

## **Higher Education Academic Regulations: Part B**

**Section:** 5: External Examiners

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## REVISION HISTORY

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1.1	September 2016	Scott Smith	Amendment to titles and names
1.2	March 2019	Scott Smith	Removal of reference to specific Quality Code section
1.3	August 2021	Scott Smith	Clarification of the appointment process Additional information on the submission of reports when programme stages extend over an academic year. Correction of minor typographical errors
1.4	May 2023	Scott Smith	Annual update and inclusion of sections from Part A.

## APPROVAL

Ver	Committee	Date Approved
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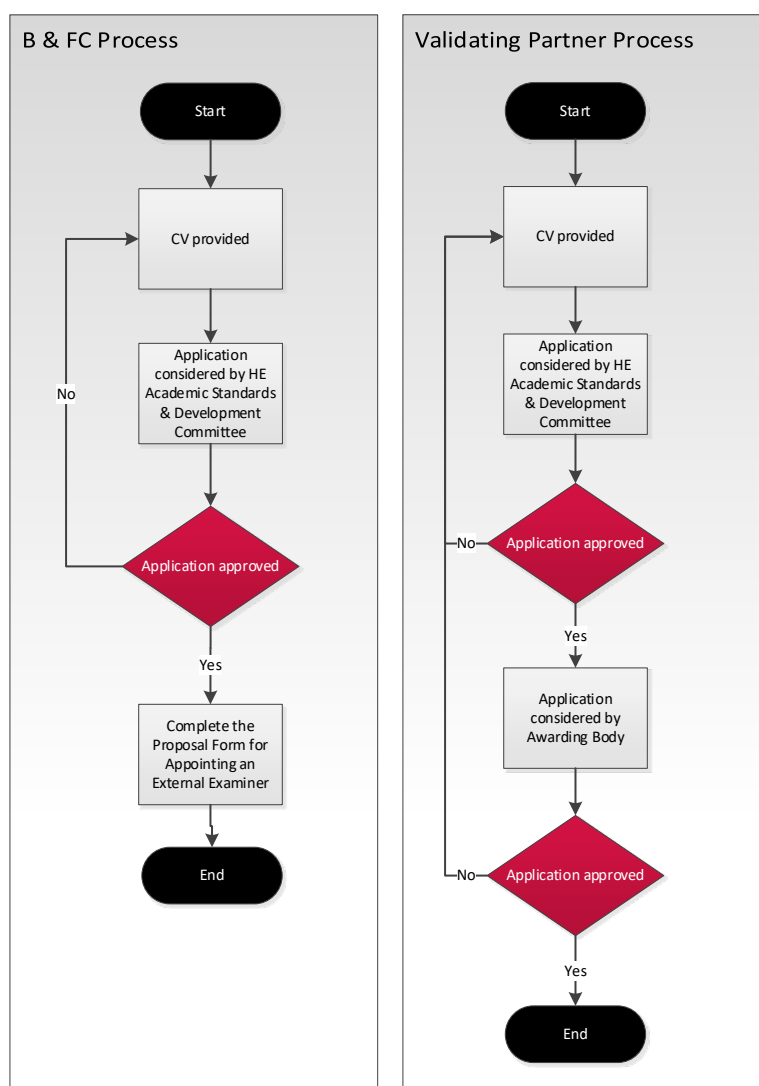
## B5.1 INTRODUCTION

Blackpool and The Fylde College programmes require at least one External Examiner(s) for each validated programme and as such, unless there is a specific and valid reason to justify an exception, no Blackpool and The Fylde College award shall be made without the scrutiny of an External Examiner. External Examiners are generally appointed to a programme in its entirety but may to a lesser extent be appointed to specific awards, streams and / or modules.

This document includes the various forms and operational practices which support the External Examiner role.

## B5.2 EXTERNAL EXAMINERS APPROVAL PROCESS

The distinctions between the Blackpool and The Fylde College's process and that of our validating partners in the approval of External Examiners are illustrated by the flowchart below.



### B5.2.1 APPOINTMENTS

All Blackpool and The Fylde College programmes require a minimum of one External Examiner and as such no Blackpool and The Fylde College award shall be made without the scrutiny of an External Examiner, unless considered under the exceptions below.

The Academic Standards and Development Committee is responsible for the appointment of external examiners and the oversight of external examiner engagement.

In exceptional circumstances where an examiner has failed to or has been unable to carry out their duties:

- a) The Academic Standards and Development Committee will seek to appoint a suitable temporary external examiner to the programme(s) affected. This may also include the appointment of an existing External Examiner for another Blackpool and The Fylde College programme to oversee the awards of another programme on a temporary basis (providing that the programme is within their area of expertise)
- b) If after every reasonable effort has been made to appoint an appropriate temporary External Examiner the Academic Standards and Development Committee may, by minuted resolution, permit affected awards to be made without external scrutiny.

