**Summary**

The Policy and its related forms are reviewed annually to ensure that the external examiner process remains effective and aligned with current external requirements.

**Scope - This document applies to:**

External examiners, heads of schools for compliance/guidance.

| Student year of entry | n/a | Current students | n/a |

**Document Control**

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<td>Georgia Terry, Quality Assurance Officer</td>
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**Superseded documents**

External Examiner Policy for Taught Programmes 2017-18

**Related documents**


**Keywords**

External examiners, nomination of, appointment of, examiner report
Policy for External Examining of Taught Programmes
at the University of Bristol

This Policy summarises the University's expectations for the conduct of external examining of taught programmes. This Policy can be found on the Academic Quality and Policy Office (AQPO) website: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/exexs/.

External examining provides a crucial means for maintaining academic standards and is an integral part of the University's Quality Framework. This policy is consistent with Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) current guidelines, in particular with Chapter B7: External Examining (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Pages/Quality-Code-Chapter-B7.aspx#.VSaDFvnF-UY).

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes: Rules for Assessment, Progression and Award of a Qualification, which can be found at: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/codeonline.html.

The University has its own internal quality assurance procedures for the processing and consideration of assessment marks, and attaches great importance to peer review from colleagues in other academic institutions, professional bodies and industry.

The duties and responsibilities of individual external examiners will be based on their role to act as independent and impartial advisors providing informed comment on academic standards set, (including those associated with Professional and Statutory Bodies where appropriate) and student achievement in response to those standards.

The purposes of the external examiner system are to help ensure that:

- the University is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements, and that the standards of student performance are properly judged against this;
- the assessment process measures student achievement against the intended learning outcomes, and is rigorous, fairly operated, and in line with University policies and regulations;
- that the assessment process is fair and is fairly operated in the marking, grading and classification of student performance, and that decisions are made in accordance with University regulations;
- the University is able to compare the standard of awards with those in other higher education institutions;
- programmes and units are well structured and balanced with appropriate content;
- good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment is identified and shared.

This Policy contains information on the following:

1. Appointment
2. Induction and support
3. Duties of the external examiner
4. Boards of Examiners
5. External Examiners Procedures
6. Data protection and commercial confidentiality
7. Fees and expenses
8. Discontinuation of appointment

Annex A External Examiners’ Report Form for Taught Programmes
Annex B Response to External Examiner’s Report Form
Annex C External Examiner Nomination Form
Annex D External Examiner Re-Appointment Form
Annex E Sampling of Assessed Student Work

Note: Use of the word school in this document may also relate to departments or centres.
1. Appointment

The responsibility for external examiner appointments

1.1. Senate regulates University examinations and recommends external examiners for appointment by Council. In practice, Senate delegates responsibility for approving appointments of external examiners to the appropriate Faculty Board.

1.2. It is normally the responsibility of Heads of Schools to monitor all appointments and to ensure adherence to the appointment procedures for external examiners. Heads of School or their nominees, after consultation with colleagues, will use their academic judgement in undertaking this responsibility.

The requirement for external examiners

1.3. External examiners provide impartial and independent advice on academic standards and on student achievement. At least one external examiner must be appointed for each subject or group of subjects forming part of a programme leading to an award of the University.

Criteria for the appointment of an external examiner (person specification)

1.4. An external examiner should meet the following criteria:

1.4.1. Knowledge and understanding of UK academic standards and of the assurance and enhancement of quality;

1.4.2. Relevant academic qualifications, or where appropriate professional qualifications and/or extensive practitioner experience;

1.4.3. Breadth of knowledge and standing within the subject to demonstrate credibility to peers;

1.4.4. Competence and experience in the areas covered by the programme (or parts thereof) and of assessment methods appropriate to the subject;

1.4.5. Competence and experience of the standards expected of students to achieve the award and of the enhancement of the student learning experience;

1.4.6. Awareness of current developments in curricula design and delivery;

1.4.7. Fluency in English, and for programmes that are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s); and

1.4.8. Where appropriate, any additional criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

1.5. Individuals who have retired may be appointed but they should provide sufficient evidence of continuing involvement in the academic area in question, and with current developments in higher education learning, teaching and assessment.

1.6. The school must check that the incoming external examiner should not hold an unreasonable number of other external examiner appointments. It is recommended that there should not be more than two appointments at any one time.

