



**The Quality Assurance Agency  
for Higher Education**

Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality  
and standards in higher education

**Section 4: External examining - August 2004**

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Linney Direct

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Fax 01623 450629

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## Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: External examining

### Foreword

1 This document is the second edition of a code of practice for external examining in UK higher education institutions. It is one of a suite of inter-related documents which forms an overall *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code*) for the guidance of higher education institutions subscribing to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency).

2 The overall *Code* and its 10 constituent sections were originally prepared by the Agency between 1998 and 2001 in response to the Reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee (the *Dearing* and *Garrick Reports*). The *Code* supports the national arrangements within the UK for quality assurance in higher education. The *Code* identifies a comprehensive series of system-wide principles ('precepts') covering matters relating to the management of academic quality and standards in higher education. It provides an authoritative reference point for institutions as they consciously, actively and systematically assure the academic quality and standards of their programmes, awards and qualifications.

3 The *Code* assumes that, taking into account principles and practices agreed UK-wide, each institution has its own systems for independent verification both of its quality and standards and of the effectiveness of its quality assurance systems. In developing the *Code*, extensive advice has been sought from a range of knowledgeable practitioners.

4 The *Code* does not incorporate statutory requirements relating to relevant legislation, for example the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001*. It assumes that institutions have an overriding obligation in all such cases to ensure that they meet the requirements of legislation. However, where a section of the *Code* is related to legislative or similar obligations, efforts have been made to ensure compatibility between them.

5 Since 2001 a number of developments in UK higher education have encouraged the Agency to begin a revision of individual sections of the *Code*. In undertaking this task the Agency has also decided to review the structure of the sections and, in particular, to replace the original 'precepts and guidance' format with a 'precepts and explanation' approach, using the explanations to make clear why the precepts are considered important and reducing opportunities for a 'checklist' approach to the *Code*. In doing so the Agency has sought to meet Recommendation 4 (part 4) of the Better Regulation Task Force in its report *Higher Education: Easing the Burden*, July 2002.

6 Revised sections of the *Code* are therefore now structured into a series of precepts and accompanying explanations. The precepts express key matters of principle that the higher education community has identified as important for the

assurance of quality and academic standards. Individual institutions should be able to demonstrate they are addressing the matters tackled by the precepts effectively, through their own management and organisational processes, taking account of institutional needs, traditions, culture and decision-making. The accompanying explanations show why the precepts are important.

7 The *Code* is a statement of good practice that has been endorsed by the higher education community. As such it is useful in the Agency's audit and review processes that consider the extent to which an institution, in developing and implementing its own policies, has taken account of the *Code* and its precepts.

8 Institutions may find the explanations useful for developing their own policy and for allowing some flexibility of practice at subject level, depending on local needs. It is important to emphasise that the explanations do not form part of the Agency's expectations of institutional practice when Agency teams are conducting audits and reviews.

9 Academic staff in departments and schools do not necessarily need to be aware of the detail of the various sections of the *Code*, although they might well be expected to be familiar with the institutional policies it informs and any parts which are particularly relevant to their own responsibilities.

10 To assist users, the precepts are listed, without the accompanying explanations, in Appendix 1 to this section of the *Code*.

11 The first version of this section of the *Code* was published in January 2000. The publication of this second version follows consultation with staff in institutions, who have helped to update the *Code* to take account of institutions' practical experience of using the guidance contained in its predecessor.

## Introduction

12 In the UK's system of higher education, institutions are responsible for the quality of the education they provide and the academic standards of the awards they offer. External examining provides one of the principal means for maintaining nationally comparable standards within autonomous higher education institutions, the external examiner being one of a number of independent and impartial advisers used by them. In addition to external examining, other means of assuring and enhancing quality and standards may include:

- monitoring or review of programmes and modules/units on a regular (often annual) basis;
- five- or six-yearly reviews including contributions from external reviewers;
- comparing programmes with those offered in similar institutions.

13 The mechanisms employed by institutions to maintain and enhance academic standards will vary, depending on individual mission, size, curriculum structures and other factors. This section of the *Code* assumes, however, that all institutions will use external examiners to help them monitor the academic standards of their awards, except those granted on an honorary basis. External examiners act as independent and impartial advisers providing institutions with informed comment on the standards set and student achievement in relation to those standards. External examining is therefore an integral and essential part of institutional quality assurance. It is the responsibility of each institution to establish criteria and guidance for external examining that enable its academic standards to be described and maintained.

