



University of Sussex

Handbook on the policy and procedures for the external examining of taught courses

Academic Quality
and Partnerships
Office

2025/26

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INTRODUCTION, FOREWORD AND SUMMARY GUIDANCE

This document sets out the University's policy and procedures for the external examining of taught courses (including partnership provision) and is published by the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office (AQP), University of Sussex. The handbook is updated regularly to take account of the requirements and guidance published by the QAA in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education for External Expertise and related national policy.

External Examiners are one of the principle means by which we uphold our academic standards at the University of Sussex.

In line with the key principles of transparency, consistency and independence in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education on External Expertise, our processes promote.

- Transparency – we will publish your report for current students and staff and intend to make this available to prospective students
- Consistency – a standard process for moderation
- Independence – External Examiner role to be confined to moderation only with no involvement in the marking process.

We thank you for undertaking this important work on our behalf.

Academic Quality and Partnerships
July 2025

SECTION A: DUTIES AND POWERS OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

1. Duties of External Examiners

Duties fall into two categories:

- core duties (shared by External Examiners for all taught courses);
- discipline/appointment-specific duties.

1.1. Core duties

The core duties of External Examiners are:

- (a) To report on whether the **standards set are appropriate for the University's awards**, or award elements, by reference to published national subject benchmarks, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, course specifications and other relevant information. Faculties/Partner institutions should agree with their External Examiners how their judgements are expected to relate to these agreed reference points and this should be **explicitly documented** as part of the material sent to External Examiners by Faculties/Partner institutions.
- (b) To report on the **standards of student performance** in courses or parts of courses which they have been appointed to examine, and on the comparability of the standards with those of similar courses or parts of courses in other UK higher education institutions.
- (c) To report on the extent to which **processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards** are rigorous, ensure equity of treatment for students and have been fairly conducted in accordance with the University regulations and policies, as demonstrated by reviewing a sample of assessed work.
- (d) To report whether the **assessment processes** measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended learning outcomes and enable students to demonstrate the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.
- (e) To report on the appropriateness of the published **marking criteria**.
- (f) To scrutinise and approve draft examination papers and assessment tasks for essays/large weighted assessments. External Examiner will be advised of the Faculty's marking strategy.
- (g) To confirm that the marking and internal moderation processes have been conducted appropriately based on the marks and feedback provided in a sample of assessed work.
- (h) To be a full member of and attend the main meeting of the relevant

Progression and Award Board (PAB). At least one External Examiner who has attended the main PAB must also attend the resit PAB meeting.

(i) To sign a statement of compliance to confirm that the University's assessment regulations and policies have been complied with. This should be completed at the end of the PAB.

(j) To submit an annual report to the Pro Vice-Chancellor and a final report at the end of the appointment period.

External Examiners should refer to the University of Sussex Progression and Award Regulations, available at:

<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/standards/examsandassessment>

Note that there are separate Progression and Award Regulations for Partner Institutions.

1.2. Discipline and appointment-specific duties

Discipline and appointment-specific duties are not detailed in this policy document but will be notified separately by the Board of Study as appropriate. For external courses validated by the University, other additional duties are specified by the institution.

1.3. Level 4 assessments

External Examiners are not required to see assessments or draft examination question papers for Level 4 assessments. External Examiners remain free to review and confirm the marking process for Level 4 assessments on request. In some cases, the external accreditation body may require full engagement of the External Examiner in Level 4 assessment; such cases will be notified to the External Examiner at the time of appointment.

1.4. Meetings with students

External Examiners should meet annually with students to assist in:

- understanding the context of the academic provision;
- gaining a general impression of the competence of the students;
- and obtaining feedback on the student experience.

Details of the procedures to be followed are set out in paragraph 4 below.

1.5. Lead External Examiner duties

Where there is more than one External Examiner attached at course level, a lead External Examiner must be appointed. The lead External Examiner will act as a first point of contact for rare occasions where a quick decision is required by External Examiners and will act as a representative for the course. In addition to any normal examining duties, the Lead External Examiner will be expected to:

- confirm that a consistent and acceptable standard is being maintained across the course
- sign off the assessment schedule for the course
- act as a first point of contact where a quick decision is required
- act as a mentor for new or inexperienced External Examiners
- attend the Main PAB and Resit PAB

External Examiners at module level will sign off exam papers and essay titles/topics that are set.

1.6. Mentor duties

A mentor will be assigned to any new appointments who have no previous external examining experience at the appropriate level. The mentor is expected to be on hand during the first year for any queries regarding benchmarking with the sector and is encouraged to share experiences of acting as an external examiner and of working at their own institutions and others, if relevant, in particular where the mentee has concerns about signing off exam papers and moderating samples of work. Mentors are not expected to advise on operation of tasks and processes within the institution or on the University's regulatory framework or its application.