### B5.2.2 CRITERIA FOR APPOINTMENT

New appointments should be considered in the context of any other External Examiners for the relevant programme. External Examiners do not necessarily operate in isolation and may act as a team with collective responsibility for ensuring the standard of the award.

It is a requirement of External Examiner's to demonstrate appropriate evidence concerning each of the following:

- knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality.
- competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof.
- relevant academic and / or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and / or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate.

- competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures.
- 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.
- familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed.
- 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).
- meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.
- awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula.
- competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

### B5.2.3 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

External Examiners must not be in the following categories or circumstances:

- A member of any governing body or committee of Blackpool and The Fylde College or any of its validating partners, or a current employee of Blackpool and The Fylde College or one of its validating partners.
- Anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with an academic colleague or student involved with the programme of study.
- Anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study.
- Anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to significantly influence the future of students on the programme of study.
- Anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with an academic colleague closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme(s) or modules in question.
- Former colleagues of Blackpool and The Fylde College unless a period of five years has elapsed.
- Former students of Blackpool and The Fylde College unless a period of five years has elapsed.
- All students taught by or with the External Examiner
- In a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution.
- The succession of an External Examiner by a colleague from the Examiner's home department and institution.

- The appointment of more than one External Examiner from the same department of the same institution.
- Any other category or circumstance that the Academic Standards and Development Committee deems prejudicial to the appointment of an External Examiner.

## B5.2.4 THE APPOINTMENT PROCEDURE

Where a new validation is under consideration, a proposal to appoint an External Examiner(s) may proceed in parallel with the process.

Potential External Examiners CVs and relevant documents are presented to the Academic Standards and Development Committee (ASDC) for consideration against the requirements set out in Appendix A. Once approved, it is the responsibility of the HE Directorate, to arrange for the completion of the Proposal Form, the proposal should be endorsed by the Head of the relevant Curriculum Area. The HE Directorate will maintain a register of External Examiners' appointments and periods of tenure.

### BRIEFING

Once a nomination has been approved by the Academic Standards and Development Committee, the HE Directorate will arrange for a letter of appointment to be sent to the External Examiner.

The letter of appointment and supporting documents will provide:

- A general outline of the responsibilities of all External Examiner's.
- Details of the modules, programmes and / or award(s) to which the External Examiner is appointed.
- Details of the roles, powers and responsibilities assigned to the External Examiners, including the extent of their authority in examination boards and their right to raise matters of serious concern with the Principal and Chief Executive of Blackpool and The Fylde College.
- Details of the notice period required should an examiner wish to resign.

Copies of appointment letters will be provided to the head of the relevant curriculum area for dissemination to staff.

In addition, External Examiners will be provided with a briefing and induction meeting which will provide the following:

- Blackpool and The Fylde College's external examining and assessment guidelines
- General information on Blackpool and The Fylde College and the curriculum area, including the relevant institutional and programme regulations for the awards to be examined.

- An overview of External Examiners' responsibilities within two-tier board process.
- The names of any other External Examiner in the team and the awards for which they will be responsible, together with the modules that each External Examiner will be solely responsible for.
- The award objectives (and, where relevant, those of individual modules), together with the curriculum and the means by which they will be assessed. Examiners should be provided with copies of definitive programme documents they are to examine.
- The learning, teaching and assessment strategies relevant to the programme to be examined.
- The arrangements made for examining any relevant flexible and / or distance provision.
- The calendar of events over the coming year, including the deadlines for submission of work to External Examiners and for its return, the dates of meeting of boards, the dates on which External Examiners are required at Blackpool and The Fylde College and the timescales for examiners' reports and responses.

### **B5.3 FUNCTION OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

The function of this procedure is to ensure that Blackpool and The Fylde College appoints appropriate External Examiners who can assure the wider community of the academic standard of Blackpool and The Fylde College's provision and awards.

External Examiners are generally appointed to a programme in its entirety but may to a lesser extent be appointed to specific awards, levels, pathways and/or modules.

Where the context permits, references to programmes within this section should be taken to apply equally to awards, pathways and modules i.e., the scope of an individual's appointment as External Examiner.

#### **B5.3.1 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

##### **General**

External Examiner's must be able to:

- Consider each student impartially based on the work submitted for assessment without being influenced by previous association with the award, the staff, or any of the students.
- Approve the form and content of proposed examination papers and / or coursework as specified in the programme validation documents.
- Approve forms of alternative assessment.



