Guidance for Academic Units on Secure Communication and Transfer of Information Methods (including with External Examiners)

Context

1. This guidance is to support academic units in selecting secure means of communication for transfer of information to colleagues working with/on our taught programmes but who are not members of academic staff. It was drafted in response to queries regarding secure communication of assessment with External Examiners, but can be used to support transfer of information in a variety of other contexts (for example where assessed work is being marked by people external to the University).

2. The methods suggested below are the recommended methods supported by NUIT or LTDS. Where colleagues wish to use a different method, they are advised to get in touch with LTDS for advice.

Documents

3. As stipulated in its Policy and Procedures for External Examiners of Taught Programmes, LTDS shares a number of documents with the External Examiner after official appointment (see paragraph 28). This is done by email.

4. Most of the relevant documents shared by the Academic Unit, including Boards of Studies documents (paragraph 29) and documents from the Chair of the Board of Examiners (paragraph 37), can be shared by using one of the methods below. This includes sharing samples of assessed work for consideration by External Examiners.

Methods

Microsoft Teams

5. A private Microsoft Team can be set up within an Academic Unit by a nominated member of Professional Services (PS) staff. It is good practice to give the Teams group a suitable name that provides clarity on the Team’s purpose.

6. It is suggested that at least two members of PS staff have owner status of the group. These administrators can add the External Examiner(s), and any other members of University staff that may need access.

7. External Examiners do not need a Newcastle University email address or account to access Microsoft Teams, and can download the app or use the webapp with their own email address. A guest account will be assigned to them in Teams. It is good practice for anyone added to Teams to be contacted beforehand to explain how the group will be used.

8. More information on setting up and using Microsoft Teams, how to create read-only files, and other good practice is available on the NUIT website.
Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

9. The VLE can also be used to share documents securely with External Examiners. In Blackboard a Community can be set up, and owners can subsequently add users to this Community. In Canvas, a Course could be created, and owners added in a similar way.

10. In order to be able to add External Examiners as users to the VLE an account needs to be set up by NUIT in advance. Before NUIT is able to create this account a completed Staff Registration Form is to be sent to it.servicedesk@ncl.ac.uk. The registration form must be countersigned by the Head of School/Service/Institute.

11. Regardless of the platform used to share documents, Schools are asked to give External Examiners access to relevant programme materials (e.g. modules) within the VLE.

OneDrive

12. Microsoft OneDrive allows documents to be shared with colleagues as well as externals. Guidance on how to give specific access is available on the NUIT website. External Examiners do not need a Newcastle University account in order to access files shared via OneDrive.

13. Information on protecting data is also provided, with information on how to restrict access and password-encrypt documents.

By Post

14. When it proves impossible to share documents virtually (e.g. because the External’s internet connection is very poor), documents can be posted by recorded delivery on a USB-stick or external hard drive.

15. Both the USB-stick/external hard drive need to be password protected, and it is advisable to also encrypt the documents on the devices. The External is asked to return the device on their next visit to the University.

Related Policies

16. For External Examining, a key reference point is the Policy and Procedures for External Examiners of Taught Programmes.

17. More information on other External Examiner documents, including guidance on virtual attendance at Boards of Examiner meetings, can be found on the LTDS webpages.

18. Data Protection Policy. In case of sharing personal data, please ensure the Data Protection Guidelines are followed at all times. Information for Staff includes Data Protection guidance, Information for Schools, and Dos and Don’ts.

Guidance last modified by LTDS, June 2020

This document is primarily intended for: School Managers/Admin Degree Programme Directors

Contact: ltds@ncl.ac.uk