



Blackpool & The Fylde College

External Examiners
Guidance and Information

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Introduction

Information on the College's regulations and procedures for external examiners is provided in this guidance document for use both internally within the College by staff, and externally by its examiners. This guidance document reflects the current edition of the College's Taught Award Regulations and Procedures, published here:

- <https://www.blackpool.ac.uk/he-regulations>
- <https://www.blackpool.ac.uk/college-policies>

This guidance will be subject to review and updated accordingly in light of revisions to the QAA Quality Code and other requirements or developments from the sector.

External examiners will also find useful information on this web page:

<https://www.blackpool.ac.uk/externalexaminers>

Overview

Key Principles

The College is responsible for the standards of its awards. Blackpool and The Fylde College views the work of its external examiners as central to its quality assurance and enhancement processes, both in the maintenance of the academic standards and quality of its programmes and in the enhancement of provision. In its use of external examiners the College adheres to the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) and in all regards adheres to the external examining principles that have been agreed by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assurance (UKSCQA) and form an important addition to the Statement of Intent on Degree Classifications.

The UKSCQA principles are used by B&FC and examiners to:

- review processes and regulations in order to reinforce the essential role of the external examiner system in protecting UK academic standards and the value of qualifications over time
- support external examiners to carry out their role more effectively and transparently
- ensure that B&FC achieves full value from the network of examiners who are engaged across the sector.

For reference the UKSCQA External Examining Principles document can be accessed [here](#) and the overarching principles reiterated in [Appendix A](#).

Standards and Enhancements

External examiners are appointed to provide the College with impartial and independent advice incorporating informative comment on the institution's standards and on student achievement in relation to those standards. External

examiners help to ensure that the standard of awards (with reference to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, applicable subject benchmark statements, and relevant professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements) is maintained at the appropriate level; and that the standards of student performance are properly judged against these reference points and are comparable with standards in other UK Higher Education Institutions of which the external examiners have experience.

External examiners also provide comment and recommendations on good practice and innovation in relation to learning, teaching and assessment in order to highlight potential to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students. Consultation with external examiners on draft coursework assignments and examination questions allows the external examiner to inform practice as it occurs.

External Examiner's Role

External examiners are asked to consider and comment upon:

- the content, balance and structure of programmes;
- the scope and appropriateness of learning opportunities available to students;
- the quality and fairness of assessment strategies and procedures;
- the organisation and arrangements for student assessment;
- academic achievements by individual students;
- academic standards within a cohort of students;
- the comparability of standards of programmes within the national context.

External examiners are given guidance on their duties and provided with information and material to enable them to carry out their role.

External Examiner Appointments

All programmes have external examiners who are appointed and remunerated by the College as the degree awarding body. External examiner appointments follow a standard College procedure using defined criteria. Approval of appointments is given at institutional level by the College's Academic Standards and Development Committee on behalf of HE Academic Board.

External Examiner Reports

External examiner reports form an essential component of the College's annual monitoring procedure and its periodic review of programmes. This enables the College to systematically take into account external comment and judgement on its provision. External examiners' comments on assessment policies and processes and the regulatory framework also inform the College's continuous review of these areas. External examiners are asked to submit their reports by specified deadlines in order to ensure that any changes arising from the reports can be considered and implemented within the following academic year.

Student Engagement

External examiner reports relate to quality management within the institution and are to be seen in this context. Reports are made available to students. This forms part of the College's arrangements for students to participate, alongside staff, in evidence-based discussions on quality assurance and enhancement.

Selection, Appointment and Employment

Person Specification

The following criteria will apply for the appointment of external examiners for undergraduate taught programmes validated by Blackpool and The Fylde College and leading to Blackpool and The Fylde College awards.

External examiners will hold an academic or professional post of an appropriate level of seniority and/or have extensive practitioner experience where appropriate **and** be able to 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.

External Examiners must inform the College if their circumstances change (e.g. academic position, institution, contact details, etc.).

Restrictions on Appointment

The College will not appoint as external examiners anyone in the following categories or circumstances:

- (a) a member of a governing body or committee of the College or a current employee of the College;
- (b) anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study;
- (c) anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study;
- (d) anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study;
- (e) 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;
- (f) former staff or students of the College unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s);
- (g) a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution;
- (h) the succession of an external examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home department and institution;
- (i) the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution.