Avoiding reciprocal and long-standing arrangements

1.7. It is important for schools to ensure that they do not put in place reciprocal arrangements between cognate programmes with another institution. Schools must refer to the list detailing where their own staff act as external examiners, to avoid this occurring.
1.8. The Head of School is responsible for ensuring an accurate record is kept of the institutions where school members of staff are currently acting as external examiners. This list should be available upon request.

1.9. Where there is more than one external examiner covering a programme/s, the incoming external examiner should not be from the same department in the same institution as any other external examiner covering the programme/s.

1.10. The incoming external examiner should not be from the same department in the same institution as the outgoing external examiner.

Conflicts of interest

1.11. The nominated external examiner and members of the school involved in the nomination should declare, using the Nomination Form, any conflicts of interests that should be given due consideration before the nominated external examiner can be formally appointed; these include:

   1.11.1. Significant involvement 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

   1.11.2. Having a near relative as student or member of staff in the school

   1.11.3. Personal association with sponsorship of students in the school

   1.11.4. Involvement in assessing colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme

   1.11.5. Holding a position which may have significant influence on the future of students on the programme

   1.11.6. Membership of the University of Bristol Court or Council

   1.11.7. Employment with one of the University’s collaborative partners

1.12. The incoming external examiner should not have been an external examiner for a taught programme at the University of Bristol for at least five years.

1.13. Former staff (including those with honorary appointments) and students of the University of Bristol can only be appointed as external examiners after a lapse of at least five years.

Exceptions and special cases

1.14. Where there is a legitimate reason for making an appointment that does not fulfil all of the criteria (Section 1.4), the details should be set out in the Nomination Form and approved by the Faculty Board. This consideration may be assisted where there are other external examiners on a programme, so that the proposed appointee’s expertise is complemented by that of others. Where a proposed appointee does not fully fit the criteria, appropriate induction and support should be provided.

1.15. There may be exceptions when addressing nominations for external examiners in small and specialist subjects where the pool of potential external examiners is limited. This should be set out in the Nomination Form and approved by the Faculty Board.

1.16. The Faculty Board must give close consideration to any proposed exceptions and special cases before giving approval to the nomination. The University Academic Quality and Standards Committee maintains an overview at University level of all cases where approval of exceptions and special cases have been given.
Duration

1.17. The normal period of appointment of external examiners for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes is four years (for the MBChB, BDS and BVSc it is five years). This does not preclude schools appointing external examiners for a shorter period of time if that is desirable for both parties.

1.18. The appointment may be exceptionally extended for a further one year period to ensure continuity, for example when a programme is coming to an end, with the permission of the Dean of the relevant faculty. This should be done using a Re-Appointment Form in Annex D and found at http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/exexs/.

1.19. If an existing external examiner starts to examine another programme during his or her appointment, which must have faculty approval, the end date of the contract for both programmes will be after the initial four (or five) years. See also Section 5.8.

Ensuring appropriate coverage

1.20. The Head of School must ensure that a sufficient number of external examiners are appointed so that adequate expertise is available to cover all the major areas of the programme(s) being examined including the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

1.21. The Head of School must ensure an appropriate match between the numbers of external examiners and the quantity of material being examined.

1.22. Where there are multiple external examiners who moderate different parts of the programme, it may be advisable to appoint a senior external examiner whose role is to assure the quality of the assessment and academic standards across the whole programme.

1.23. Where there are specialist units requiring particular expertise, the school may appoint external examiners to act as external assessors. External assessors can carry out much of the work of an external examiner but covering only one unit or a limited set of units. The school must also have appointed an external examiner/s who is able to take more of an oversight of the whole programme. External assessors are not required to attend Boards of Examiners.

2. Induction and support

2.1. The school has a primary responsibility for ensuring that external examiners receive appropriate induction and support. The external examiners must be provided with opportunities to familiarise themselves with the University, its assessment procedures, school policy on moderation as well as with the extent and nature of their appointment as external examiners. External examiners will receive appropriate information as part of the appointment process (see Section 5.6 and 5.7 below).

2.2. Where the external examiner has not acted in this role before for any institution, the school should ensure that the external examiner is provided with the appropriate support to carry out the role. Support might involve assigning a more experienced external examiner as mentor, or using a team of externals, if practicable. Where it is not possible to have more than one examiner acting at any one time, due to the size and nature of the programme/unit, the school might consider supporting the new appointment through training and mentoring by an experienced examiner in a different field.
2.3. Where more than one examiner is appointed to a programme or unit, the school is encouraged to phase new appointments to enable mentoring of new examiners. Where only one examiner is appointed or the phasing of new appointments has not been possible, a handover or shadowing of the outgoing examiner is encouraged.

