

# Policy and Procedures for External Examiners of Taught Programmes



## Introduction

1. This policy covers all taught programmes, both undergraduate and postgraduate, wherever and however they are delivered. It aims to provide a framework within which all examiners must operate in order to comply with the University's Statutes and, in particular, to enable the Senate to fulfil its responsibilities as the supreme governing body in all academic matters (Statutes 27-29).

## Principles of the University's use of external examiners

2. The University is responsible for the quality and standards of all academic awards made in its name. The function of external examiners is to assist the University in discharging this responsibility. In order to ensure the quality of the education it provides and the maintenance of the standards of its awards, the University makes scrupulous use of its external examiners by:
  - a. Requiring them to provide independent and impartial advice, as well as informative comment on the University's standards and on student achievement in relation to those standards;
  - b. Drawing upon their professional advice and expertise and giving full and serious consideration to their reports.

## External examiners and Educational Partnerships

3. It is the responsibility of the University, when it is making an award, to appoint an external examiner, irrespective of whether all or part of the programme is delivered by a collaborative partner (or partners). The following minimum standard applies to external examining arrangements for programmes that are the subject of an educational partnership:-
  - a. Where appropriate, external examiners should be the same as those overseeing similar programmes delivered at Newcastle so that they can ensure comparability of standards. If separate examiners are used (e.g. for dual awards or another institution's modules included on Newcastle programmes), arrangements should be made to bring together the judgements of the different examiners regarding the standards of the programmes, i.e. the Newcastle Board of Studies should consider the reports of all examiners;
  - b. the external examiner(s) should normally visit the TNE or partner provision twice during their period of appointment, and in no circumstances should visit less than once during their period of appointment;
  - c. the Agreement should set out the need for the Newcastle external to sample review some of the partner's assessment and what that sample would consist of. This is not required for a UK partner once their quality management processes have been considered as equivalent and appropriate (in these cases a copy of their external examiner report going to the Newcastle BoS would suffice);
  - d. any costs of travel and/or translation must be borne by the Newcastle school or by the partner (depending on what is agreed when the partnership is established, and specified in the Agreement);
  - e. The use of external examiners for maintaining and enhancing quality and standards is not commonplace in many countries and is one area where further information on this area of practice may be required to aid the partners' understanding of the role.

4. The extent to which a collaborative partner becomes involved in aspects of the process is a matter for the University to determine with the partner. Such arrangements will be explicitly covered in the Memorandum of Agreement setting out the partnership arrangements.

## **Research degree programmes**

5. For programmes containing research and taught elements (such as professional doctorates or Integrated PhD), a single external examiner may be appointed for both elements. This policy covers the taught elements of such programmes. External examining arrangements for the research elements of such programmes (and all other research degree programmes) are covered in the University's [Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees](#).

## **Special types of provision**

6. The specific responsibility of each external examiner is dependent on the role allocated by the institution on appointment, and may be at different levels depending on the nature of the provision and the way in which decision-making processes about assessment are structured at the programme or module level. The policy can therefore be adapted to suit specific subject area needs, as in the case of Combined Honours provision and the PARTNERS programme, for example. For distance learning programmes, points a. b. and d. above should be regarded as additional guiding principles in determining external examining arrangements.

## **Purpose and role of external examiners**

7. The University requires its external examiners to:
  - a. confirm whether the standards of the University's awards meet or exceed the academic standards specified in external reference points such as the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, the UK Quality Code, subject benchmark statements, and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies;
  - b. confirm whether the academic standards of the University's awards are consistent with those of similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions;
  - c. report on whether the University's processes for assessment measure student achievement rigorously and fairly and are conducted in line with University policies and regulations;
  - d. identify, where appropriate, examples of exemplary practice and innovation in learning, teaching and assessment;
  - e. comment on opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning experience provided to students.
8. A detailed list of duties is outlined in paragraphs 45-48.

## **Nomination and Appointment**

### *Nomination*

9. For each taught programme, module, or element, the Board of Studies undertakes the task of establishing and maintaining the output standards of the award. The Head of School is responsible for ensuring that this task is undertaken effectively. One or a combination of external examiners for

each programme (or part thereof), or module, is nominated by the Head of School or a delegated nominee. The University reserves the right to appoint a 'principal' where a team of external examiners is used, if this is deemed necessary by the Chair of Faculty Education Committee.