External examiners normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time.

Please note the appointment of retired academics is permissible within a maximum of 3 years after the date of retirement. Sufficient evidence should be provided of continuing involvement in the academic area in question.

Terms of Office

The duration of an external examiner's appointment will normally be for four years, with an exceptional extension of one year to ensure continuity.

An external examiner may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.*

*Note: This also applies where previously separate departments have been combined.

Approval Process and Additional Considerations

The College's Academic Standards and Development Committee will appoint external examiners who meet the above criteria on the nomination of heads of curriculum and subject to the approval, on behalf of the College's HE Academic Board. When an external examiner is nominated who lacks sufficient prior external examining experience, wherever possible appropriate support should be provided to the external examiner.

There shall be at least one external examiner for each degree programme but the number of external examiners appointed for each programme should be appropriate for the workload in order that the work each is asked to undertake is manageable, within the required timescales, for the various examining activities.

The HE Directorate will provide an appointment letter to the external examiner. The appointment letter will include information on:

- (a) the period of appointment;
- (b) the programme(s)/modules which are the responsibility of the external examiner;
- (c) reporting and fees;
- (d) links to relevant College web pages.
- (e) a copy of the external examiner guidance

Following the appointment of an external examiner, departments are responsible for liaising with the appointee and providing him or her with the information necessary to carry out their duties. This information is located here:

<https://www.blackpool.ac.uk/externalexaminers>

External examiners must be appointed in advance of the commencement of the term of office. All appointments are subject to the provision of evidence of eligibility to work in the UK as required by the UK Visa and Immigration Services checks. Evidence of eligibility to work within the UK must be provided prior to the commencement of work. External examiners are required to provide: National Insurance number; Passport page holding their personal details; any visa or entry clearances.

External examiners are responsible to the College through HE Academic Board. The College will be responsible for contracts and payment.

A summary report of all external examiner appointments will be made available to HE Academic Board and/or its appropriate sub-committee(s).

Student Information on External Examiner Appointments

Students shall be made aware of the identity and current position of the external examiners appointed to their programmes and awards. The College is required to publish these details as part of their information for students, together with a contextual statement on the role which external examiners play in the maintenance of the academic standards and quality of Blackpool and The Fylde College programmes and in the enhancement of provision. It is made clear to students that it is inappropriate for students to make direct contact with external examiners, in particular regarding their individual performance in assessment, and that if they do so the external examiners will have been told by the College not to enter into communication with them and to refer the matter to the College.

Early Termination of Appointment

The importance of the role of the external examiner in contributing to the management of standards and quality means that any failure to fulfil the role is viewed seriously. The College reserves the right to terminate an appointment if an external examiner fails to fulfil their obligation at the end of any single year of appointment.

Early termination may occur in the following instances:

- (a) serious illness;
- (b) resignation of the external examiner concerned. It is expected that, other than in cases of serious illness, the external examiner will fulfil all remaining commitments relating to the current academic assessment cycle, in order to allow adequate time to find a suitable replacement);
- (c) changes in programme structure which render the appointment no longer applicable;
- (d) non-fulfilment of external examiner duties (in particular, the failure to attend examination boards where attendance is required without making alternative arrangements, the failure to submit reports, or the provision of incomplete reports);
- (e) unprofessional conduct;
- (f) irretrievable breakdown of the relationship with the curriculum area teaching team such as to disadvantage students on the course.

Where a conflict of interest arises during a term of office and cannot be resolved, normal practice would be for the external examiner to resign.

Except in cases of serious illness or resignation, the following procedures for the early termination of an appointment shall be followed:

- (a) The HE Academic Registrar will notify the external examiner of the termination, specifying the reasons.
- (b) Any resignation or termination of appointment will be included in the summary reports of appointments made to HE Academic Board.

Where necessary the College reserves the right to terminate the appointment immediately, but where appropriate, for example where changes in programme structure apply, it will give the external examiner reasonable notice.

External Examiner Duties

The College will explicitly define the programmes for which a specific external examiner is responsible. External examiners will be informed of these programmes on appointment, and also whenever a curriculum area wishes to change these details.

Every programme will have at least one external examiner.

External examiners will be required to scrutinise Level 4 modules for the Foundation Degree as Level 4 will contribute to the classification of the Foundation Degree award.