14 This section of the *Code* links the external examining process to subject benchmarking, the national qualifications frameworks and institutional programme specifications, all of which are part of the publicly available information that supports judgements on academic standards and quality assurance procedures.

15 The main purposes of external examining are:

- to verify that academic standards are appropriate for the award or part thereof which the external examiner has been appointed to examine;
- to help institutions to assure and maintain academic standards across higher education awards;
- to help institutions to ensure that their assessment processes are sound, fairly operated and in line with the institution's policies and regulations.

In addition to these essential functions, institutions may ask external examiners to undertake other activities. This section of the *Code* does not propose any restriction to such extensions of the role, although it does state the need for both parties to agree on them, and to make explicit any associated powers that may be assigned to external examiners for the purpose. Any extensions of the role(s) of external examiners should not in any way reduce the effectiveness of, or conflict with, the

main purposes of external examining. Precepts 2 and 6 below provide more details on these points.

16 There is wide variation between institutions in the detail of their practices for external examining. This section of the *Code* seeks to ensure that, without inhibiting such local diversity or hindering innovative approaches, a UK-wide basis exists for securing the academic standards of the awards of individual institutions.

17 Where the institution delivering a programme is not the awarding institution, the appointment and functions of external examiners still remain the responsibility of the awarding institution, although in some circumstances, recruitment, selection and appointment of external examiners may safely be delegated to the partner. [See also *Section 2 of the Code, Collaborative provision, and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, precepts 21 to 23].

18 In the quality assurance processes managed by the Agency, auditors and/or reviewers are engaged at institutional and/or programme levels. It is important that there should be no misunderstanding about the respective roles of auditors/reviewers and external examiners. Auditors/reviewers are not involved in the examination process and have distinctly different responsibilities from those of external examiners.

19 It is for external examiners to perform their role on a continuing basis and report, to their contracting institutions, whether students' performances have been judged properly and fairly against the institution's academic standards. At agreed intervals, auditors/reviewers consider whether an institution has effective mechanisms in place to ensure that it sets academic standards at appropriate levels. Auditors/reviewers may more broadly identify whether the academic standards set by an awarding institution are at an appropriate level, referring to the elements of the Academic Infrastructure (see footnote 2 on page 7). They will not, however, intervene in the assessment of individual students.

20 One part of the information sought by auditors/reviewers in their evaluation of an institution's academic standards and practices will be provided by scrutiny of the effectiveness of an institution's procedures relating to external examining, and the extent to which it has taken due account of the precepts of this section of the *Code*.

21 The external examining system depends on all higher education institutions in the UK being willing to accept responsibility for ensuring that professional development of academic staff includes experience that prepares them for external examining. The future continued success of the system will rely upon institutions recruiting and retaining individuals who can contribute to the sustainability and effectiveness of the external examining process and upon their encouraging staff to prepare for and undertake this role.

22 The increasing diversity of programmes and modes of study within higher education suggests that institutions will, where appropriate, want to appoint external examiners with professional or practice-based expertise, in addition to those with more typical academic backgrounds.

23 This section of the Agency's *Code* covers the external examining of taught programmes and their components, rather than instances where external examiners are appointed to consider an individual student (eg for the examination of research degrees). It makes reference to, and should where appropriate also be applied with, other sections of the *Code* including those dealing with *Assessment of students*, *Collaborative provision* and *Postgraduate research programmes*.

## Precepts and guidance

### General principles

The external examining function should help institutions to ensure that:

- the academic standard of each award and its component parts is set and maintained by the awarding institution at the appropriate level, and that the standards of student performance are properly judged against this;
- the assessment process measures student achievement appropriately against the intended outcomes of the programme, and is rigorous, fairly operated and in line with the institution's policies and regulations;
- institutions are able to compare the standards of their awards with those of other higher education institutions.

The core functions of institutions' external examining processes are outlined in precept 1.