2.4. An external examiner will normally be an academic from another UK higher education institution; but there are cases where someone from a professional, statutory or regulatory body or from industry is more appropriate. In these cases, the school will need to provide additional appropriate support to enable these examiners to carry out the role.

2.5. Schools must provide external examiners with sufficient evidence to undertake the role effectively. Information, including samples of assessed work, samples of rubrics, must be sent to the external examiner within a reasonable timeframe in relation to projected workload and turnaround time expected. It must be sufficient so that they are able to engage in the process in an appropriate way. Schools must ensure that external examiners are aware of all relevant processes, including in relation to moderation.

3. Duties of the External Examiner

Quality Assurance role

3.1. External examiners should ensure the programmes/units are coherent, that they satisfy the University’s credit framework\(^1\) and the outcomes are aligned with the relevant qualification descriptor set out in the applicable qualification framework\(^2\), with reference to subject benchmark statements where applicable.

3.2. External examiners should quality assure the decisions in relation to the University’s policy and procedures, ensuring that the types of assessment are appropriate for the subject, the students, the respective level of study and the expected outcomes, and suggest appropriate amendments where necessary.

3.3. External examiners should assure themselves that University procedures and regulations have been applied fairly and equitably.

3.4. External examiners should review and approve draft assessment and ensure that assessment criteria, marking schemes and arrangements for classification are set at an appropriate level. Approval of draft assessments and feedback should normally be given within an agreed timeframe for consideration prior to the assessment.

3.5. Where applicable, external examiners should ensure that any additional professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements are reflected and satisfied by the programme.

3.6. External examiners will be provided with sufficient evidence to enable them to discharge their responsibilities.

External examiner feedback

3.7. External examiners are asked to comment and provide advice on matters of curriculum content, balance and structure, in so far as these affect the programme academic structure.

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\(^1\) The University’s credit framework is outlined in the Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes

\(^2\) The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and subject benchmark statements are available on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk
3.8. Schools should ensure that external examiners are made aware of the outcomes of their comments and advice.

Oral assessments

3.9. External examiners can find guidelines for conducting oral assessments in the Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes Rules for Assessment. These guidelines specify that two examiners should be present during oral examinations; the external examiner could be one of these.

Reviewing assessed work

3.10. The School should make available to the external examiner samples of assessed work to review at the earliest possible time to enable them to assure the institution is maintaining academic standards. Guidance for schools on how to select an appropriate sample of assessed student work can be found in Annex E. Schools are required to ensure that student anonymity as set out in the Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes is extended to any assessed work considered by the external examiner.

3.11. Schools/Boards of Examiners should establish guidelines concerning the range of assessed student work that external examiners should sample as part of the quality assurance process and which should be brought specifically to the attention of the external examiners and, where appropriate, any additional evidence relating to the award of marks for that assessed work.

3.12. The external examiner has the right to request to see all assessments that contribute to the degree result.

3.13. The external examiner may be asked to adjudicate where there are disagreements between the internal examiners, although internal examiners should try to agree marks where possible and only send irreconcilable conflicts to the external examiner.

Detection of improper practice

3.14. If an internal or external examiner considers that a candidate has engaged in an improper assessment practice or other academic misconduct, the examiner should, as soon as possible, report the circumstances to the Chair of the appropriate Board of Examiners, who should follow the appropriate rules and regulations pertaining at that time.

Initial reflections at the Board of Examiners

3.15. External examiners are asked to provide initial reflections at designated meetings of the school, department or programme Board of Examiners (as set out in Sections 3.16 and 3.17 below). The reflections will be made either verbally or in written form (such as an email or short note) if the external examiner is not at the meeting. This is an opportunity for the external examiner, acting as a critical friend, to highlight key strengths and weaknesses, including any initial recommendations for action. Comments should cover, as considered necessary by the external examiner: academic standards, curriculum design and delivery, assessment, and any other relevant area. External examiner comments will be formally recorded in the minutes of the Board of Examiners along with the initial response from staff. Any concerns or recommendations will be actively considered by the school before the start of the next academic year.