2. Attendance at Progression and Award Boards (PABs) (general)

It is an integral part of the duties of an External Examiner to attend the Progression and Award Board (PAB) meetings to confirm that the examination and assessment processes have been conducted appropriately. External Examiners will be advised separately by the PAB Deputy Chair of the dates of the meeting(s) of the Board they are required to attend. External Examiners are not normally required to attend Module Assessment Boards (MABs) or Progression only PABs but may be contacted to discuss any anomalies. Lead External Examiners are required to attend the Main PAB and Resit PAB as stated above and will receive an additional fee. If the PAB takes place in person, all travel expenses will be paid by the University and any expenses for any additional visits will be reimbursed.

If, exceptionally, an External Examiner is unable to attend a PAB meeting, the Deputy Chair of the Examination Board **must** be provided with contact details (phone/email as appropriate) so that the PAB may consult with the External Examiner should the need arise. Where the External Examiner, acting as the representative External Examiner attending the Resit PAB, is unexpectedly unable to attend, another External Examiner must be asked to attend.

3. Powers of External Examiners

External Examiners review and confirm the appropriateness of the application of the marking and internal moderation process, based on the marks and feedback provided in a sample of assessments. They should not change marks nor act as additional markers on a par with internal examiners in any circumstances.

In their independent capacity External Examiners have the power to:

- 3.1. confirm that the outcome of the marking and internal moderation processes are

appropriate, based on the sample of assessments reviewed for the cohort;

3.2. not confirm that the outcome of the marking and internal moderation processes are appropriate, based on the sample of assessments reviewed for the cohort. In this case the External Examiner may request a second sample for scrutiny or refer back for a full or partial remark for the whole cohort;

3.3. request and obtain reasonable access to assessed parts of any course taken within the academic year, including evidence about a student's performance on a placement.

In addition, External Examiners:

3.4. may comment on the method for selecting a sample of students' work for external scrutiny taking account of the need to provide a representative sample covering the full range of marking bands (NB: for e-submission assessments the sample is automatically generated in line with the regulations);

3.5. should have the opportunity to meet with internal markers and students;

3.6. should liaise with the Chair of the relevant Board of Study should they require any information additional to that provided to a student regarding the rationale for marks awarded

4. Limits of External Examiners' powers

4.1. Where an External Examiner is unwilling to endorse the outcomes for an individual student, the final decision rests with the Chair of the PAB to determine the outcome within the authority delegated to the PAB as set out in the Examination and Assessment Regulations. In such circumstances, the Chair must report the fact to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) immediately. External Examiners retain the right to make a separate confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor on such occasions.

4.2. *Exceptional Circumstances and academic misconduct cases*

The University has separate procedures for considering matters of exceptional circumstances and academic misconduct and these are set out in the Progression and Award+ Regulations. The processes for determining the outcome of exceptional circumstances or academic misconduct are therefore outside the immediate remit of External Examiners. The role of the External Examiner in these instances is as a member of the PAB in determining the impact on progression or on the final award where such discretion is permitted within the progression and award regulations.

5. Summary of procedures for meetings between External Examiners and students

The following procedure should be followed for all External Examiners:

- each External Examiner should be offered an opportunity to meet annually with students, to assist in: understanding the context of the academic provision; gaining a general impression of the competence of the students (such as oral skills, general feel for the subject); obtaining feedback on the student experience.
- the meeting should normally be unsupervised by University faculty so as to encourage students to speak freely about their experience;
- the meeting should last up to one hour (and normally not less than 20 minutes);
- the meeting need not take place on the same day as the PAB (instead the meeting can be arranged for any time during the academic session, and be linked to other visits the external might be making to the University);
- where time is constrained (such as where an examiner visits for only one day), it may not be possible to schedule a meeting, but every attempt to do so should be made;
- the meeting can take any form appropriate to the subject/cohort (from informal meetings over lunch, round table sessions, visits to laboratories/workshops, post-seminar sessions), and this should be discussed with the External Examiner;
- students from all levels may be invited to the meeting, but no student is required to attend. Students should be advised that the meeting is for quality assurance purposes and has no impact on individual marks or classification and that concerns about individual assessments (including guidance on appeals/complaints) fall outside the scope of the meeting;
- the meeting is **not** a formal part of the examining or assessment process. Meeting students can assist the External Examiner in evaluating the quality of the students being examined by providing a context in which to consider their work (the students' understanding of the purpose of their degree). It also serves to provide an additional avenue of student feedback on the overall quality of provision, and explicitly engages students in the quality loop;
- the External Examiner should be asked to provide feedback to faculty on any issues raised (strengths as well as weaknesses).
- External Examiners are encouraged to consider how well the course's teaching methods and learning opportunities help students engage with the University's pedagogic themes of as environmental sustainability, human flourishing, and digital and data futures. These themes are intended to equip students to thrive as engaged, adaptable, and globally responsible citizens.
- External Examiners are also encouraged to consider how effectively the course supports students from diverse backgrounds and experiences and enables all students to succeed both during their studies and beyond.