#### 1

**An institution should ask its external examiners, in their expert judgement, to report on:**

- i whether the academic standards set for its awards, or part thereof<sup>1</sup>, are appropriate;**
- ii the extent to which its assessment processes are rigorous, ensure equity of treatment for students and have been fairly conducted within institutional regulations and guidance;**
- iii the standards of student performance in the programmes or parts of programmes which they have been appointed to examine;**
- iv where appropriate, the comparability of the standards and student achievements with those in some other higher education institutions;**
- v good practice they have identified.**

### The roles of external examiners

Institutions employ external examiners in a range of roles. Besides the core role in assuring the academic standards of programmes and awards outlined in precept 1, institutions may ask external examiners to undertake other roles. It is important that any other roles should not conflict with or compromise the core role.

<sup>1</sup>Part of a programme might be: a group of modules/courses/units; one module/course/unit; or an element, ie a component of a module/course/unit.

The Academic Infrastructure<sup>2</sup> is one of the important reference points that help external examiners to fulfil their core role.

## 2

**Institutions should state clearly and communicate to all concerned the various roles, powers and responsibilities assigned to their external examiners, including the extent of their authority in examination/assessment boards.**

By providing clear guidance on the role and authority of different types of examiner within their assessment systems, institutions will help all parties concerned with the assessment process, including students, examiners, academic departments/schools and individual academic staff, to understand:

- the responsibilities of a subject examiner within a modular system, who might normally be asked to comment on assessment practices at module or element level;
- the role of an external examiner of a programme or group of programmes, normally in one or a few subject areas;
- the role of an external examiner whose remit might be to advise on comparability of the examining process across a range of programmes, such as procedures for the classification of degrees;
- the extent to which an external examiner can be responsible for modules spanning different programmes.

The distinction between the core and any additional roles of external examiners reduces the chances of conflicts of interest. If the core role of external examiners is to help assure the quality of assessment processes and maintain academic standards, they will need advice about how they are expected to undertake their responsibilities in evaluating the level of student achievement, for example, by approving examination papers, sampling students' work and generally moderating and validating marks. The involvement of external examiners in other activities, such as periodic review, should involve prior consideration of the potential risk this might pose to the examiner's ability to be impartial.

It may, in some cases, be appropriate for someone who has acted as an external referee or adviser in curriculum redesign or in the development of a new programme to become an external examiner subsequent to fulfilling the advisory role.

A clear understanding by external examiners of the ways in which their work contributes to the institution's quality assurance processes will help them to fulfil their role effectively.

It is helpful for all concerned if institutions make clear their expectations of external examiners in respect of the operation of examination/assessment boards. To enable

<sup>2</sup>Components of the Academic Infrastructure are: frameworks for higher education qualifications; subject benchmark statements; the *Code*; programme specifications.

external examiners to fulfil their role, they would normally be expected to attend examination/assessment boards which consider the programmes or parts of programmes which they are engaged to examine.

The extent to which the external examiner may influence the final decision of the board is a matter for institutional policy. In some institutions it is considered normal practice for a board of examiners to make collective decisions, with no individual having primacy. Institutional regulations or guidance normally indicate the authority given to examination/assessment boards to moderate and finalise marks.

*Section 6 of the Code, Assessment of students*, contains guidance on the conduct and membership of assessment panels and boards.

**3**

**Prior to the confirmation of mark lists, pass lists or similar documents, institutions will expect external examiners to endorse the outcomes of the assessment(s) they have been appointed to scrutinise.**

Institutions will have their own procedures for enabling external examiners to endorse assessment outcomes, which are normally the collective decisions of boards of examiners (see precept 2 above). The external examiner's endorsement is normally taken to indicate that assessment processes have been carried out in accordance with the policy and regulations of the institution.

Institutions normally provide guidance on the significance of external examiners' signatures on documents recording the final decisions of examination boards, as well as on the arrangements for resolving a situation where an external examiner is unwilling to endorse the outcomes of the assessment processes. The latter might involve a written statement from the external examiner. Guidance on such circumstances helps to prevent misunderstandings and avoid confusion.

It is also helpful to make explicit the extent to which the decision of an examination/assessment board, endorsed by an external examiner, is open to further consideration.