3.16. For undergraduate programmes, external examiners should provide initial reflections at the final Board of Examiners.
3.17. For postgraduate taught programmes, external examiners should provide initial reflections on the taught component at the Board of Examiners where progression is approved, and on the dissertation stage and programme overall at the final Board of Examiners. Where postgraduate taught programmes do not have a dissertation stage, external examiners only need to provide reflections at the final Board of Examiners.

*External Examiner Reports*

3.18. The external examiner must submit an annual Report, providing commentary and recommendations as appropriate on the conduct of the assessment processes, academic standards, assessment, and the curriculum design and delivery. Additionally, the external examiner is asked to highlight and comment on examples of good practice, innovation and enhancement opportunities provided to students. The report will include and expand on the initial reflections that were presented to the Board of Examiners (see Sections 3.15 – 3.17) as well as raising any further points.

3.19. External examiners should satisfy themselves that the school has given due consideration to any recommendations given in the previous year’s Report, with any actions or rationale for the status quo noted. The school will respond formally through the Response Form process (see Section 5.23). If a University level response is required on policy or regulation, the school will refer the recommendations from the examiner’s report to the Academic Quality and Policy Office to provide a response.

3.20. When the external examiner is submitting a Report for the final year of his/her period of appointment it is the opportunity for the examiner to write an overview of his/her experience at the University of Bristol. It should, therefore, include comment of the University's academic standards in the relevant subject and in particular any significant changes in standards over the appointment period.


3.22. The completed External Examiner Report must not name or otherwise identify staff or students on the programme or unit as the Report will be made available to students on the University’s Blackboard site (see Section 3.25 below).

3.23. The procedures for the submission of the Report are in Sections 5.9 to 5.11 below.

*Disclosure of External Examiner Reports*

3.24. External Examiner Reports will be made available by the University to various internal committees and groups and appropriate statutory and professional bodies. The Report can also be made available to members of the public under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act. By signing the External Examiner Acceptance Form, the external examiner gives consent to such disclosure as the University considers appropriate. The External Examiner Report also includes a statement and declaration to allow disclosure.

3.25. The Report (and the Response Form) will also be made available to students via the relevant virtual learning environment. These will normally be uploaded within four weeks of the maximum deadline for the school Responses.

3.26. Students are made aware of the identity and current position of external examiners appointed to their units, programmes and awards. Students are advised not to contact external examiners directly, and if an external examiner receives any direct contact from a student they should refer the matter to the Academic Quality and Policy Office.
Raising serious concerns

3.27. Should external examiners encounter particular problems during their term of office, which they are unable to resolve with the appropriate academic staff, they may draw these to the attention of the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for academic quality and standards by submitting a special report to him/her at any time. The report should be addressed to the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor with the responsibility for academic quality and standards and sent to the Academic Quality and Policy Office at First Floor, 31 Great George Street, Bristol, BS1 5QD.

3.28. The Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor will notify the University Academic Standards and Quality Committee that a special report has been received and will begin an investigation into the points raised. The University shall provide a timely response to the report received, which will describe the actions taken to address the concerns. The Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor will provide an update to the University Academic Quality Standards Committee once the investigation has taken place and any actions to resolve the issues have been agreed.

3.29. In the event that an external examiner has a serious concern relating to failings with academic standards and internal procedures and feels the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor has not sufficiently addressed the concerns, the matter can be raised externally through the Office for Students (https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/)

4. Boards of Examiners

See also the Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes (http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/codeonline.html) for information about the conduct of Examination Boards.

4.1. External examiners are required to be notified of, and have the right to attend, the meetings of the Board of Examiners for all programmes which lead to a University award, and to which they have been appointed as external examiner. The external examiner should attend at least one meeting of the Board each academic year, as specified by the school. The external examiner should receive the minutes for meetings to which he or she does not attend.

4.2. External examiners should be informed of their role and the extent of their authority in terms of the Board of Examiners. All of those involved in the Board should be clear on the role of the external examiner.

4.3. Schools should ensure they give as much notice as possible to external examiners of the dates of Board of Examiners and other occasions on which they may be present. In the event that an external examiner cannot attend a specified meeting, the school should be informed as soon as possible in order to agree an alternative process:

4.3.1. Telephone conference or another means of incorporating the external examiner’s views, and with the external examiner receiving relevant paperwork; or

4.3.2. An alternative and appropriate external examiner attends instead.

4.4. Where neither of these options are possible, the school should consult the relevant Faculty Education Director to consider appropriate actions.

