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Document cover sheet

Title	Guidance by the General Board of the Faculties on the arrangements for External Examiners for taught courses
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Guidance by the General Board of the Faculties on the arrangements for External Examiners for taught courses

External Examiners play a key part in the University's quality assurance processes and maintaining academic standards. In line with the rest of the UK sector, the principal objectives of the external examining system at Cambridge are to ensure that:

- The standards set for an award are appropriate for the qualification and comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions;
- assessment procedures are sound and measure student achievement rigorously against the intended learning outcomes;
- the examination process is conducted fairly and in line with internal policies and regulations; and
- good practice is identified and disseminated.

This guidance provides information relating to the nature of the external examining role at Cambridge, the process by which External Examiners are appointed and the expectations of the General Board of the Faculties at the University of Cambridge.

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1. Roles and responsibilities

External Examiners are appointed by the General Board or Degree Committee to:

- act in a moderating capacity;
- provide an independent assessment of academic standards; and
- comment on the validity of the examination process.

The reports of External Examiners contribute to the University's monitoring and quality assurance activities.

The General Board is aware that there may be some variability in the roles of External Examiners across the University due to the complexity and breadth of the courses and their underlying philosophies. Nevertheless, it considers that all External Examiners shall undertake certain duties.

The duties prescribed below apply to all undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes[1].

Exceptions relating to the Medical, Veterinary and Natural Sciences Triposes, are indicated within the document.

Please note that any reference to the Chair of Examiners is taken to be read as Senior Examiner in the case of Natural Sciences Tripos (NST) Parts II and III, and for some MPhil Degrees. Senior Examiners are also appointed to the Human, Social and Political Science (HSPS) Tripos to act in conjunction with the Chair.

Setting and reviewing question papers

External Examiners should receive relevant draft examination papers with supporting material such as model answers/marking criteria. They should be provided the opportunity to make comments on or suggest appropriate amendments to the draft examination papers and/or supporting material. External Examiners should be made aware of the outcomes of their comments and advice.

External Examiners should discuss with the Chair of Examiners any other material they may require and a suitable timeframe for providing comments.

Moderating examination scripts

External Examiners are not normally expected to carry out marking of assessed work[2]. Rather, they are involved in assessing whether internal marking has been appropriately and consistently

[1] Refer to Ordinances (Chapter III) for examinations specified in the Schedule: https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/so/

[2] **Assessors** should be appointed to act as second markers and paid the appropriate university rates. Assessors are not expected to take responsibility for the overall conduct of the examination or the classing decisions for individual candidates nor do they report on the fairness of the assessment and the standards of the candidates.

applied. External Examiners are entitled to see all scripts and any other work that contributes to the assessment and subsequent classification. More usually however, External Examiners will review a sample of scripts to ensure that internal marking is accurate and consistent and that classifications are of an appropriate standard. External Examiners are expected to advise on the borderlines between classes and between passing and failing.

The principles for the selection of marked scripts should be agreed in advance between the External Examiner and Chair of Examiners. Ideally, the sample should include scripts across the top, middle and bottom of the range, borderline candidates, mark sheets and evidence of internal moderation. External Examiners should discuss with the Chair of Examiners the number and types of scripts to be received.

In circumstances where the External Examiner raises a legitimate concern regarding marks, it would generally not be appropriate to adjust the marks of a limited number of students whose work has been sampled. Under such circumstances, adjustments to marks should be made with reference to the entire cohort.

Adjudicating disagreement

Internal examiners should attempt to agree marks where possible. The External Examiner should be in a position to report on the soundness of the procedures used to reach a final agreed mark, by obtaining information on the method used to reconcile divergent marks. In exceptional circumstances, where marks cannot be reconciled, the External Examiner may be asked to provide their view.

Role in viva voce examination

The External Examiner may be invited to participate in oral examinations, where they are allowed by the examination regulations. The External Examiner should discuss with the Chair of Examiners how these duties are undertaken.

Decisions relating to individual candidates are taken by the Board of Examiners as a whole, including the External Examiner(s). In an equality of votes the Chair has a second or casting vote.