### **Nomination and appointment of external examiners**

The procedures for nominating and appointing external examiners within an institution are an important part of the assurance of academic standards. Good practice in this area is likely to be achieved when a senior academic body takes responsibility for ensuring that:

- criteria for the identification, nomination and appointment of candidates are understood and accessible to all staff initiating appointments;
- nominations are assessed effectively and rigorously;

- any potential intellectual property difficulties, such as might arise from the need for commercial confidentiality, are resolved prior to appointment.

It is important that external examiners are chosen who have an understanding of the types of programmes or parts of programmes they are asked to consider. This means that it can be most appropriate for institutions to recruit external examiners from other institutions similar to themselves. Nevertheless, institutions may also find it helpful to consider the full range of expertise available across higher education when seeking potential external examiners.

Institutions typically provide potential external examiners with sufficient documentation to enable both the nominee and the institution to proceed to the approval stage of appointment with a shared understanding of the role. Documents are likely to include some formal agreement between the institution and the examiner, for example a letter of appointment or contract.

It is normal practice for a formal letter of appointment, or equivalent, to be sent to an external examiner, confirming the terms of the appointment and making it clear to whom in the institution he/she is responsible.

#### 4

**Institutions will make every effort to ensure that their external examiners are competent to undertake the responsibilities defined in their contract.**

The external examining process relies on appointments procedures that enable institutions to select suitable external examiners for the range of roles required of them. Clear guidance for those appointing external examiners makes the selection and recruitment processes transparent to all concerned and enables potential external examiners to be clear about the role(s) they are being asked to perform.

Appointments criteria will normally refer to:

- appropriate levels of academic and, where appropriate, other professional expertise and experience in relation to the relevant subject area and assessment;
- the individual's ability to make an effective contribution to the efficiency and sustainability of the assessment process and to provide objective advice on assessment and related procedures;
- the need not to exclude otherwise well-qualified candidates on the grounds that they have no previous experience as external examiners.

People appointed as external examiners, particularly those with little or no prior experience of the role, will need to be appropriately briefed and inducted (see precept 7 below). Potential external examiners should receive sufficient information about the role they are being asked to undertake to enable them to make sound decisions about accepting or declining the appointment.

Specific guidance will be needed when external examiners are appointed for particular aspects of assessment, for example practice-based and multi- or inter-disciplinary programmes and modules.

In professional and/or vocational subjects, professional, statutory or regulatory bodies have an important role in accrediting and maintaining professional standards, including fitness to practise. Members of such organisations, and individuals from industry or commerce, make a valuable contribution to the external examining process. They should be given appropriate support by the recruiting institution to enable them to combine academic judgements with the requirements of the relevant profession. This helps to ensure that the relationship between the academic and the professional aspects of the assessment are dealt with securely and with confidence.

**5**

**Institutions should define explicit policies and regulations governing the nomination and appointment of external examiners, and premature termination of the contract by either party.**

Institutions are responsible for the number and deployment of their external examiners. In discharging their responsibilities, institutions typically undertake some or all of the following:

- develop guidance for the nomination and appointment of external examiners, and monitor whether these criteria are being followed. This can help to ensure consistency and effectiveness of practice;
- identify the period of appointment, normally between three and five years: this length of appointment enables the external examiner to become sufficiently familiar with this institution and its programmes, while reducing the opportunity for a lack of objectivity that can occur if this period is too long;
- put in place an approval process that includes consideration of appropriate documentation in support of nominations; this can help to reassure students and others about the rigour of the appointments process;
- establish systems for the appointment of external examiners that include consideration and confirmation of nominations at institutional level; this can help to reassure the institution about the integrity and objectivity of procedures operated by those acting on its behalf;
- keep a central register of appointments and periods of tenure; this can help institutions to avoid inadvertent conflicts of interest and ensure the proper rotation of external examiners;
- develop criteria and procedures for the early termination of the contract. Some contracts are annually renewable by both parties. Instances which might prompt termination include: non-attendance by the examiner at

examination/assessment boards, providing false information, failure to produce written reports, or non-payment of fees by an institution.

Where more than one examiner is appointed to a programme or part thereof, it can be helpful to phase examiner appointments to enable the mentoring of new examiners.