- Be consulted about and agree to any proposed changes to the structure of the assessment which will directly affect students currently on the award.
- Attend External Examiners' meetings, where appropriate, and have access to all assessed work, if so required.
- Advise Module and Programme Boards on appropriate action where marks for any module are significantly outside normal patterns.
- Agree principles for the selection of candidates for vivas (if any) and, as appropriate, to attend or conduct vivas or oral examinations.
- Participate, as required, in reviews of decisions about individual student's awards.
- Report to Blackpool and The Fylde College on the effectiveness of the assessments and any experiences to be drawn from them.
- Report to Blackpool and The Fylde College on any matters of concern and to support the programme team in the continuous enhancement of the curriculum and its delivery, organisation and management.
- Provide informative comment and recommendations upon:
  - Whether Blackpool and The Fylde College is maintaining the threshold academic standards for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements
  - Whether or not Blackpool and The Fylde College's assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the institution's policies and regulations
  - Whether or not Blackpool and The Fylde College's academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other higher education institutions of which the External Examiners have experience.
  - Good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment observed by the External Examiner(s)
  - Opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students.
  - The conduct of Module and Programme Boards.

### **Assessment-related**

External Examiner's will have access to:

- Draft examination papers and coursework assessment briefs as specified by the programme validation documents.
- A sample of assessments (and the marks awarded) representative of the cohort of students' work and the spread of classification in the module.

- On request and at an appropriate time, a meeting with a representative group of students from the programme(s) they are examining for any purpose related to the examiner's duties.
- On request and at an appropriate time, a viva voce examination of any individual student about whom the examiner has serious concerns.

**Note:** Blackpool and The Fylde College encourages external examiners to meet with student groups in the course of their duties, particularly where the content of a programme includes significant assessment activity that has substantial elements of the assessment of practical or project work, assessed presentations by the students and/or exhibitions.

From this an External Examiner should be able to:

- Comment on draft examination papers and / or coursework briefs and be satisfied that they are at the appropriate level (as detailed in B6 of the Blackpool and The Fylde College Academic Regulations (Assessment and Feedback)).
- Verify the standard of marking.
- Comment on the moderation of marks.

### **Ratification Of Outcomes**

External Examiners will be asked to confirm after each Programme Board of Examiners that they endorse the outcomes of the assessment processes that they have been appointed to scrutinise.

This endorsement may be by signing a confirmation document at the end of the Board, or by exchange of emails or written confirmation after the Board.

Any decisions taken by a Programme Board of Examiners in the absence of such an endorsement are subject to endorsement being received after the Board.

It is normally expected that Blackpool and The Fylde College will not make awards that the relevant External Examiner is unwilling to endorse. However, the final decision in such cases, and in cases where an examiner fails to provide either endorsement or reasons for non-endorsement, is reserved to the HE Academic Registrar.

Should an External Examiner be unwilling to endorse the outcomes of any Board, they must provide reasons for this decision in writing or by email and should recommend alternative outcome(s) that they would be willing to endorse.

Where an External Examiner is unable to endorse the outcomes of a Programme Board of Examiners the matter must be brought to the attention of the HE Academic Registrar through the minutes of the relevant Board of Examiners and as detailed above, the HE Academic Registrar may decide to ratify the Board's decision without

the agreement of the External Examiner. In any case, the HE Academic Registrar will lead an investigation into the recommendations made by the External Examiner to determine the appropriate course of action.

Only the HE Academic Registrar may notify students of any outcome where an External Examiner has not endorsed awards.

#### **B5.4 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.
- External Examiners should normally not hold any more than two external examiner appointments for programmes/modules at any one time, whether at Blackpool and The Fylde College or at other institutions.
- An External Examiner who wishes to resign before the expiry of their normal period of office is required to write formally to the Academic Standards and Development Committee, giving notice as set out in their letter of appointment.
- The Academic Standards and Development Committee may terminate an External Examiner's appointment before the expiry of their normal period of office on the grounds of failure by the External Examiner to fulfil their obligations or if a conflict of interest arises which cannot be satisfactorily resolved.

#### **B5.5 SERIOUS CONCERNS**

External Examiners are informed, in writing at the beginning of their term of office, that they have a right to raise any matter of serious concern with the Principal and Chief Executive, if necessary, by means of a separate confidential written report. Blackpool and The Fylde College will provide a considered and timely response to any confidential report received, outlining any actions they will be taking as a result.

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 head of the institution, they may invoke QAA's concerns scheme or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.

Where an External Examiner expresses serious concerns about a programme before the Programme Board of Examiners has conferred awards to students on that programme, the Principal and Chief Executive shall have the discretion to delay the conferment of awards until after the concerns have been investigated and to require

that the Board considers the outcomes of that investigation and any resulting actions prior to conferring awards.