SECTION B: PROCEDURES FOR THE NOMINATION AND APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

6. Nomination of External Examiners

The procedures for the nomination of External Examiners include:

- consultation within Faculties/Partner Institutions
- discussion with the proposed External Examiner to ensure that the nature and extent of the role is understood;
- scrutiny of nominations by the Board of Study (for courses provided by the University);
- approval of nominations by the Chair of Faculty Education Committee (chaired by the Associate Dean E&S) on behalf of Senate.

7. Procedures for the nomination of External Examiners

7. Procedures for the nomination of External Examiners

a.1 Completion of a nomination form and consultation within the Faculty/Partner Institution

The Academic Quality and Partnerships Office (AQP) will routinely inform the Chair of the Board of Study and the relevant Curriculum and Assessment Officers of the nominations needed for the forthcoming year. All External Examiner appointments should be made before the start of the academic year unless there are exceptional circumstances where an External Examiner has resigned part way through the year. Nomination forms can be downloaded from the following web page:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/standards/externalexaminers>

The AQP Office (Partnership) will advise Partner Institutions about nominations required.

The Faculty Education Committee will wish to be assured of the suitability of the nominee, focusing particularly on the nominee's discipline expertise and will specifically address professional and statutory body requirements when approving nominations.

The proposed nominee should be approached informally to ascertain their willingness to be appointed normally by the Chair of the Board of Study. The Chair of the Board of Study should provide sufficient information on the role, the sample size to be scrutinised, timing of Progression and Award Boards (PABs) and any other required duties to enable the proposed nominee to make a realistic decision about accepting the appointment.

A completed and signed nomination form, together with a supporting CV, **which makes explicit both the nominee's discipline expertise and their experience in assessment matters**, should be returned to the following:

- In the case of courses provided at the University: The relevant Curriculum and Assessment Officer, who will put forward the proposal to the Faculty Education Committee (FEC) (chaired by the

Associate Dean E&S) for final approval. If approved by the FEC, the Curriculum and Assessment Officer will forward the form to the Academic Quality. If unsuccessful, the nomination will be returned to the originating officer for revision or for a new nomination, if appropriate.

- In the case of courses provided at a Partner Institution: The AQP Office will forward the form for approval by Associate Deans (Education and Students). If unsuccessful, the nomination will be returned to the originating officer for revision or for a new nomination, if appropriate.

1.2 Scrutiny and processing of the nomination

The processing of a nomination has four stages:

a. Role of the Curriculum and Assessment Officers/AQP Office:

Nomination forms are returned to the relevant Curriculum and Assessment Officers for courses provided by the University or to the AQP Office (Partnership) (in the case of validated courses at partner institutions), who will:

- check that the form is complete and that all the criteria¹ are met. The form will be returned to the person who made the recommendation where necessary. The AQP Office may be consulted for guidance.
- inform the AQP Office and proponents of the outcome of the Board of Study scrutiny by forwarding a signed nomination form with CV to the AQP Office before approval by the Faculty Education Committee.
- prepare the nominations recommended by the Board of Study for the Chair of Faculty Education Committee (chaired by the Associate Dean E&S) for approval.

b. Role of the Board of Study

Nomination forms with accompanying CVs will be scrutinised by the relevant committee in order to approve. It is expected that these committees will particularly focus on the experience and expertise of nominees in relation to assessment matters, research links and possible conflicts of interest, including avoiding reciprocal External Examiner arrangements. If it is unsuccessful, the nomination will be returned to the originating officer for revision or for a new nomination, if appropriate.