## 6

**Institutional procedures should ensure that potential conflicts of interest are identified and resolved prior to the appointment of external examiners.**

In developing guidance for examiners, faculties, schools and departments, institutions usually find it useful to include specific details on some or all of the following:

- the maximum number of external examinerships they would normally expect or allow their appointees to hold;
- the normal number of reappointments and periods between reappointments. It would normally be considered exceptional to reappoint an external examiner for a second complete term of office without a break, although sometimes it may be necessary to extend an appointment for up to one year;
- how they would normally avoid reciprocal appointments with departments/schools of other institutions (which give rise to a potential lack of objectivity) and how conflicts of interest will be dealt with where such appointments are unavoidable;
- the period which should elapse before a former student or member of staff could be appointed as an external examiner;
- whether an examiner can be succeeded by another from the same institution;
- conflicts of interest that arise because of a change in circumstances, eg change of job.

Exceptions to normal policies should be identified.

### **Preparation of external examiners**

## 7

**Institutions should ensure that, once appointed, external examiners are provided with sufficient information and support to enable them to carry out their responsibilities effectively. Specifically, external examiners must be properly prepared by the recruiting institution to ensure they understand and can fulfil their responsibilities.**

Different kinds of collaborative provision influence arrangements for external examiners. [See also *Section 2 of the Code, Collaborative provision, and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, precepts 21 to 23]

Opportunities are normally provided to enable external examiners to familiarise themselves with the institution and its assessment procedures, and to agree their responsibilities, prior to the first assessment visit. The familiarisation process will include providing the external examiner with institutional information such as regulations, external examining and assessment guidelines and school/department information such as student and programme handbooks, examination papers, marking and classification criteria. These opportunities are even more important where an external examiner has little or no prior experience.

It is the responsibility of the recruiting institution to provide guidance on what it expects from all its external examiners, especially those with little or no prior experience.

External examiners will wish to ensure their own development in the role, including taking advantage of the range of support mechanisms available, locally and nationally. Preparation for the role of external examiners is part of professional academic practice and this may be reflected in development opportunities provided by institutions for their own staff. Support provided by the recruiting institution will include regular updates on assessment policy and procedures, where appropriate drawing upon national support mechanisms for the external examining process.

### External examining

**8**

**Institutions should state clearly, and communicate to all concerned, the programmes and awards, or parts of programmes, to which each external examiner is appointed.**

It is important that there is clarity about the circumstances in which external examiners are, and are not, used. An institution may think it appropriate to state explicitly, for example, that any student achievement that contributes to a named award will be moderated by an external examiner. Alternatively, an institution might decide that by confirming the academic standards of a Bachelor's programme, an external examiner is implicitly endorsing the level and standards of related interim qualifications such as undergraduate certificates and diplomas.

Factors that often have a bearing on the employment of additional external examiners to endorse the academic standards of awards include:

- the capacity of existing external examiners to make competent judgements relating to all agreed external reference points, for example the components of the Academic Infrastructure such as the frameworks for higher education qualifications, and/or the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies;
- the need for an appropriate match between the numbers of external examiners and the quantity of assessed material being examined;

- whether more than one examiner is needed for a programme that is academically diverse;
- how examiners will be deployed to assess the overall standards and coherence of combined studies and multidisciplinary programmes.

**9**

**Institutions will wish to agree with their external examiners the evidence each considers necessary to ensure the effective discharge of external examining responsibilities, and will provide them with a range of relevant information.**

External examiners appreciate clear advice on their role in the assessment process. They will also need to be aware of the extent to which they can: gain direct access to all of the assessed parts of a programme, including placements; determine the method and extent of sampling students' work; request additional marking; select candidates for, and influence the nature and conduct of oral examinations; determine the extent of compensation or condonation; and participate in decisions on cases of suspected or proven cheating by students.

To fulfil their role in a rigorous manner, external examiners will need to know:

- whether they are entitled to meet students on programmes or parts of programmes they are examining;
- what evidence they need to judge the quality and appropriateness of assessment and to assure themselves that assessments are testing the intended student learning outcomes;

(See also *Section 6 of the Code, Assessment of students*, precept 8.)

- how they will be given adequate opportunity to hold meetings with internal examiners.