4.5. The external examiner should endorse the recommendations for award classification by signing the completed student degree classification list. It is the school’s responsibility to ensure that the external examiner(s) sign the completed student degree classification list. The template of this document is provided by the Examinations Office.

4.6. External examiners must provide initial reflections at particular meetings of the Board of Examiners
(see Sections 3.15 – 3.17), and these reflections must be recorded formally in the minutes along with the initial response from staff. Any concerns or recommendations must be actively considered by staff before the start of the next academic year.
5. **External Examiner Procedures**

*Appointment procedures*

5.1. The Faculty Board approves the appointment of External Examiners.

5.2. The school must complete an External Examiner Nomination Form (Annex C, referred to here as the ‘Nomination Form’), available at [http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/exexs/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/exexs/). This Policy and the Nomination Form provide guidance on the factors to consider when making the nomination.

5.3. The school must ensure the Nomination Form is signed. It must be signed by the nominated external examiner, the Head of School (or nominee) and the Faculty Dean (or nominee) and submitted to the Faculty Board. Unsigned forms will result in an incomplete nomination.

5.4. Once approved, the completed Nomination Form must be sent electronically to the Academic Quality and Policy Office at Exex-Admin@bristol.ac.uk mailbox, who are responsible for sending out appointment letters and appointment packs to the External Examiner. The school will also be copied in to the appointment letter for information.

5.5. The Academic Quality and Policy Office maintains a list of the University's external examiners, including an archive of nominations and appointments.

*Information sent to the external examiner*

5.6. When an external examiner is appointed, the Academic Quality and Policy Office will send him/her:

5.6.1. a letter of appointment (including information on fees);

5.6.2. a link to the electronic template of the External Examiner Report form;

5.6.3. the name of the school contact person, nominated by the Head of School;

5.6.4. a link of the Policy for External Examining of Taught Programmes;

5.6.5. a link of the University’s Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes Rules for Assessment, Progression and the Award of a Qualification;

5.6.6. information about where to find University strategies, policies and procedures and the framework for UK higher education including subject benchmark statements.

5.7. The relevant school will send him/her, as and when appropriate and within an agreed timeframe of not less than one week prior

5.7.1. details of the programme(s) and units on which the students are being assessed (including content, structure, learning outcomes & assessment methods, for instance through the student handbook);

5.7.2. draft examinations papers and assessments and the proposed marking scheme(s), including, if appropriate, model answers and marking criteria;

5.7.3. the relevant faculty and/or school assessment guidelines;

5.7.4. any further information relevant to the discipline, e.g. fitness to practice guidelines;

5.7.5. the fee/expense claim form and details of how to claim.

5.8. If there is faculty approval for an existing external examiner to cover another programme during his or her appointment (see Section 1.19), the Academic Quality and Policy Office will issue a new appointment letter confirming the extended coverage of the new programme.

*External Examiner Reports*
5.9. As set out in Section 3.18, all external examiners must submit an annual External Examiner Report Form (in Annex A). These Reports provide essential independent feedback and any recommendations are considered carefully by the University. External examiners who have only been involved for a partial part of the process, such as participation in a Board of Examiners as a replacement (as set out in Section 4.3.2), should also complete a Report or provide appropriate feedback on their participation by another written means. A suitable fee should also be paid for any participation in the external examiner process.

5.10. The Academic Quality and Policy Office will contact all external examiners annually by email and send them a copy of the External Examiner Report Form, found at http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/exexs/.

5.11. Reports must be submitted electronically in Microsoft Word format to exex-admin@bristol.ac.uk.

Reporting deadlines

5.12. It is recommended that the External Examiner Report is sent to the Academic Quality and Policy Office within four weeks of the final meeting of the Board of Examiners, and it must be sent by the following maximum deadlines:

5.12.1. 1 August (undergraduate programmes);
5.12.2. 20 December (postgraduate taught programmes).

5.13. Postgraduate taught programmes that have a non-standard structure, where the 20 December deadline is unsuitable, may apply to the Academic Quality and Policy Office for a separate maximum deadline.

5.14. If the school is subject to external scrutiny (for example for professional accreditation) which requires the External Examiner Report to be submitted earlier than the normal deadline, the school must ensure that the external examiner is made aware of this earlier deadline.

Receipt and circulation of Reports

5.15. The Academic Quality and Policy Office logs receipt of the Reports and maintains a full record of Reports received as part University’s Quality Framework. External examiners receive an email acknowledgement on receipt of their Report.