¹ Criteria for the appointment of external examiners are given in Section C

c. Role of the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office

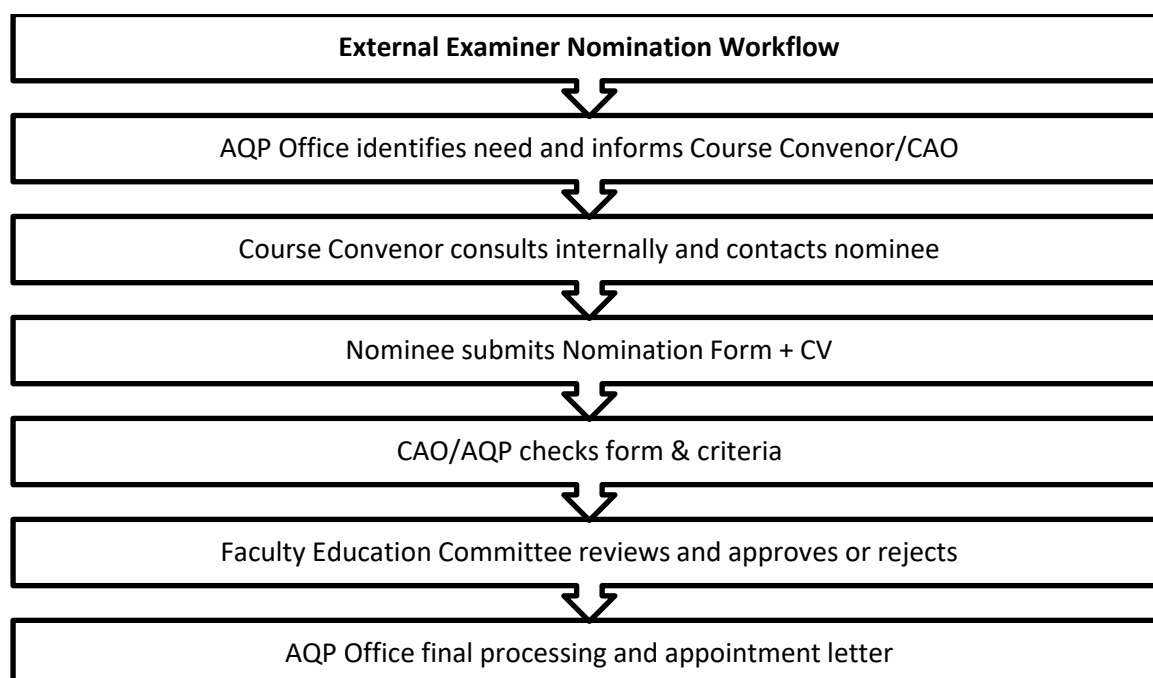
The AQP Office will:

- produce a consolidated list of existing External Examiners for taught courses/modules. The consolidated list will enable the University to maintain an overview of the home institutions of External Examiners for a Faculty when considering a new nominee.
- Issue the letter of appointment. This will include details of the course/s the External Examiner has been appointed to; period of appointment which states the start and finish date

d) Faculty Education Committee

The Faculty Education Committee scrutinizes the recommended nominations in the context of the existing approved appointments and any other relevant recommendations and approves (or otherwise) the appointment. If approved, the signed nomination form is returned to the AQP Office and an appointment letter issued. If rejected, the Faculty or Partner institution will be requested to bring forward an alternative nomination or provide further information.

In exceptional cases (e.g. urgency or illness), nominations may still be escalated to the UEC for approval.



e) Extending the remit of an existing External Examiner and approval for the extension of these duties

In order for an existing External Examiner to extend the remit of their duties the Faculty or Partner Institution must inform the AQP Office which courses the External Examiner will be covering and whether or not this is for the remainder of the tenure. A rationale must be

provided to explain why an extension to the remit is required stating the number of modules the External Examiner will be moderating. The AQP Office will forward the request to the Chair of FEC, along with the original nomination form and the External Examiner's CV. If the extension of duties is approved, the AQP Office will send out an appointment letter stating the course/s the External Examiner has oversight of and the tenure of the appointment.

7. Duration of the appointment

External Examiners are appointed by the University normally for a period of four years. Undergraduate appointments will normally commence on 1 October of a given year and expire on the 30 September in order to coincide with the start date of an academic session. For postgraduate appointments the appointment will usually run until the 31 December to include the PABs and give time for any formal queries that arise after the PABs. An External Examiner will be asked to provide an overview of their term in office on completing the final report. External Examiners for Degree Apprenticeships are appointed by the University normally for a period of five years. Appointments are aligned with four academic years and will commence on 1 January of a given year and expire on the 30 September in order to coincide with the start date of an academic session.

Postgraduate appointments for January intakes will normally commence on 1 January of a given year.

Exceptionally a period of appointment may be agreed to coincide with a term start date, for example in cases where the tenure of a previous External Examiner had been terminated part way through the session. In exceptional circumstances an extension of one year may be approved. Faculties or Partner Institutions should submit a written request, supported by the FEC, setting out the rationale. Such requests will usually only be considered in order to provide continuity either where the tenure of more than one External Examiner is due to end at the same time or where the experience of another External Examiner needs to be complemented.

8. Phasing of appointments

It is desirable to phase External Examiners' appointments where more than one External Examiner is appointed to a course. The induction of new External Examiners and effective liaison between outgoing and incoming examiners should be regarded as complementary to the principle of phasing. Previous External Examiner Reports will be made available to new External Examiners by the Faculty or Partner Institution.

9. Timing of the appointment process

Recommendations for the following academic year should be considered by the appropriate Faculty Education Committee or AQP Office (Partnership) (as detailed above) at the spring meeting for undergraduate courses and the summer meeting (or earlier if possible) for postgraduate courses and autumn meeting for apprenticeship courses, where relevant.

The early appointment of an External Examiner is vital. Where a course has been approved at validation, the Faculty or Partner Institution will be asked to secure a nomination for an External Examiner ahead of the start of the course.