10. The nomination form is available at: <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/epgs/policies-and-procedures/external-examiners/>
11. External examiners are normally appointed for a period of four years. This does not preclude schools appointing external examiners for a shorter period of time if that is desirable for both parties. In exceptional circumstances it may be considered appropriate to extend the appointment of a current external examiner for a fifth and final year to achieve continuity, for example, where a programme is being withdrawn or suspended. Requests for such extensions must be submitted for consideration and approval by the Chair of Faculty Education Committee, and subsequently reported to University Education Committee.
12. An external examiner appointment may temporarily be suspended by the University or the external examiner, for example due to illness, maternity leave or other unforeseen circumstances for up to one year. Another suitable external examiner will then be appointed to take on the role on a temporary basis to cover the period of absence. The original end date remains as advised at appointment.
13. Nominations should be considered by the relevant Board of Studies prior to consideration by the Faculty Education Committee. The Chair of the Board of Studies should sign the nomination form as evidence that BoS consideration has taken place. The Head of School should sign the nomination form prior to submission to Educational Policy and Governance Service (EPGS) ([ext.examiners@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:ext.examiners@ncl.ac.uk)). EPGS is responsible for checking all nominations to ensure compliance with the criteria (minus the eligibility to work check) for appointment prior to seeking Chair of Faculty Education Committee approval for each nomination.
14. The University must, by law, ensure that prospective external examiners are eligible to work in the UK. This will be carried out after the Faculty Education Committee Chair has approved the nomination. The check **must** be carried out before the confirmation of appointment email is sent to the external examiner and no less than 24 hours before any work whatsoever is undertaken by the external examiner. EPGS is responsible for obtaining and checking copies of examiners' identity documents in order to comply with legal requirements. [Guidance for the Right to Work check](#) for EPGS on this is available on the website.
15. Subject to the receipt of a satisfactorily completed nomination form and supporting documents, recommendations for appointment are approved by the Chair of Faculty Education Committee. An annual report from each Faculty Education Committee recording all appointments approved for the current academic year is provided to Senate via the Taught Programme Sub-Committee (TPSC) and the University Education Committee.

## Criteria for selection

### *General*

16. In making nominations, Heads of Schools or their delegated nominee must, in consultation with colleagues, apply the following UK-wide set of criteria for appointing external examiners (as defined

in [UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: External Expertise](#)). The criteria need to be met for each programme/module being examined through one or a combination of external examiners.

17. *Person Specification* (The University will appoint external examiners who can show appropriate evidence of the following):
  - a. knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality
  - b. competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof
  - c. relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate
  - d. competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures
  - e. 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
  - f. familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed
  - g. 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 judgements)
  - h. meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies
  - i. awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula
  - j. competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.
18. At least one external examiner for each programme should work for a higher education institution within the UK (or have worked at one within the last five years).
19. *Conflicts of interest* (The University will not appoint as external examiners anyone in the following categories or circumstances):
  - a. a member of University Council or Senate, or a governing body of one of the University's collaborative partners;
  - b. a current employee of the University;
  - c. anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study;
  - d. anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study;
  - e. anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study;
  - f. 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 modules in question;
  - g. 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);
  - h. a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution;
  - i. the succession of an external examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home department and institution;
  - j. the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution.
20. In addition, the University will not appoint as external examiners:

- a. former external examiners, unless a period of five years has elapsed since their last appointment;
  - b. external examiners holding more than two external examiner appointments at any institution for taught programmes/modules at any point in time.
21. If an external examiner moves to a new post at a different institution, the external examiner should advise the University so that no conflict of interest arises. Should such a conflict of interest occur, the relevant Chair of Faculty Education Committee will liaise with EPGS in order to take any necessary action.