5.16. The Academic Quality and Policy Office will be responsible for forwarding Reports to:

5.16.1. Head(s) of School
5.16.2. Director of Teaching and Learning OR Head of Education OR Programme Director(s)
5.16.3. School Administrator(s)

5.17. It is the responsibility of the school to ensure that the External Examiner Report is circulated to all relevant staff including any unit and/or element leads.

5.18. The Academic Quality and Policy Office manages the upload of External Examiner Reports to the University’s Blackboard site. Any part of a Report where an individual has been identified or in very exceptional cases where text has been included that could bring the University into disrepute will be redacted from the Blackboard version. The Response Form from the school will also be uploaded by the Academic Quality and Policy Office to demonstrate that any relevant action has been taken. Any text where an individual is identifiable in the response will be redacted.

5.19. Any response that requires a University level response on policy or regulation will be referred to the Academic Quality and Policy Office to respond.
**Overdue External Examiner Reports**

5.20. The Academic Quality and Policy Office must receive the External Examiner Report by the relevant maximum deadline.

5.21. If the Report is not received by the deadline, the Academic Quality and Policy Office will write to the external examiner requesting receipt of the Report. It is a requirement for the external examiner to return the Report, and these Reports form a significant part of the University’s Quality Framework. In addition, the fees of the external examiner should not be paid until the requirement to submit a satisfactorily completed Report has been met.

5.22. The school must continue to remind the external examiner regularly until the Report has been received. The Academic Quality and Policy Office will work with the school to assist in this process.

5.23. If the Report is not returned in a timely manner, the external examiner’s appointment will be automatically terminated five weeks after the maximum deadline has passed unless there is a valid reason for the delay. The Academic Quality and Policy Office will notify the external examiner of the termination of the appointment. The Head of School, the relevant Faculty Education Director and the Dean will be informed (see also Section 8).

**Receipt and circulation of Response Forms**

5.24. When the External Examiner Report is forwarded to the Head of School, a copy of the Form for the School Response to an External Examiner’s Report will be included (the Response Form is also available at [http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/exexs/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/exexs/)). Using the Response Form, the school must provide a short overall response to the external examiner, followed by detailed individual responses to all recommendations and to any previous recommendations that the external examiner considers to be unresolved. An update on the consideration given to the initial reflections from the external examiner presented at the Board of Examiners (see Sections 3.15 – 3.17) must be included in the response. The formal response to the external examiner is an important part of the feedback process, and must be completed and sent to the external examiner in a timely manner.

5.25. The Response Form must be sent to the external examiner and copied to the Academic Quality and Policy Office by email to exex-admin@bristol.ac.uk. The Academic Quality and Policy Office will log receipt of the Response Form and will retain a copy of the form for use as part of the University's Quality Framework. The Response Form (and the External Examiner Report) will also be made available to students via the University’s Blackboard site.

5.26. It is recommended that the Response Form is sent to the external examiner and to the Academic Quality and Policy Office within **four weeks** of receipt of the Report, and it must be sent by the following maximum deadlines:

5.26.1. **15 September** for undergraduate programmes;

5.26.2. **31 January** for taught postgraduate taught programmes.

5.27. Postgraduate taught programmes that have a non-standard structure and have agreed a separate deadline for reports with the Academic Quality and Policy Office (see Section 5.13) will also have a separate maximum deadline for the response.

5.28. Reports that are received late (see Report deadlines in Section 5.12) may receive a delayed response.

5.29. Once the school has completed and returned the Response Form to the external examiner the school should check with the external examiner that s/he is satisfied with that response. The school
may make an initial response to the external examiner on the Response Form and then provide an update at a later date on any actions undertaken.

5.30. Schools must confirm to the Faculty Board that a response has been made to all External Examiner Reports. The Faculty Board must ensure that timely responses have been made and that responses contain appropriate and timely actions. The University Academic Quality and Standards Committee maintains oversight at University level and receives regular reports on the external examiner process.

**Overdue Response Forms**

5.31. If the Academic Quality and Policy Office does not receive the Response Form by the appropriate maximum deadline, the Head of School will be contacted with a request for the Form to be submitted within one week and, if necessary, the matter will be referred to the relevant Faculty Education Director, who should notify the Dean. If a response is still not made to the external examiner, the matter will be further escalated to the relevant Academic Director, who may involve the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education and Students).