The HE Academic Registrar shall ensure that academic colleagues and/or students are informed in a timely manner wherever they are affected by the implications of serious concerns, or the actions arising from them.

#### **A5.6 EXTERNAL ADVISOR – CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

Blackpool and The Fylde College Academic Regulations requires that a suitably qualified external advisor is identified to support the development of Blackpool and The Fylde College curricula.

The Academic Standards and Development Committee will approve appointment processes and terms of reference for external advisors.

#### **B5.7 INEXPERIENCED EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

Where an External Examiner has no previous experience in that role they will normally either be appointed to a team of examiners or be provided with an experienced External Examiner as a mentor.

Blackpool and The Fylde College will provide appropriate training for inexperienced External Examiners and, on request, for experienced examiners who wish to refresh their practice and / or gain a better understanding of Blackpool and The Fylde College processes and regulations.

#### **B5.8 CHANGES TO THE APPOINTMENT OF AN EXTERNAL EXAMINER**

Where a Curriculum Area wishes to extend the tenure of an External Examiner (within the limits set out above) or reallocate duties amongst an approved team, the relevant Curriculum Area must first obtain the approval of the ASDC for the proposed changes.

Curriculum Areas should note that the External Examiner's agreement to such a proposal must be obtained prior to a request being made to the ASDC.

#### **B5.9 EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORTS**

Each External Examiner will, usually, be required to produce an annual report to Blackpool and The Fylde College at a time determined by the ASDC. The only exception to this 'annual' mechanism would be to align with the delivery of a programme that may encompass a mid-stage period away from study, for example, Maritime students, in most circumstances, undertake a period of sea time during their studies that will extend the length of a stage / level of study. In such cases reports

may be required at the end of a stage rather than annually. The report must provide clear and informative feedback to the institution on those areas defined for the role.

In addition, reports must:

- Confirm that sufficient evidence was received to enable the role to be fulfilled (where evidence was deemed insufficient, full details are provided)
- State whether issues raised in the previous report(s) have been addressed to their satisfaction
- Address any issues as specifically required by any relevant professional body
- Provide an overview of their term of office (when concluded)
- Distinguish clearly, where necessary, between distinct cohorts of students, particularly where a programme is delivered in multiple modes and / or at more than one location or institution
- Avoid naming individual students or members of staff within the report.

## **B5.10 PUBLICATION TO STUDENTS**

External Examiners' reports will be made available in full to current students of Blackpool and The Fylde College, with the sole exception of any confidential report made directly to the Principal and Chief Executive.

The versions of reports provided to students may be amended where the External Examiner has contravened the requirement not to identify individual members of staff or students or in very exceptional cases where the External Examiner has included content that may bring into disrepute Blackpool and The Fylde College.

Reports will be disclosed to students as confidential quality documents that may be freely discussed with staff and with other students on the programme(s) to which they relate but are not to be disclosed more widely.

## **B5.11 CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS**

Each External Examiner report will be considered by the programme team(s) for the programme(s) covered by the report. Programme leaders are required to provide examiners with timely feedback on actions taken as a result of reports, or the reasons for not taking action. Any instance in which a programme team decides not to act on a recommendation made by an External Examiner must be explained fully in a response to the External Examiner and within the Annual Programme Review for that programme.

HE Academic Board will carry out an annual review of the general issues and themes arising from External Examiners' reports and will consider all cases where a recommendation of an External Examiner has not been acted upon. Student representatives will be fully involved in this process and will be provided with further

information to enable them to understand all the issues raised and Blackpool and The Fylde College's response.

To monitor all actions identified by External Examiner's reports Quality and Standards work with the HE Directorate to ensure all actions are appropriately addressed.

#### **B5.12 CRITERIA FOR TEAMS OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

If a programme has a team of examiners, one of the team will be asked to act as 'Lead External Examiner'. The Lead External Examiner does not need to be a subject expert in all areas for which the team is responsible. Appointments to a team should normally be staggered to ensure continuity.

Where a team of examiners is appointed to a programme or group of programmes, it is not necessary that each examiner individually meets all of the criteria in the person specification for a sole External Examiner providing that the team as a whole is able to do so.

#### **B5.13 RECOGNITION OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS WORK**

Blackpool and The Fylde College recognises the importance, and mutual benefit, of the work undertaken by members of its own colleagues as External Examiner's for other institutions and agree with colleagues the time they need to fulfil these duties.

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## APPENDIX B5 – A – EXTERNAL EXAMINER PERSON SPECIFICATION

It is a requirement of External Examiner's to demonstrate appropriate evidence concerning each of the following:

- knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality.
- competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof.
- relevant academic and / or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and / or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate.
- competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures.
- 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.
- familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed.
- 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).
- meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.
- awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula.
- competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.