#### *Exceptions and special cases*

22. The University will appoint as external examiners individuals who do not meet all the above criteria only in exceptional circumstances where there is a legitimate case for making such an appointment. A case for an exception should be detailed in the nomination form and will be subject to consideration and approval by both the Chair of Faculty Education Committee and the PVC Education. Exceptions will be reported to University Education Committee via TPSC.
23. Examples of possible exceptions would be:
- a. External examiners drawn from business, industry or the professions who are unable to fulfil all the criteria (such as qualifications, academic background or experience of assessment);
  - b. external examiners who, as researchers, have eminent standing in their discipline, but lack experience of providing and enhancing the student learning experience;
  - c. nominations for external examiners in specialist disciplines where the pool of potential external examiners is restricted
24. Consideration of such cases may be assisted where the nominee is not the sole external examiner for the provision, hence her/his expertise would be complemented by that of others who do fulfil all the criteria.
25. Retirees, or individuals who plan to retire during a proposed period of appointment, may be considered for appointment provided there is sufficient evidence of their continuing involvement in the academic area in question, sufficient to meet the criteria listed above.

#### *Appointment of first-time external examiners and handover arrangements*

26. The University encourages the nomination of suitably qualified colleagues to undertake their first post as external examiner and gain experience in the role, and also wishes to encourage the transfer of knowledge between successive examiners. In cases where individuals are nominated who have no previous external examining experience at any institution, or where a single external examiner is appointed for a single programme, Schools should make arrangements for examiners to be appointed to a team of external examiners, or to support handover or shadowing arrangements, or to be provided with suitable briefing by relevant members of University staff as preparation for the examination process.

#### *Use of external advisers from programme approval and external subject specialists from Learning and Teaching Review (LTR)*

27. Individuals who are asked to fulfil the role of external adviser for a new programme proposal may also be appointed to serve as external examiner for the programme once it is introduced. The University permits this firstly, on the grounds that it represents good practice for such individuals to engage with a programme from proposal through to completion of a first cohort of students, and secondly, as the University seeks to ensure that the pool of external examiners is not unnecessarily restricted. The latter reasoning also applies in the case of external subject specialists from LTR, who may be appointed to serve as external examiners even if the LTR has taken place during the past five years. However, a current external examiner may not be asked to serve as an external subject specialist in LTR.

## Appointment

28. Following confirmation of appointment, examiners are sent from EPGS:
- a. A confirmation email setting out the terms and conditions of appointment, including confirmation of the programme(s), module(s) to which the external is appointed;
  - b. Links to key information including:
    - I. The *University Policy and Procedures for External Examiners of Taught Programmes*;
    - II. The *University's General Regulations, relevant Regulations for Taught Programmes – Assessment Regulations*, and the *University's Academic Appeals Procedure for Students*;
    - III. *Guidance for Boards of Examiners*;
    - IV. The *University's Education Strategy*
    - V. Information for [Candidates with Special Requirements in Exams](#)
29. Examiners are sent from the relevant Board of Studies:
- a. External examiner reports and BoS responses from the previous two years;
  - b. The relevant Degree Programme Handbook;
  - c. Procedures relating to relevant professional issues, e.g. Fitness to Practise.

## Termination of appointments

30. An external examiner may terminate their appointment for any reason, in which case they should write to the Vice-Chancellor, Newcastle University, King's Gate, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU. For appointments effective from 2017-18, the external examiner must give no less than three months' notice when terminating their appointment.
31. The University can terminate an examiner's appointment at any time in the event that:
- a. the examiner fails to attend a Board of Examiners (where required to do so and without good cause and/or making alternative arrangements);
  - b. the examiner fails to submit an annual report by the deadline determined by the University, or submits an incomplete report;
  - c. an unresolvable conflict of interest develops.
32. The Chair of Faculty Education Committee is responsible (in liaison with EPGS) for suggesting cases where terminating an examiner's appointment should be considered. The PVC Education is responsible for approving such requests and will write to the external examiner on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor with an explanation of the reasons. EPGS will provide the academic unit with an

explanation of the reasons, ask the academic unit to nominate a suitable replacement, and also inform the Examinations Office.