**Uploads to Blackboard and oversight by the Academic Quality and Policy Office**

5.32. The External Examiner Report and the Response Form will be uploaded to the relevant virtual learning environment at the same time so that a complete set of information is shared with students. This is normally uploaded four weeks after receipt of the Response.

5.33. Before uploading the Report and Form, the Academic Quality and Policy Office will verify that the points raised by external examiners are addressed appropriately in the response. Any possible discrepancies will be brought to the attention of the Head of School in the first instance. If the possible discrepancies are not clarified / addressed and notified to the Academic Quality and Policy Office within one week, the matter will be referred to the relevant Faculty Education Director, who should notify the Dean. If the matter is not resolved, it will be further escalated to the relevant Academic Director, who may involve the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education and Students). If a University level recommendation has been referred to the Academic Quality and Policy Office, they will coordinate a response.

**Annual summary report**

5.34. The Academic Quality and Policy Office will prepare an annual summary report highlighting themes arising from the University's External Examiner Reports. This summary report will be reviewed by the University Academic Quality and Standards Committee to highlight good practice examples and to take forward any actions at University level. The annual summary report is regarded as confidential but will be made available to various internal committees and groups, and to appropriate statutory and professional bodies.

**6. Data protection and commercial confidentiality**

6.1. Schools and external examiners should be fully aware of information security when exchanging draft exam papers and other draft forms of assessment, see [www.bris.ac.uk/infosec/](http://www.bris.ac.uk/infosec/).

6.2. All personal data supplied by the external examiner for the purpose of his or her appointment and subsequently his or her engagement as an external examiner will be held securely and for no longer than necessary.
6.3. The University will use this data for communication about and payment of fees and expenses and for any other necessary communications. This data may be shared, if necessary, with schools of the University. The University will not disclose external examiners’ contact details or any other personal details to third parties (i.e. outside the University) without the consent of external examiners.

6.4. External examiners should ensure that Reports do not name or otherwise identify individual students on the programme or unit.

6.5. It is the responsibility of the Head of School to ensure that any potential intellectual property issues that may require commercial confidentiality agreements (i.e. industrial placements) be resolved in consultation with the Faculty Office and Secretary’s Office prior to the appointment being made.

7. Fees and Expenses

7.1. Payment of external examiners’ fees and expenses is the responsibility of the school (or the faculty in some cases). There are University-level guidelines on setting fee levels, but the relevant school has the discretion to determine the appropriate fee payable for each external examiner. The level of fee paid to an external examiner should be taken into account if a school is considering whether to ask him/her to take on additional tasks.

7.2. External examiners will be provided with a fee/expense claim form once the report is submitted, which should be completed and returned to the school. Any queries related to fees or expenses will be addressed by the school.

8. Discontinuation of appointment

8.1. The appointment of an external examiner may be discontinued by the University or the individual examiner before the completion of his/her period of appointment.

8.2. If an external examiner wishes to resign from his or her appointment, this would normally be after the External Examiner Report has been satisfactorily completed at the end of the annual cycle, where there is a natural break in activity. In these cases, the external examiner must inform the Head of School in writing before the end of the academic year (31 July).

8.3. If the external examiner wishes to resign during the academic year, he or she must do so in writing to the Head of School, giving a three month notice period.

8.4. Where an external examiner resigns prior to the expiry of the appointed term the appropriate school is responsible for obtaining written confirmation of the resignation, advising the Academic Quality and Policy Office and nominating a replacement.

8.5. In the event of unsatisfactory performance, the University reserves the right to terminate the appointment at any time. Unsatisfactory performance could cover a range of issues, including the failure to attend appropriate examination boards without making alternative arrangements and the failure to submit completed Reports. A termination of the appointment may also be necessary where a conflict of interest arises during the term of office.

8.6. The decision to discontinue shall be based on a statement (usually from the Head of School) detailing the proposed grounds for discontinuation and submitted to the Academic Quality and Policy Office. The final decision to discontinue will be made by the Dean. In cases of automatic termination due to the non-return of Reports, the statement and the final decision by the Dean are
not required (see Section 5.22). The Academic Quality and Policy Office will inform the external examiner in writing of the decision and it will be reported to the school and to the relevant Faculty Board.

*This Policy was revised and approved by University Academic Quality and Standards Committee in March 2018, with no further amendment by Education Committee in June 2018.*