The curriculum area will provide the external examiner with the necessary material and identify what specific activities they will be asked to undertake, which should always include the following:

- (a) commenting on draft examination papers and other assessment tasks that count towards the award;
- (b) reviewing an agreed sample of work;
- (c) attending the examination board(s) for the programme(s);
- (d) providing an annual report on the modules/programme(s);
- (e) when necessary commenting on any proposed new programmes in the subject area and any proposed changes to existing modules/programmes.

The College's external examiner report form provides details of the specific questions which external examiners are asked to address in their report.

Membership of Boards of Examiners

The College's arrangements for its examination boards and the external examiner's role as a member of these boards are detailed in the College's Taught Award Regulations and Procedures, published here:

<https://www.blackpool.ac.uk/he-regulations>

External examiners will be expected to attend meetings of boards of examiners for the degree programmes for which they are acting. If, in exceptional circumstances, an external examiner is unable to attend the scheduled examination board then this should be reported to the HE Directorate for approval. In such circumstances external examiners will still be expected to participate in all other duties prior to the examination board and to the decision making process by making themselves available for consultation in the period immediately before and during the scheduled meeting of the board of examiners.

External examiners are expected to comment informally at the end of the meeting on matters listed on the external examiners' report form once the detailed discussion of cases has been completed.

Prior to the confirmation of pass lists external examiners are required to endorse the outcomes of the assessment processes they have been appointed to scrutinise.

Personal Mitigating Circumstances

External examiners will be provided with details of personal mitigating circumstances during the relevant board of examiners. Details of the operation of the Personal Mitigating Circumstances Procedure are located here:

<https://www.blackpool.ac.uk/he-regulations>

Induction and Information for External Examiners

External examiners are provided with the following institutional-level information via the College's website.

General Regulations including:

- College policy and procedures on marking and moderation of assessment
- operation of exam boards
- the procedure for Personal Mitigating Circumstances
- classification of award
- additional requirements for professional awards
- generic grading criteria
- guidance for scaling of marks
- procedures for appeals and complaints
- procedure for Academic Malpractice

The HE Directorate will ensure that a programme of briefing is put in place to support both new and inexperienced external examiners. New external examiners are encouraged to make arrangements with the academic contact to pay a preliminary visit to the institution in order to meet the staff concerned, see the work in progress and familiarise themselves with the programme. Mid-year visits may be required for programmes with cohorts completing at various times throughout the academic year.

Curriculum areas are required to provide external examiners with the necessary information and evidence base to enable them to carry out their duties effectively. This includes information on programmes and modules, marking and moderation procedures, assessment criteria, and student performance. The programme leader for the programme has responsibility for ensuring that external examiners are provided with this information and material.

The programme leader will provide the following information to the external examiner on, or soon after, their appointment.

- (a) Channels of communication, and timings for receipt of assessment material.

- (b) All relevant programme specification, together with full details of the modules and syllabi for the programme for which the external examiner is responsible.
- (c) Details of the overall programme assessment scheme, the scheme of assessment for each module (including the balance between examined coursework, dissertations, practicals, formal examinations, etc.), and the grading and marking criteria for different types of assessment.
- (d) Copies of the most recent external examiners reports for the programme

Information Provided Annually

Curriculum areas will provide the following information and material to the external examiner on an annual basis.

- (a) Information on changes to programmes and modules which have taken place since the external examiner last reviewed assessment for the programme.
- (b) Timely and accurate information about the arrangements for the examination board(s) which the external examiner is expected to attend, together with the due date for submission of the external examiner's annual report (normally four weeks after the meeting of the examination board).
- (c) Draft examination papers and other assessment tasks for the external examiner to comment on, and information on departmental guidance provided to students undertaking revision classes and other preparatory work for examinations as to the areas of a subject which may be examined.
- (d) Following the internal marking and moderation of assessed work, curriculum areas should make as much as possible of the assessed work for every module available to the appropriate external examiner. Ideally this would consist of material from all assessed assignments (exams and coursework), but it is recognised that in some cases this may be impractical; in such cases the material made available must cover enough assessed assignments such that between them they represent at least 50% of the assessment by weight for the module.

It is at the examiner's discretion which pieces of work are scrutinised, subject to the following minimum requirements:

- The examiner should scrutinise samples of work from assignments making up at least 50% of the module assessment by weight;
- A sample from a collection of n scripts should involve a minimum of five scripts or the square root of n scripts, whichever is the greater, covering a range of performances including at least one fail (if there are any).