### **Change in circumstances of an external examiner**

33. If the circumstances of an external examiner change after they have been appointed in such a way that a conflict of interest might arise (e.g. a change of job), they should notify the University of this change where an assessment of the continuation of appointment will be undertaken by the relevant Faculty Education Committee in liaison with EPGS. In cases where it is considered that the examiner remains suitably independent to continue in the role, the matter will be reported to TPSC acting on behalf of University Education Committee.

### **Institutional responsibilities in relation to external examiners**

34. The University Education Committee is responsible for ensuring to Senate that the nomination and appointment process has been conducted in fair and rigorous manner and for consideration and confirmation of appointments by Faculties at the Institutional level; to fulfil this role University Education Committee receives (via TPSC) an annual report of the appointments from each of the Faculties which includes the following:
  - a. Name and title of nominee;
  - b. Institution of the nominee;
  - c. Institution of the previous external examiner;
  - d. Degree Programme(s) to which they have been appointed;
  - e. Institutions of other external examiners for the same degree programme(s).
35. EPGS maintains a central register of appointment and periods of tenure and maintains the ongoing institutional overview of appointments. The Examinations Office is responsible for the arrangement of the payment of fees, which is conditional on receipt of written annual reports, and of expenses incurred in fulfilment of the role. Details of fees are available at <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/exams/staff/externalexamining/>
36. The University gives full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiners' reports, and provides external examiners with a considered and timely response.

### **Support for external examiners**

37. Each year, external examiners can expect to receive from the appropriate Chair of Board of Examiners:
  - a. Details of any duties additional to those specified in paragraphs 45-48 of this policy;
  - b. Regulations for Taught Programmes – Assessment Regulations relevant to the degree programme;
  - c. Any instructions issued to examiners and/or boards of examiners;
  - d. Degree programme regulations, programme specifications and programme handbooks (including assessment criteria) for the relevant programme(s);
  - e. Information about School moderation and scaling procedures;
  - f. A full list of modules, module descriptions, including learning outcomes and assessment methods;
  - g. Procedures relating to relevant professional issues, e.g. Fitness to Practise.



- h. Access to programme materials within the Virtual Learning Environment used by the school;
- i. Draft assessment types, including examination papers and coursework instruments, and, if appropriate, a description of the marking schemes for each type of assessment, and, if deemed appropriate by the Board of Studies, model answers for assessments.
- j. A selection of assessed student work (to be sent or made available to external examiners). The principles for such selection should be agreed early in the academic year between the Chair of the Board of Examiners and the external examiner and include, where appropriate, details of sampling across various locations of delivery or educational partnerships;
- k. Samples of Learning Agreements relating to any student placements or - if the placement is for credit- samples of assessed work.
- l. The arrangements, where appropriate, for the selection of candidates for viva voce examinations where the viva is a formal part of the assessment process (taught postgraduate programmes only);
- m. The arrangements for the external examiner to be given adequate opportunity to communicate with internal examiners and, where appropriate, others involved in teaching and assessment (such as placement providers/assessors);
- n. Information concerning the authority and role of the external examiner in the Board of Examiners. (NB This must be consistent with the relevant Examinations Conventions: Regulations for Taught Programmes – Assessment Regulations;
- o. Early information concerning the dates and times of Boards of Examiners meetings;
- p. Minutes from meetings of Boards of Examiners which have taken place during the period of their appointment and at which student performance has been considered;
- q. Details of arrangements made, where appropriate, for them to meet with students on the programme (including, wherever possible, those on placements) they are appointed to examine. The purpose of such meetings should be made clear well in advance. In order to facilitate this, external examiners may claim a small fee for up to two additional visits per year if they are essential to the role. Alternative arrangements, such as the use of Skype and dial-in conferencing, may also be made to maximise the number of interactions between students and external examiners;
- r. Information, where appropriate, on any Educational Partnership activity including any differences in syllabus, module content, intended learning outcomes, programme structures and the reasons for any such differences.

38. In addition, external examiners will receive a briefing from the Chair of the Board of Examiners and, if appropriate, the Degree Programme Director prior to the Board of Examiners' meeting which will cover all relevant Regulations for Taught Programmes – Assessment Regulations.

39. It is particularly important for those with no previous experience of external examining to attend this briefing. All external examiners, however, should be offered other opportunities to visit the University at any time during the term of their contract and consultation with external examiners throughout the year is encouraged.