Practical examinations

The External Examiner may act in a moderating capacity for practical examinations and should have the same degree of involvement as they would have for written papers.

The Chair of Examiners should discuss with the External Examiner the nature of their involvement.

Attendance at meetings

An External Examiner is appointed as a full and equal member of a Board of Examiners[3], which is appointed as a body to propose and settle the examination requirements and draw up a list of successful candidates, within the regulations for the examination concerned[4]. All decisions are made as a consensus of the Board as a whole. Where voting takes place, the External Examiner has an equal vote to other members of the Board of Examiners. The Chair of Examiners should clearly discuss the structure and role with the External Examiner.

External Examiners have a right to be present at all Examiner's meetings and, with the exception of the Medical and Veterinary Sciences Tripos and Parts IA and IB of the Natural Sciences Tripos, are **required** to attend the final meeting of Examiners at which classifications are agreed and class lists signed[5].

If, exceptionally, the External Examiner cannot be present at a final meeting, they should discuss this with the Chair in order to obtain dispensation from attendance. Such dispensation may be granted provided that the External Examiner certifies that they are prepared to allow their name to be added to the class list. Applications for dispensation should be made to the Education Quality & Policy Office using the form found here.

Medical cases and other allowances:

External Examiners are not required to make decisions relating to medical cases. Such cases are considered by a central committee, using a different process to that of most other institutions.

Examiners must assess all student work submitted for examination strictly on an 'as-seen' basis. Personal or individual circumstances cannot be taking into account in the marking of examination scripts and other work. The sole exception to this is in the case of candidates with documented Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) such as dyslexia. In such cases, the Chair of Examiners will receive a list of SpLD Blind Grade Numbers from the Student Registry to share with Examiners who are instructed not to penalise these candidates for minor spelling and grammatical errors, unless such accuracy constitutes a core competency standard of the assessment (e.g. language papers).

Consideration of medical and other personal circumstances which may have a bearing on performance, is a matter for the following central bodies:

The Student Registry

Candidates, through their College Tutors, may make applications to the Student Registry to

[3] For some Masters degrees, other Examiners' Committee arrangements fulfil a similar role to a Board of Examiners.

[4] Note that for the Natural Sciences Tripos and the Medical and Veterinary Sciences Triposes, only Senior Examiners are required to attend the Final Examiners' meeting to finalise marks and sign the class list.

[5] In the case of MPhil Degrees, the Examiners consider the marks at the final meeting before recommending them to the Degree Committee for approval.

sit examinations under special conditions; e.g. sitting the examination in isolation, being given extra time, or being provided with appropriate additional or alternative materials. Examiners are not informed of special conditions and are expected to mark the scripts and other work in line with other candidates.

The Examination Access and Mitigation Committee
The Examination Access and Mitigation Committee (EAMC) considers applications for students on the following courses: all undergraduate, EMBA, LLM, MAcc, MASt, MArch, MBA, MCL, MDes, MEng, MFin, MMath, MMus, MSci and PGCE.

The EAMC includes professionally qualified medical advisers. One of the Committee's roles is to consider cases of students whose examination performance may have been hindered by mitigating (typically health-related) circumstances. In undertaking its work, the EAMC considers the medical or other supporting evidence submitted on behalf of candidates by their Colleges, including supervision reports together with details of previous and current examination performance.

Further information, including guidance notes, can be found on the EAMC homepage: https://www.student-registry.admin.cam.ac.uk/about-us/EAMC

Additional duties
The Faculty Board, Degree Committee, or other comparable authority should familiarise themselves with the expectations in this guidance before requiring the External Examiner to undertake additional duties.

Where additional duties are required, these should be communicated with, and agreed to by, the External Examiner in advance. EQPO should be advised if an External Examiner needs to be replaced for any reason.

2. Nomination and appointment

The General Board is currently responsible for appointing External Examiners following nomination by the Faculty Board or Degree Committee (or comparable authority).

Where more than one External Examiner is appointed due to the nature or size of the examination, they are jointly responsible for assuring academic standards. This will generally be achieved through their attendance at the final Board of Examiners' meeting, notwithstanding that their individual report may pertain specifically to the parts of the examination for which they were involved.