**External examiners' reports**

External examiners are appointed by an institution and their reports are an important component of an institution's internal and external quality assurance processes. Institutions will wish to provide explicit advice for their external examiners on their expectations for reports, including content and structure.

**10**

**Institutions should require external examiners to submit at agreed times a written report that provides comments and judgements on the assessment process and the standards of student attainment.**

In addition to the reporting requirements specified by the institution, external examiners need to be free to make whatever comments they see fit in exercising their expert judgement. This is an important aspect of their externality. To facilitate

this, external examiners will need to know the route by which they can raise matters of particular importance or sensitivity, for example, by making a confidential report to the head of the institution.

Institutions generally provide additional guidance on:

- the timing of reports, to whom they should be sent and what medium is required, for example, printed or electronic copies;
- the level of confidentiality that reports will be afforded;
- whether a summary or overview report is required from the external examiner at the end of a term of office.

**11**

**Institutions should indicate the required form and coverage of external examiners' reports.**

In the interests of clarity, institutions may find it helpful to specify the aspects of the assessment process that it requires external examiners to comment upon. These should be consistent with the roles and duties notified on appointment. Increasingly, institutions are using standard report forms, often including particular question headings which indicate the nature and type of information sought from external examiners. Guidance should be available for external examiners, outlining what action the institution will take if an external examiner does not comply with the required form and coverage of report.

Reporting requirements will be tailored to the arrangements and needs of the institution, but reports generally comment on:

- the academic standards demonstrated by the students and, where possible, their performance in relation to students on comparable courses;
- the strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort;
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance;
- the extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration;
- the design, structure and marking of assessments;
- the procedures for assessments and examinations;
- whether external examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information;
- the coherence of the policies and procedures relating to external examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform;

- the extent to which the external examiner's comments in his/her previous report have been considered and appropriately acted upon;

and might additionally comment on other matters.

The wide-ranging advice provided by some external examiners can be beneficial for developing and refining student learning outcomes and in supporting institutions in using elements of the Academic Infrastructure.

If an institution is required by its funding bodies to provide summaries or other information deriving from external examiners' reports for publication, then it will need to explain these requirements to its external examiners and agree systems to assemble and verify the information.

#### **Use of external examiners' reports within the institution**

The reports of its external examiners are fundamental to the process by which an institution assures the academic standards of its awards and satisfies itself that this is being done effectively. The way it does this is a reflection of the seriousness with which it takes these matters.

**12**

**Institutions should ask external examiners to send their reports to the head of the institution, or named person(s) designated by the head of the institution to exercise responsibility for the handling of these reports. Institutions should ensure that the reports are considered within the institution at both subject and institutional levels.**

**13**

**Full and serious consideration should be given by the institution to comments and recommendations contained within external examiners' reports, and the outcomes of the consideration, including actions taken, should be formally recorded.**

To derive maximum benefit from the work of their external examiners, institutions need to have in place effective ways of:

- considering the reports and, where appropriate, taking action as soon as possible;
- enabling them to know that departments/faculties/schools have taken account of the content of the reports, for example, by specifying the forms of feedback used to inform external examiners of consequential action taken and recording the responses from the subject areas concerned;
- ensuring that those responsible for a particular examination or assessment are made aware of and, if necessary, monitor any changes which occur as a result of the relevant external examiner's report.

In addition to the primary consideration of individual external examiners' reports at subject level, institutions typically summarise their external examiners' responses annually and draw out any themes or recurring recommendations to ensure that these are fully addressed at appropriate levels. Producing an overview report that is considered by relevant quality assurance committees could be a first step in learning from and disseminating summary information.

It is helpful for external examiners' reports to be considered at a variety of levels in an institution, from module/subject/department/school level to senior management level. The module/programme level is particularly important, where immediate action can be taken in response to external examiners' comments.

In cases where the requirements of external professional bodies are the focus of comments, there may be a need to inform those bodies of action taken in response to the external examiner's report.

### **Feedback to external examiners on their reports**

**14**

**Institutions should ensure that external examiners are, within a reasonable time, provided with a considered response to their comments and recommendations, including information on any actions taken by the institution.**

External examiners need to have confidence that the institutions they are assisting are giving proper consideration to the comments and recommendations they have made. This does not mean that institutions have to agree with or accept all comments or recommendations made by their external examiners. A reasoned response is part of a productive relationship between the two parties.

