general quality of students' work;
 - the relationship of the quality of work to the various degree classifications and/or grades;
 - the procedures followed at the GSA Final Examination Board;
 - consultation on proposed changes to courses or the introduction of new courses;
 - general observations on the strengths and weaknesses of the course and of the students' performance.
- 7.3 When preparing the Annual Report, External Examiners should consider issues of equality and diversity issues throughout as relevant to the assessment of students.
- 7.4 External Examiners should ensure that individual staff and students are not identified in their Reports.

- 7.5 Academic Registry will retain a copy of the report electronically, and the Academic Quality Office will make it available to the appropriate Heads of Schools and Programme Leaders for consideration and response.
- 7.6 External Examiner's reports are considered by the Deputy Director Academic, Schools, Programme Leaders, Staff Student Consultative Committees and Boards of Studies at the start of the academic session. Programme Leaders are required to report on action taken in the Annual Programme Report.
- 7.7 It is the responsibility of Schools to ensure that Student Representatives are given the opportunity to be fully involved in the process of the consideration and response to the External Examiner's reports.
- 7.8 If an urgent response to the contents of the report is appropriate, Schools should respond to Academic Registry normally within 1 month of receipt of the report. Academic Registry will forward responses to the External Examiner.
- 7.9 Schools are required to respond to Academic Registry regarding the contents of the report prior to the Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting meeting in December and to send the responses to the External Examiner.
- 7.10 With the sole exception of any confidential report made directly and separately to the GSA Director, External Examiner Reports and departmental responses will be published on Canvas before the Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting exercise.
- 7.11 Aspects of Reports are only redacted where the External Examiner has contravened the requirement not to identify individuals, or in very exceptional cases where the External Examiner has included something intended to cause harm to the institution or to bring it into disrepute.
- 7.12 Where an External Examiner has a serious concern relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme or programmes and has exhausted all GSA internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Director of GSA, they are made aware that they may invoke QAA's concerns scheme or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.
- 7.13 Further details on External Examiner Reports submissions and payment of expenses can be found in the Handbook for External Examiners.