Where an External Examiner is not appointed ahead of the start of an academic year, exceptionally, the Pro Vice-Chancellor may consider withdrawing the course.

Faculties are asked to publish the name of the External Examiner appointed to each course. This will usually be included in the course handbook provided to students.

10. Early termination of appointments

Termination of contract or resignation

If an External Examiner is likely to be unavailable for an extended period of time during the period of appointment, the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office (AQP) should be informed as soon as possible. This will ensure that alternative External Examiner arrangements can be put in place. External Examiners are required to give a full term's notice. In exceptional circumstances, for example serious illness, less notice can be given. Letters or emails of resignation/termination should be addressed to the AQP Office.

Exceptionally, the University may terminate the appointment of an External Examiner before the completion of his/her appointment. This may be due to the following circumstances:

- failure to submit an annual report
- failure to attend (in-person or virtually) the campus at least once per year
- where there is a conflict of interests which was not apparent at the time the appointment was made
- where there has been a significant change in circumstances of the External Examiner in relation to appointment
- where there has been a significant change in the circumstances related to the course to which the External Examiner has been appointed – e.g., discontinuation of the course/modules
- where there has been an irretrievable breakdown in relations between the External Examiner and the Faculty or Partner Institution
- misuse of data
- Misconduct
- Where there has been extended unavailability or a sustained inability to perform the agreed services for a prolonged or indefinite period of time, and no mutually acceptable alternative arrangement, (such as temporary adjustments) has been reached

11. Maintenance of a co-ordinated list of External Examiners

A list of External Examiners for University courses (including Partner Institutions) will be maintained by the AQP Office. The list will act as both a check list for reviewing the home institutions of potential nominees at both Faculty and University level, for recording incoming reports and enabling basic data gathering about the population of External Examiners.

SECTION C: CRITERIA FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

12. Policy on the criteria for the appointment of External Examiners

The principles underpinning the **criteria** for the appointment of External Examiners:

- require that External Examiners have knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
- require that External Examiners are sufficiently qualified and have sufficient expertise and experience in discipline-specific and assessment matters and in course design;
- Have relevant subject expertise in the fields covered by the course. This may be indicated by: the present (or last, if retired) post and place of work; the range and scope of experience across HE or the professions; current and recent active involvement in research/scholarly/professional activities in the field of study concerned.
- Relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification to be externally examined and knowledge of Professional and/or Statutory Body (PSRB) requirements where relevant
- support the exercise of objective, impartial and independent judgements about awards made by the University;
- avoid arrangements which result in undue reliance on nomination of External Examiners from any one university and arrangements where there is a known conflict of interest.
- Have the right to work and reside in the UK, and will use the UK as their main place of residence throughout their tenure for UG External Examiners.

13. Criteria for the appointment of External Examiners

13.1. External Examiners should have **expertise and experience** in the academic area of the appointment, in the assessment of modules and courses and in course design or review. Normally, External Examiners will be at Senior Lecturer level or above, be academically qualified to the level of the award being examined and will have knowledge of the Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements where relevant. For courses with more than one External Examiner, the course may benefit from wide-ranging external scrutiny by having External Examiners drawn from a relevant variety of institutional contexts.

13.2. In the case of retired nominees, retirement must have been within the last five years, and sufficient evidence of current involvement in the subject area is required e.g. via consultancy or visiting lectureships.

Criteria are not set for discipline-specific expertise, which are a matter for individual Faculties/Boards of Study/Partner institutions. In relation to assessment expertise, nominees should demonstrate at least one of the following: experience of external examining at the appropriate level (for example DPhil examining alone would not be enough); experience as Chair or member of an examination board at the appropriate level; experience of Course leadership or significant curriculum development, or otherwise in a role responsible for assessment at a course-wide level.

13.3. In the interests of impartiality, those making nominations must avoid **reciprocal arrangements** with Faculties of other Institutions. A period of three years must have elapsed before appointment.

An External Examiner should not normally be appointed if they have any direct interest in, or

ties to, the University, its staff or students, or if they are from department in a university where a member of the inviting university department is serving as an External Examiner.

If there are research links between the nominating department and the nominee, Faculties/Departments/Partner Institutions should specifically indicate on the nomination form that such a link exists, the nature of the link and the way in which the Faculty/Department/Partner Institution has satisfied itself that such a link does not endanger the potential objectivity of the relationship with the proposed External Examiner.

13.4. In order to have **sufficient time** for the proper performance of functions, no individual should hold, simultaneously, more than one other External Examinership at *undergraduate or postgraduate* level. They may hold a maximum of two external examiner appointments in total including the appointment at the University (excluding PhD/DPhil examining duties that are intermittent).