40. It is the responsibility of the relevant School to provide the external examiner with clear information as to the precise nature of the evidence that will be made available, as well as to how and when this will happen.

41. External examiners can expect to receive, from the University:-

- a. A virtual institutional briefing / induction in the form of the [Handbook for External Examiners](#) of Taught Programmes;



- b. [Guidance on using the online External Examiners system](#) for the submission of reports
  - c. Additional paper- and web-based information outlined in paragraph 38 above;
  - d. Regular updates on institutional assessment policy and procedures to be provided by EPGS
42. A full list of supporting documents can be accessed via the External Examiners page on the [EPGS website](#).
43. External examiners for programmes that are the subject of an educational partnership can expect to receive, from the appropriate School:-
- a. A briefing on the nature of the partnership and clear explanation of the relationship and the roles and responsibilities of each partner.

## Duties

44. In order to report to the University on the soundness and fairness of the assessment process and on the standards of student achievement, the duties of external examiners of taught programmes are:

### *Core:*

- a. To comment upon the standard of University awards in relation to external references, including the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, subject benchmarks and in relation to other UK Higher Education Institutions, and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies;
- b. To review and evaluate examinations and other forms of assessment which contribute to students' degree results;
- c. To review and evaluate the assessment process;
- d. To ensure consistency in the assessment process;
- e. To participate in viva voce examinations, if they are held (taught postgraduate programmes only);
- f. To comment on the structure and academic standards of the relevant programmes;
- g. To comment on the content and teaching of the relevant programmes, particularly with regard to how the programme is informed by current research and scholarship, and how the programme is delivering in terms of graduate employability;
- h. To comment, if invited to do so by the University, on specific questions arising from academic appeals made by candidates;
- i. To comment, if invited to do so by the University, on the academic consequences of cases of suspected or proven cheating / assessment offences by students;
- j. To review the extent to which the assessment for a programme of study enables students to demonstrate that the Intended Learning Outcomes have been met through the annual approval of an Assessment Framework. The framework will include the assessment strategy for the programme, a full list of modules, indicating their status and their form of assessment.
- k. External examiners may request further detail on any assessment type and see any draft assessment type, including examination papers and coursework.
- l. All assessed work will be made available to an external examiner if requested. As a minimum, external examiners should see at least one piece of work from each module each year which contribute to the final degree classification. This should include samples of assessed work from for-credit placement modules. For written examinations external examiners should see a sample of scripts from the top, middle and bottom of the range, (the sample selection should be made in consultation with the external examiner, and arrangements will reflect the volume and nature of assessment).

- m. The scripts of all candidates who have been severely penalised because they have failed to obey instructions relating to the assessment should be drawn separately to the attention of the external examiner.
45. In addition, external examiners may be asked to:
- a. Fulfil, if requested by the academic unit, the core duties for external examiners (as listed above) in relation to any stand-alone modules taken for credit where the module is either part of, or in a discipline cognate with, a named programme of study for which the individual has been appointed as external examiner.
  - b. Observe clinical practice, or oral/aural performance, or demonstration of work (e.g. poster, design or artistic work). Such duties, if the external examiner is involved, will normally be conducted for the whole cohort of students, with the guidance of one or more internal examiners;
  - c. Comment upon students' work undertaken at Stages 0 and 1;
  - d. Provide, if appropriate, an independent external view on changes proposed to existing programmes to ensure that standards are comparable with similar programmes elsewhere.
46. All external examiners are required to provide an overview report at the end of their term of appointment.
47. Boards of Examiners are required to make these additional expectations explicit to external examiners on their appointment and annually.