Responses to external examiners might include information on the detailed consideration of their report(s), with details of any actions taken as a result of their reporting. Where a decision has been taken not to implement recommendations, external examiners should be told why. The formal response from an institution to the external examiner is an important part of the feedback process.

## Appendix 1

### The precepts

**1**

An institution should ask its external examiners, in their expert judgement, to report on:

- i whether the academic standards set for its awards, or part thereof<sup>1</sup>, are appropriate;
- ii the extent to which its assessment processes are rigorous, ensure equity of treatment for students and have been fairly conducted within institutional regulations and guidance;
- iii the standards of student performance in the programmes or parts of programmes which they have been appointed to examine;
- iv where appropriate, the comparability of the standards and student achievements with those in some other higher education institutions;
- v good practice they have identified.

**2**

Institutions should state clearly and communicate to all concerned the various roles, powers and responsibilities assigned to their external examiners, including the extent of their authority in examination/assessment boards.

**3**

Prior to the confirmation of mark lists, pass lists or similar documents, institutions will expect external examiners to endorse the outcomes of the assessment(s) they have been appointed to scrutinise.

**4**

Institutions will make every effort to ensure that their external examiners are competent to undertake the responsibilities defined in their contract.

**5**

Institutions should define explicit policies and regulations governing the nomination and appointment of external examiners, and premature termination of the contract by either party.

<sup>1</sup>Part of a programme might be: a group of modules/courses/units; one module/course/unit; or an element, ie a component of a module/course/unit.

**6**  
Institutional procedures should ensure that potential conflicts of interest are identified and resolved prior to the appointment of external examiners.

**7**  
Institutions should ensure that, once appointed, external examiners are provided with sufficient information and support to enable them to carry out their responsibilities effectively. Specifically, external examiners must be properly prepared by the recruiting institution to ensure they understand and can fulfil their responsibilities.

**8**  
Institutions should state clearly, and communicate to all concerned, the programmes and awards, or parts of programmes, to which each external examiner is appointed.

**9**  
Institutions will wish to agree with their external examiners the evidence each considers necessary to ensure the effective discharge of external examining responsibilities, and will provide them with a range of relevant information.

**10**  
Institutions should require external examiners to submit at agreed times a written report that provides comments and judgements on the assessment process and the standards of student attainment.

**11**  
Institutions should indicate the required form and coverage of external examiners' reports.

**12**  
Institutions should ask external examiners to send their reports to the head of the institution, or named person(s) designated by the head of the institution to exercise responsibility for the handling of these reports. Institutions should ensure that the reports are considered within the institution at both subject and institutional levels.

**13**

Full and serious consideration should be given by the institution to comments and recommendations contained within external examiners' reports, and the outcomes of the consideration, including actions taken, should be formally recorded.

**14**

Institutions should ensure that external examiners are, within a reasonable time, provided with a considered response to their comments and recommendations, including information on any actions taken by the institution.

## Appendix 2

### **Membership of the working group for the Code of practice: External examining**

Dr Alan Betteridge	Head of Quality Assurance, Oxford Brookes University
Helen Bowles	Policy Adviser, SCOP
Sarah Butler	Director of Academic Support, University of Sussex
Professor James Calderhead	Vice Principal, University of Dundee
Mark Flinn	Director of Academic Affairs, Edge Hill College
Peter Griffiths	Academic Registrar, University of Gloucestershire
Professor Ian Haines	Director of the Graduate School, London Metropolitan University
Dr Bill Macmillan	Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of Oxford
Brian Salter	Deputy College Secretary and Academic Registrar, King's College London
David Young	Policy Adviser, Universities UK
Professor Nick Harris	Director of Development and Enhancement, Quality Assurance Agency
Janet Bohrer	Development Officer, Quality Assurance Agency
Gill Clarke	Assistant Director, Quality Assurance Agency and Director, Teaching Support Unit, University of Bristol



**The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**  
Southgate House  
Southgate Street  
Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000  
Fax 01452 557070  
Email [comms@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)  
Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

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