13.5. An External Examiner should not normally be succeeded by **another from the same institution to the same course**.

13.6. **Former members of staff and former students** should not be invited to become External Examiners until at least five years after their staff appointment/student registration has ended. Each course may not have more than one External Examiner who is a former member of staff or a former student at any given time, regardless of the period of time that has elapsed.

13.7. No External Examiner will be appointed for a second four-year appointment. Exceptionally, an interim extension may be considered as set out in B8.

13.8. No two External Examiners should be appointed from the same department/unit of the same institution to a Faculty at the same time.

13.9. The nomination of External Examiners with little or no prior experience of external examining is considered, provided they meet the criteria, and that appropriate arrangements are made for induction and mentoring by the Faculty/Department/Partner Institution. The Faculty should arrange for one of their more experienced External Examiners to act as a mentor to the new External Examiner.

13.10. An External Examiner should not be appointed to courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level where this will result in them being a member of both the undergraduate and the postgraduate Progression and Award Board (PAB). An exception to this is Integrated Masters degrees where the External Examiner can be included in both.

13.11. UG External Examiners will need to show evidence that they are legally entitled to work and reside in the United Kingdom. They will be required to use the UK as their main residence throughout their tenure.

14.12 Former members of validation panels, i.e., independent academics may be nominated as an External Examiner for a newly validated course

Criteria related to courses and modules

There should normally be at least one External Examiner for each:

- course leading to a named award, such that there is appropriate expertise

to inform decision-making at the PAB.

- module delivered at Level 5 or above. An External Examiner must be assigned at module level – the Faculty or Partner Institution ensure that all modules are assigned before moderation takes place.
- validated course at partner institutions.

14.13 The University does not currently publish criteria for the relationship between the number of External Examiners and the quantity of assessed material being scrutinised. It is the responsibility of the Faculty to distribute the modules owned by the Faculty between the appointed External Examiners.

Where more than one External Examiner is appointed to a course, a Lead External Examiner should be agreed, usually on appointment.

14. Exceptions to the policy

Exceptionally, External Examiners may be appointed who work outside Higher Education (for example for Professional Regulatory and Statutory Bodies) or who have *discipline* expertise but not *assessment* expertise (for example in Medicinal Chemistry, Management, Environmental Science and validated courses in Restoration and Conservation). In the case of nominees without appropriate assessment expertise, such appointments will normally only be approved where there is at least one other External Examiner for that subject/course who has appropriate assessment expertise. This should be clearly indicated on the nomination form.

SECTION D: THE INDUCTION OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

15. Materials to be sent to the External Examiner

In addition to the appointment letter setting out contractual arrangements, External Examiners should receive the following information (some material may be provided by URLs):

15.1. Materials sent to External Examiners by the AQP Office:

- Handbook on the policy and procedures for external examining of taught courses
- Progression and Award Regulations
- Teaching and Learning Strategy (currently being revised)
- Summary and Analysis of External Examiner Reports (Institutional issues identified by the University including agreed actions)
- Schedule of UG/PG PAB dates and proposed timescale for external moderation.

Material is also available on:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/standards/externalexaminers>

In the case of validated courses at partner institutions, the AQP Office will send the Handbook on the policy and procedures for external examining of taught courses and will request that the partner institution sends a copy of their own examinations and assessment regulations.

15.2. Materials sent to the External Examiner by the Faculty/Department/Partner Institution at the start of the appointment or start of the year (where appropriate):

- Course specifications setting out course structure and modules
- Course aims and learning outcomes
- List of modules to be externally moderated
- Module aims and learning outcomes
- Module assessment modes
- Marking criteria
- Reading lists
- Copy of most recent Annual Course Review Report
- Copy of previous External Examiner's report
- Copy of Progression and Award Board's annual report
- Confirmation of the name of the person to act as primary contact with the External Examiner
- Date of Progression and Award Board (PAB) meetings.

In the case of validated courses, the AQP Office (Partnership) will inform the partner institution of the appointment. The partner will then arrange for the above materials, relevant to their own institution, to be sent to the External Examiner.

15.3. Materials sent to External Examiners at the point of moderation:

- Assessment task
- Access to the full marks register for the cohort
- Module marks statistics
- A moderation form containing the internal moderator's comments about the sample of assessments reviewed as part of internal moderation.

15.4. Related policy information

The following information can be accessed via the web. External Examiners are requested to acquaint themselves with University policy in these areas:

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy
<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/equalities/>

16. Induction

New and continuing External Examiners will be invited to a centrally-organised induction session annually. External examiners will also receive an induction from the faculty, setting out what to expect, when they will receive samples for moderation and what modules they will be assigned to. The induction within the faculty will also cover best point of contact and accessing Sussex resources i.e., Canvas and Sussex Direct.

The materials indicated in 16.1 and 16.2 above form part of the induction. New External Examiners should also have the opportunity to meet the Faculty/Department/Partner Institution staff prior to the first formal visit.