## Procedure of Board of Examiners and the role of external examiner

### *Role of the External Examiner*

48. Full guidance on the operation of Boards of Examiners can be found in the [Guidance for Boards of Examiners](#). The University expects external examiners to be conversant with this guidance.
- a. The external examiner appointed for a programme is a member of the relevant Board of Examiners and is required to attend the final meeting of the Board in person, or, via a video link (the external examiner must visit at least once during their appointment) in order to carry out the required duties;
  - b. In normal circumstances, a decision on the award of a qualification to a candidate shall only be made by a Board of Examiners if the appointed external examiner is present;
  - c. External examiners have the right to speak on any matter regardless of whether their opinion has been specifically invited. However, the Board is not obliged to defer to their judgement in taking decisions;
  - d. The external examiner has no special role in individual cases relating to mitigating circumstances and therefore will not be invited to take part in School Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) committees, although they should expect to be informed of its decisions;
  - e. No member of the Board of Examiners, including the external examiner, can alter the individual marks of students;
  - f. **The minutes of the Board of Examiners should include explicit confirmation of external examiner(s) endorsement of the acceptance of the overall standards, and to signify acceptance of the individual classifications shown. External examiners are also required to sign the final list of degree results** and Schools should retain a copy of this document. In the event that the external examiner is not able to attend a Board in person, they should confirm their endorsement of standards via email to the Chair of the Board of Examiners. In the event

that the external examiner is unwilling to endorse the outcome of the examination process with regard to the overall standards, the Chair of the Board of Examiners should report the matter to the Examinations Office. The Examinations Office will collate the relevant information and refer the matter to the Academic Registrar for consideration;

- g. External examiners are encouraged to attend resit Board of Examiners meetings either in person or via video link. Although attendance is not compulsory, all external examiners for the provision should be consulted prior to these meeting, and are required to engage with this stage of the assessment process.

49. For Joint and Combined Honours degrees, external examiners from relevant single Honours subject areas are asked to provide separate comments on the comparability of standards and student performance specifically relating to joint or combined honours. For the degree of BA with Honours in Combined Studies and the BSc Joint Honours in Science, external assessors are appointed by the appropriate Faculty Education Committee in line with the criteria for external examiners. The external assessor is not required to scrutinise the work of candidates but is required to attend the meeting of the relevant Board of Examiners and to report to the University on the reliability and integrity of the process of deciding awards. For all Boards of Examiners, internal examiners must be present to provide effective liaison where appropriate and practicable.

### **Absence of an external examiner**

50. In the unavoidable absence of an external examiner, the Board of Examiners may proceed on condition that the external examiner:-
- a. has provided comments on the standards of the programmes for which they have responsibility;
  - b. is available for consultation;
  - c. receives a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Examiners and related documentation;
  - d. completes and submits their annual report as normal.
51. In such cases, an alternative external examiner attending the same Board of Examiners meeting can report on the operation of procedures by the Board.
52. If the external examiner is unable at the last minute to attend the Board of Examiners in person, they may be deemed to be present and in attendance through a video link, on condition that it can be ensured that they are well-informed as other members of the Board, has access to all necessary documents, and that a visual link can be maintained. [Guidance on virtual attendance](#) is available on the website.
53. If it is clear at an earlier stage in the academic year that an external examiner will not be able to fulfil all the duties required of them, it may be appropriate for an emergency replacement external examiner to be appointed for that year.
54. Absence, and the reason for that absence, must be documented and reported to the Board of Examiners by the Chair of the Board of Examiners.

## Reporting

55. The University requires its external examiners to submit annual reports through its online submission system which is accessible at: <https://apps.ncl.ac.uk/examiners> and, at the end of their period of appointment, provide a final written overview report. [Guidance on using the online system](#) is available at on the website. These reports are given serious and timely consideration.
56. Feedback is given to external examiners on any actions taken as a result of their report following the consideration of external examiners' reports by the Board of Studies; the Chair of the Board of Studies will provide a written reasoned response to the report. This written response will address all issues raised in the external examiner's report. If the Board of Studies has decided that no action should be taken on any issue, this will be stated and the reason(s) for this decision detailed in the response.
57. The University requires the external examiner in their annual report:
- a. To report on the appropriateness of the standards of its awards, by reference to published national subject benchmarks, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, programme specifications and other relevant information;
  - b. To report on the comparability of standards with those of similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions;
  - c. To comment upon the appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes for the programme(s) and the extent to which the curriculum enables students to attain these outcomes;
  - d. To report on the extent to which its processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are sound and have been fairly conducted;
  - e. To report on the standards of student achievement including the strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort;
  - f. To comment upon examination and administrative procedural matters such as the provision of timely and sufficient information in order to fulfil their roles; the operation of the Board of Examiners;
  - g. To comment upon specific areas where programme(s) are collaborative in nature;
  - h. To identify, where appropriate, examples of good practice in teaching and learning.
58. For External examiners of educational partnership provision supplementary questions in Section E will be required; any reports which do not have this section completed will be returned for completion. If responses in Section E raise particular concerns about the Educational Partnership EPGS may investigate the matter further including direct contact with the External examiner.
59. External examiners are asked not to identify individual staff or students by name in their annual report. Any names included in reports may be subject to redaction by the University. Positive comments will not be redacted.