Normally it would not be expected that an examiner would go significantly beyond these minimum requirements, as long as he/she is satisfied that the material scrutinised enables him/her to judge whether:

- the types of assessment are appropriate for the subject;

- the marking scheme/grading criteria have been properly and consistently applied;
- the assessment processes are carried out in accordance with the College's regulations and procedures, and;
- the standard of assessed work is comparable with other programmes of which the examiner has experience.

Curriculum areas should make their own arrangements as to the way in which the scripts are made available to the examiner.

The work made available to the examiner for a module should be accompanied by a commentary which informs the external examiner of the marks awarded for all items of assessment and the basis on which they are awarded, together with internal examiners' feedback and comments.

Following receipt of the external examiner's report to the College, the programme leader, through the HE Directorate, should send to the examiner a formal response to this report.

External Examiner Reports

Submission and Circulation of Reports

Reports are submitted annually by external examiners direct to the HE Directorate. Examiners are asked to submit these within four weeks of the final programme board of examiners. If a report is not submitted within the relevant time period, external examiners will be reminded by the HE Directorate to submit a report. Subsequent failure to do so will lead to the College considering terminating an external examiner appointment prematurely.

Content of Reports

Areas for comment

External examiners are expected to comment on the following areas in their report:

- (a) comparability of programme standards;
- (b) curriculum design and delivery;
- (c) assessment methods and procedures;
- (d) student achievement;
- (e) organisation and arrangements for external examiner involvement; (f) good practice and enhancement opportunities; (g) specific issues which require action.

The external examiner report form provides the specific questions which external examiners are expected to address. Of particular importance is the external examiner's judgement on the comparability of standards of the provision with UK national standards; where an external examiner is in his or her final year of the appointment, they are asked to review their experience of the programmes over the period of appointment and provide additional comment on:

- (a) evidence of the students' progression from year to year;
- (b) the progressive development and enhancement of the learning and teaching provision;
- (c) the standards achieved;
- (d) marking and assessment;
- (e) the appropriateness of the assessment procedure;
- (f) Student feedback

Confidential Reports

If an external examiner feels there are particular issues of a sensitive nature on which they wish to comment in confidence, they have the right to submit a confidential report to the Principal and Chief Executive. Such a report should be made in addition to the normal annual report. Reports submitted to the Principal and Chief Executive in confidence will be dealt with as appropriate.

Consideration of Reports by the Institution

External examiner reports are an important source of external comment on the quality and standards of the College's provision and on the potential for quality enhancement. The College gives consideration to the reports at a number of different levels within the institution.

Reports are reviewed in detail at curriculum area level and the programme leader is required to make a formal response to the report to the external examiner. The report and the department's response are considered as part of the Annual programme Review (APR).

Annual Programme Review (APR)

As part of the APR, programme leaders are asked to discuss any issues raised by external examiner(s) together with their formal response. The APR document should include an account of this discussion and the ways in which the programme team intends to respond, and any differences in views should be described. Specific actions should be included in the Quality Improvement Plan, which is an integral part of the APR document.

External examiner reports are separately analysed annually by the Academic Standards and Development Committee and a summary report on the cross-institutional issues and themes arising from this analysis is provided for institutional consideration.

Availability of Reports to Students

External examiner reports relate to quality management within the institution and are to be seen in this context. Reports are made available to students through the College's VLE. Curriculum areas must inform students how these reports will be made available. This forms part of the College's arrangements for students to participate, alongside staff, in evidence-based discussions on quality assurance and enhancement.

Appendix A.

To be effective, external examiners should:

1. Protect standards and ensure comparability and consistency
2. Act as an expert in providing independent critical review, performing the role with integrity and supporting enhancement
3. Ensure fairness and transparency in assessment
4. Maintain the currency of their knowledge
5. Support inclusivity and equity in teaching, learning and assessment

To promote an effective external examining system, institutions should:

6. Appoint the right examiners, ensuring that conflicts of interest are avoided
7. Provide adequate training to enable external examiners to fulfil the role
8. Ensure the role is fully understood
9. Enable students to understand the value and purpose of external examining
10. Engage with and support the external examiners they appoint
11. Engage with and support their own staff acting in the role elsewhere
12. Review their policies and practices against these principles on a regular basis