16.1. Induction of External Examiners with little or no previous experience of the role

Faculties/Boards of Study/Partner Institutions are asked to ensure that inexperienced External Examiners are mentored by an existing External Examiner who would be encouraged to identify specific requirements of the role. The inexperienced External Examiner may consult their mentor on questions regarding grading in comparison to other institutions but should contact the Faculty if they have questions about the regulations or processes.

16.2. Induction of External Examiners from outside higher education

It is not normally University policy to appoint externals from outside higher education, but such cases may be considered where the appointee is not the sole External Examiner for the award or his/her expertise is complemented by others who satisfy the criteria. In these cases, the Faculty/Board of Study/Partner Institution will need to pay particular attention to the induction of such externals in relation to understanding assessment issues.

Nominees from backgrounds other than higher education, for example business, industry or the professions, may be appointed where their knowledge and/or experience is appropriate to the programme of study and ensuring that they are provided with a detailed induction and support.

16.3. Significance of an External Examiner's signature on the statement of compliance at the PAB

As part of their induction process, Faculties/Partner Institutions are asked to draw External Examiners' attention to the following points:

- the signature of an External Examiner on the statement of compliance indicates the External Examiner's endorsement of the outcomes of the assessment process and the PAB.
- once a statement of compliance has been signed by an External Examiner at a PAB those outcomes represent the final decision of the PAB and will not normally be reconsidered except in the case of a decision by a virtual PAB, the discovery of factual errors or an appeal.

SECTION E: CONTENT AND FORMAT OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS REPORTS

17. Annual reports

External Examiners are required to submit an annual External Examiner report to the University within 6 weeks of the exam board. Generic issues of concern and areas of good practice will be considered as part of the University's Annual Course Review. If you are coming to the end of your appointment, we do ask for an overview of your term of office in your final report. This is valuable both to the institution but also the incoming External Examiner. External Examiners are asked to complete University's standard online report form via a dedicated link, which will be sent to you by externalexaminers@sussex.ac.uk.

All reports for validated partnership courses should be submitted to:

partnership@sussex.ac.uk

Please note that the report template may be subject to change from year to year, External Examiners are requested to download the latest version for completion. A copy is included in the Appendices to this handbook for reference. This form comprises a full report for use by the University.

We recognise that our External Examiners give important feedback on the process/running of our courses, and the timely receipt of reports enables us to take early action to address issues raised and make an impact on the experience of the next cohort of students. It is therefore vital that you meet the deadline for the submission of reports as given below. Please note that those who are representing a Faculty at the Resit Progression and Award Boards are still required to submit a report by the deadlines below, however you may send a revised version of the report following the Resit PAB if appropriate.

- Undergraduate reports six weeks from the date of the end of year PAB
- six weeks from the date of the end of year PAB
- Postgraduate six weeks from the date of the end of year PAB
- Validated courses

Reports which are incomplete or not in the correct format may be returned to the External Examiner by the AQP Office for amendment and completion. All External Examiner reports should be completed in sufficient detail to fulfil their role in safeguarding the standards and quality of provision.

External Examiners are asked to complete a statement of compliance which acts as a checklist stating whether or not the relevant examination and assessment procedures and policies have been adhered to in a satisfactory manner. This checklist needs to be completed in addition to the External Examiner's Report.

18. Additional reports

18.1. External Examiners are asked to include a **concise overview in their last annual report** at the end of their term of office, both as a précis of the outcomes of their period of office and to highlight matters which would be helpful to an incoming External Examiner.

18.2. External Examiners retain the right, should they so wish, to make a separate, **confidential report** to the Vice-Chancellor at any time on matters of particular importance and/or sensitivity. The University will respond to the concerns raised, in a timely manner, outlining actions that may be taken as a result.

18.3. Where an External Examiner has a serious concern relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a course or courses and has exhausted all published applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor, he/she may invoke QAA's concerns scheme. QAA advise that, "Such an investigation will be appropriate where there is evidence of systematic failings in quality management in the institution, but not where there is a one-off case of ineffective practice." Further information on the scheme can be on the QAA website at: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

19. Procedure for late External Examiner reports

i) Annual reports should be submitted to the University within the deadline specified in 18 above. This is usually within 6 weeks of the final board attended by the External Examiner for the academic year in question.

ii) If a report is not received within 6 weeks of the final examination board, the AQP Office will contact the External Examiner to enquire about the reason for the lateness of the report and to agree a further deadline. This is because the report is one of the main reference points in the Annual Course Review and quality audit processes.

iii) Where an External Examiner report remains outstanding following the initial reminder a second reminder will be sent by the AQP Office giving a final date for the receipt of the report.

iv) If the AQP Office does not receive the report in time for the Annual Course Review the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education and Students) may consider terminating the contract

v) The payment of External Examiner fees will be initiated by the AQP office upon receipt of a report, after which the authorising body will be asked to review and confirm the payment. We will endeavour to pass payments through the approval process as efficiently as possible. The AQP Office will notify the External Examiner of the final deadline.

vi) Fees will not be payable for reports that have been delayed beyond usefulness, i.e. after the Annual Course Review has taken place. It is important to note that travel expenses will always be paid by the University on submission of an expense claim form.