## Procedures for the submission and consideration of reports

### *Introduction*

60. These procedures have been developed to:
- ensure that reports from external examiners are received as soon as possible after the boards of examiners have met;
  - ensure that matters of concern are identified and responded to promptly;
  - identify any University-wide themes and trends, and examples of good practice.

### *Submission of reports*

61. External examiners are required to complete and submit their reports electronically via the online system <https://apps.ncl.ac.uk/examiners>. Acknowledgement of receipt of reports is sent to external examiners by EPGS.
62. Following receipt of a report, the Examinations Office<sup>1</sup> will arrange for the external examiners' fee to be paid.
63. As stated in the letter of appointment, the University expects external examiners to submit reports by the following dates:
- |                                    |             |
|------------------------------------|-------------|
| For undergraduate programmes       | 1 September |
| For taught postgraduate programmes | 30 November |
64. If a report has not arrived by the appropriate deadline EPGS will notify the academic unit to check whether there are exceptional reasons for the delay. If no reason is identified, EPGS will contact the external examiner direct to remind them of the need to submit their report as soon as possible. EPGS will include the relevant Chair of Board of Studies and Faculty Education Committee secretary in any communication with the external examiner on this matter.
65. If the report is not received after such reminders, the Head of EPGS will contact the external examiner to advise them that the matter is being referred the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education for further consideration.
66. If the report is not received by the time of the referral, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education will write to the external examiner to terminate the external examiner's appointment.
67. Payment of fees is conditional on receipt of completed reports.

### **Circulation of reports**

68. On receipt of an external examiner's report copies of the report are sent by EPGS immediately to the academic unit that administers the degree programme. The University encourages the circulation of reports to all those concerned with the teaching of programmes. The Head of School should ensure that any complimentary comments about programmes are conveyed to those concerned.

---

1. For the MBBS and BDS programmes offered by the Faculty of Medical Sciences, the Faculty will arrange for the external examiners' fee to be paid.

## External examiners' recommendations to the University and serious matters of concern

69. In the event of an external examiner doing the following, EPGS will bring the report to the attention of the Dean and, if appropriate, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education and/or Vice-Chancellor:-
- requesting clarification or further information on a matter of University policy;
  - recommending that a University policy be reviewed;
  - highlighting a serious matter of concern.
70. Serious matters of concern are those which put academic standards or quality at risk, for example:
- significant deficiencies in academic provision by a School;
  - substantial differences in the application of assessment criteria within the same programme;
  - major irregularities or deficiencies in the examinations and assessment processes;
  - lack of facilities appropriate to the standard normally expected for a particular programme of study.
71. In consultation with relevant senior staff, EPGS will produce a considered response setting out what, if any, action will be taken. This response will be sent to the external examiner by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education. The University has the right to reject the view of an external examiner, but will only proceed on this basis following careful consideration of the issues raised. To ensure that institutional oversight of such issues takes place, TPSC will meet to consider the response before it is finalised, and will notify University Education Committee of the final outcome. A copy of the final response will be sent to the relevant Faculty and academic unit, the latter having responsibility for informing professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, where applicable.
72. In addition to submitting their report, external examiners may also send a confidential letter to the Vice-Chancellor, Newcastle University, King's Gate, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU, under separate cover from their annual report. When such a letter is received the Vice-Chancellor will conduct such investigations as they deem appropriate, and reply to the external examiner's confidential letter. The Vice-Chancellor's office will notify EPGS that a response has been sent to the confidential letter. EPGS will inform relevant staff and student representatives of the substance of any confidential letter, or of the action arising, where these have implications for them. A copy of the final response will be sent to the relevant Faculty and academic unit, the latter having responsibility for informing professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, where applicable.