Faculty Boards or Degree Committees should ensure that each External Examiner is aware of other appointments.

Please note: It is expected that External Examiners will be recruited from within the United Kingdom. Faculty Boards wishing to nominate an External Examiner from outside the UK will need to make a case for General Board consideration. Requests of this nature should be sent to examiners@admin.cam.ac.uk. If granted, the Faculty may be required to reimburse a percentage of the travel expenses.

Length of service

External Examiners are appointed for one year at a time, but may be re-appointed. No External Examiner shall normally serve for more than three consecutive years for a particular examination and thereafter may not be appointed until a period of five years has elapsed; exceptions to this rule may be possible if a nominating body can demonstrate that there are special circumstances (e.g. in a minority subject). To allow sufficient time for the proper performance of their duties, individuals should normally be expected to hold not more than two External Examiner appointments at first degree level concurrently.

Faculty Boards and Degree Committees should review the conduct of the External Examiners before nominating them for re-appointment. In particular, they should bear in mind the requirements for the submission of appropriate reports for quality assurance and public reporting requirements. The General Board may choose not to re-appoint an External Examiner who has not fulfilled their reporting duties from the previous year.

Suitability

To ensure the suitability of appointment, the General Board may request a statement of support for appointment or reappointment from the nominating body; such a statement would normally include a current CV for the nominated person and an indication of their suitability for the role.

Although seniority is not, in itself, a necessary qualification for appointment as an External Examiner, those appointed should normally be persons of seniority and must certainly have appropriate experience and/or knowledge and the ability to command respect in the subject. In certain circumstances, it is appropriate that persons from outside the higher education system *(e.g.* from industry or the professions) be invited to act. Every External Examiner will be expected to have:

- Competence and experience in the field covered by the course
- Academic qualifications/professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined
- Experience of setting examinations and running assessment procedures (either externally or internally)
- Familiarity with the standard to be expected of students in the course to be examined
- Fluency in English

- Met the criteria set out by professional and accrediting bodies
- Awareness of modern developments in the design and delivery of the flexible curriculum
- Expertise in the enhancement of the student experience

Conflict of interest

Care should be taken to avoid nominations where *conflicts of interest* (either professional or personal) may arise. The General Board will consider such appointments on a case-by-case basis. The following points should be noted:

- An External Examiner shall not hold an office in the University, or a Fellowship or some office or post in a College and should not teach any course of instruction which forms part of the teaching programme for the examination concerned
- Former members of staff and students of the University shall not be eligible to become External Examiners until at least five years have passed since their departure
- Retirees can be considered provided they have sufficient evidence of continuing involvement in the academic area in question
- Reciprocal arrangements between Examiners from Cambridge institutions and other institutions should be avoided, wherever possible
- An Examiner being succeeded by another from the same institution should also be avoided and no more than one External Examiner for an examination should be appointed from the same institution

To avoid potential conflicts of interest, External Examiners should not be appointed if they are covered by any of the following categories: near relative of a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study, an examiner on a cognate course in the institution, anyone closely associated with the sponsorship of students on the course, anyone closely associated with placements or training, anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study, anyone in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study, or anyone who has been directly involved as an external member of a validation panel for the programme.

The appointment of more than one External Examiner from the same department of an institution should be avoided.

Documentation and course materials

On appointment, all External Examiners should be supplied with the information needed to undertake their role.

External Examiners will receive the following documentation from the Education Quality & Policy Office:

- A letter of appointment and standard University Terms and Conditions
- A link to a copy of this guidance
- A link to the report that must be completed

The Chair of Examiners is expected to supply the External Examiner with the following material *prior to the commencement* of their duties:

- Relevant course materials such as a handbook or programme specifications
- Details about the examination, including the regulations and any recent changes to the conduct of the examination
- Information on marking schemes and classing conventions
- A timetable for the examination process, including dates of Examiners' meetings
- Copies of recent External Examiners' reports and any responses
- Details of any agreed additional duties for External Examiners

The Chair of Examiners should make the following available to the External Examiner during *the course* of their duties:

- Draft examination papers and accompanying criteria and/or model answers
- Access to all scripts and other material submitted by candidates
- A sample of scripts, as agreed (refer to the section on roles and responsibilities above)
- Evidence of internal marking and moderation
- Opportunities to meet with students, if requested by the External Examiner[6]

The guiding principle is that External Examiners should have enough evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and are consistent.