## Consideration of reports

73. All external examiners' reports for undergraduate programmes, taught postgraduate programmes, and taught elements of research degree programmes, should be considered by the relevant Board of Studies. The discussion of external examiners' reports by the Board of Studies should be fully minuted.
74. External examiners reports should be considered by the Board of Studies within the following timescale:

Undergraduate programmes	No later than the end of November
Taught postgraduate programmes	No later than the end of January

75. Following the consideration of external examiners' reports by the Board of Studies, the Chair of the Board of Studies is responsible for ensuring that a written reasoned response is provided, addressing all issues raised in the reports. The Board of Studies response should be undertaken through the online External Examiner Database; further [guidance](#) is available on the EPGS website. Where the Board of Studies does not agree with an external examiner's recommendation, the response should outline to the examiner(s) the reasons for this view. The response of the Board of Studies, together with the external examiner's report, should be received for information by the relevant Student-Staff Committee.
76. Boards of Studies written responses to external examiners' reports should be forwarded to Faculty Learning and Teaching teams within the following timescale:
- |                                |                                   |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Undergraduate programmes       | No later than the end of November |
| Taught postgraduate programmes | No later than the end of January  |
77. Faculty Education Committees are responsible for ensuring that appropriate action is taken by Boards of Studies in response to external examiners reports. All reports and Board of Studies responses are considered by a faculty quality circle, leading to the production of a faculty summary report that is considered by Faculty Education Committee. The faculty quality circle will ensure that all issues raised by external examiners have been satisfactorily addressed. The Chair of Faculty Education Committee (or nominee) provides written feedback to each Board of Studies. Where the quality circle considers that a written response does not address all the issues raised by an external examiner, this response will be referred back to the Board of Studies for further consideration. Where a written response from a Board of Studies is judged appropriate, Faculty Education Committee is responsible for notifying the Board of Studies of this.
78. Faculty Education Committees should consider Boards of Studies responses to external examiners' reports within the following timescale:
- |                                |                                   |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Undergraduate programmes       | No later than the end of February |
| Taught postgraduate programmes | No later than the end of April    |
79. Following the meeting of Faculty Education Committee at which the faculty summary report on external examiners' reports and responses is considered, the summary report, together with an extract from the minutes of the meeting of Faculty Education Committee where it was considered, should be forwarded, with any recommendations, to the TPSC acting on delegated authority from University Education Committee.
80. TPSC is responsible for considering any University-wide themes and trends arising from external examiners' reports, and, if appropriate, considering whether University Regulations, policies, procedures or guidelines need to be revised. In order to fulfil this responsibility, TPSC considers reports from Faculty Education Committees on the consideration of external examiners' reports, and overviews prepared by EPGS of all external examiners' reports on taught programmes. Separate overviews are prepared for undergraduate programmes and taught postgraduate programmes.
81. TPSC's consideration of University-wide issues arising from external examiners' reports should take place at the earliest opportunity following Faculty Education Committee consideration. At the earliest opportunity following TPSC consideration, TPSC shall submit an annual summary report to



University Education Committee on the general issues and themes arising from the year's external examiners' reports.

82. The first meeting of the next academic year of TPSC will consider reports from Faculty Education Committee on any outstanding external examiner reports and Board of Studies responses.

### **QAA - Concerns about standards and quality in higher education**

83. 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 published applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor they may invoke QAA's concerns scheme or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.
84. For information about how the concerns scheme applies to external examining, reference should be made to [QAA's concerns scheme](#). The scheme must not be used for one-off cases of ineffective practice, or to raise a personal grievance or issues relating to an external examiner's appointment.

Policy last modified by EPGS, May 2021.	
Document last modified by EPGS, August 2023.	
This document is primarily intended for:	Chairs of Boards of Examiners Degree Programme Directors External Examiners School Managers/Admin
Contact:	<a href="mailto:educational.policy.governance@newcastle.ac.uk">educational.policy.governance@newcastle.ac.uk</a>