Briefing

The External Examiner will be contacted by the Chair of Examiners to discuss particular aspects of the duties required of them before the examinations begin. This is particularly important for a new External Examiner, who may not be familiar with the University's examination arrangements. The External Examiner's primary point of contact will be the Chair of Examiners and should liaise with Chair in most matters.

3. Reporting requirements

On completion of their duties the External Examiner is required to submit a completed report form to the Vice Chancellor, which is then made available for discussion by the appropriate Board or Committee within the Faculty or Department concerned.

[6]There is no formal requirement for External Examiners to meet with students to obtain feedback on their experience, although it may be appropriate depending on the subject area or the assessment method. Clear guidance should be provided to students about the purpose of any meeting.

Where individuals have been appointed as an External Examiner for more than one award, please note that a report form must be completed for each individual award.

Process of submission
The report form should be addressed to the Vice Chancellor and emailed to vcexternalexaminers@admin.cam.ac.uk.

Please note that for those writing a report on *undergraduate awards*, the deadline to submit the report is on **31 July.** For those writing a report for *other awards*, the deadline to submit the report **1 October.**

Consideration and response
The Vice-Chancellor's office passes reports to the Education Quality & Policy Office where they are collated and checked for quality assurance purposes. Reports are then forwarded to the Chair of Examiners and/or the Head of Department as appropriate, who are requested to formulate formal written responses. For examinations held in June, the responses are expected by the end of Michaelmas of the same calendar year, providing that the reports have been received in good time.

Faculties and departments should also outline whether they expect other examiners to produce reports and if so, provide information on the expected content and format and details of where they should be sent. All examiners' reports should be considered as unreserved business at Faculty Boards meetings and other faculty or departmental committees. Comments referring to individual students must be excised, in order to preserve anonymity. The comments of External Examiners can form useful feedback to students on the cohort's performance and provide pointers for improvement for future candidates.

Disclosure
The University may publish the name and home institution of the External Examiner on the web via the University Reporter, in line with University Policy.

All External Examiners' Reports should be made available to students, with the exception of any confidential report which may be made to the Vice-Chancellor.

The Faculty Board, or Degree Committee, should decide how best to share the reports with its students and how to make them aware of the reports. The University may publish the contents of the report for the purpose of making publicly available information on teaching quality standards. In accepting the appointment, External Examiners give their consent to such processing.

Please note that reports are usually considered by the senior committees in the relevant faculties and departments, which include student representatives in their membership. Reports should ideally be written in a form that avoids discussion of individual candidates or members of staff.

External Examiners should refrain from identifying individual candidates where possible and/or faculties and departments must ensure that any such details are redacted from the report prior to making them publicly available.

4. Payment

You will be able to claim a fee for acting as an External Examiner, and expenses including the cost of overnight accommodation for up to two nights where appropriate. Requests for payment of more than two nights should be made to examiners@admin.cam.ac.uk before appointment.

Payment of your fee for acting as an External Examiner is conditional on receipt of the External Examiner's report(s). The External Examiner report form can be found here.

External Examiners who are claiming expenses or a fee should complete a Fees and Expense claim form, available from the Faculty/Department administrator.

The Chair of Examiners, Senior Examiner (in the case of Natural Sciences Tripos and the Medical and Veterinary Sciences Triposes), or Degree Committee (in the case of postgraduate degrees awarded by the Degree Committee) are responsible for authorising payment of fees and expenses. The relevant Faculty or Department will then forward the completed claim form to Student Registry so that these payments can be processed.

Please note that the External Examiner contract for services does not confer any right to sick pay or holiday pay, or any other employment or workers' rights.