SECTION F: PROCEDURES FOR THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND CIRCULATION OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

20. Acknowledgement and circulation of External Examiners' reports

There is a three-stage process for the acknowledgement and circulation of External Examiners' reports as follows:

20.1. The Academic Quality and Partnerships Office (AQP), on receipt of an External Examiner's report, will send an acknowledgement to the External Examiner.

The AQP Office will be responsible for monitoring that all expected reports are received and will take appropriate action on outstanding reports.

20.2. The AQP Office will distribute reports electronically on receipt (via Curriculum and Assessment Officers where appropriate) as detailed below:

Undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses

- 20.2.1. Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students)
- 20.2.2. Executive Dean
- 20.2.3. Associate Dean (Education and Students)
- 20.2.4. Chair of the Board of Study
- 20.2.5. Curriculum and Assessment Officer

Validated courses

- (a) Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students)
- (b) Link Tutor
- (c) Head of the partner institution
- (d) One other named contact responsible for quality assurance.

21.3 Guidance for Faculty Education Committees

The following guidance is intended for all members and officers of Faculty Education Committees:

1. Committee secretaries will include the reports within the formal circulation to committee members.
2. The External Examiner provides assurance to the University on the standards and quality of the teaching, learning and assessment processes at the University. In addition, the External Examiner confirms that the assessment and moderation processes have been conducted consistently and appropriately in accordance with the University's regulations and policies.
3. The External Examiner's report is intended as a tool to assist the University in identifying strengths and weaknesses in provision and a key purpose of the report is to encourage the External Examiner to act as a critical friend to the course. It is therefore to be expected, and is an essential part of the process that External Examiners raise queries and concerns related to courses or modules and make proposals to better manage assessments going forwards.
4. The University publishes the full report (or extract of) to the current students and staff and External Examiners should therefore not identify individuals directly or indirectly. In addition, the University intends to publish reports to prospective students and the public.

SECTION G: PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

21. Procedures for taught courses provided at the University

21.1. All External Examiners' reports are subject to detailed scrutiny by the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office. AQP will draw to the attention of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) individual reports where there is evidence of good practice, or where there are matters of particular significance or concern. Reports falling into the latter category are raised directly with the relevant Faculty or support unit to ensure appropriate action is being taken. In addition to this, the Pro Vice-Chancellor has access to all External Examiner reports at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

21.2. Chairs of Board of Studies, Chairs of Module Assessment Boards and Progression and Award Boards should discuss issues raised in the External Examiners' reports. Every effort should be made to engage with elected student representatives when reviewing these reports within the formal committee structures. The Director of Teaching and Learning should ensure that an action plan is prepared for the Faculty Education Committee that addresses each issue and that where no action is proposed a clear reason must be given for that recommendation. The External Examiners' report(s) and the proposed action plan should:

- a) be considered by the Board of Study/department meeting where relevant, and
- b) be submitted to the Faculty Education Committee (FEC) in Semester 1 (undergraduate provision) or Semester 2 (postgraduate provision).

21.3. The FEC will consider the External Examiner's reports and associated action plans and either approve the action plan or ask for further action to be taken. The FEC will also monitor actions taken in the previous year and ensure that any issues have been resolved.

21.4. The Chair of the PAB is responsible for ensuring that the agreed action plan is implemented and for writing to External Examiners to inform them of any action that has been taken or is intended. Copies of the External Examiner action plan should be sent to the AQP Office for audit and monitoring purposes.

21.5. The AQP Office will draft a consolidated overview report for consideration by University Education Committee (UEC). The report will normally focus on matters of generic issue, in particular in relation to university-wide policy where such matters are not within the authority of the Faculty to alter. UEC will consider this report annually and identify and agree actions to address the issues raised, as appropriate.

21.6. The AQP Office will ensure that any issues affecting University-wide rules or procedure are raised at the relevant committee, or with appropriate officers.

21.7. The AQP Office will send the summary report with agreed actions to all External Examiners on behalf of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students).

22. Procedures for taught courses provided at partner institutions

22.1. All External Examiner reports are subject to detailed scrutiny by the AQP Office (Partnership). The AQP Office (Partnership) will draw to the attention of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) individual reports where there is evidence of good practice or where there are matters of particular significance or concern. Reports falling into the latter category are raised directly with the relevant partner institution to ensure that appropriate action is being taken. In addition to this, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor has access to all External Examiner reports.

22.2. The relevant partner institution's officers should discuss issues raised in the External Examiner's report and prepare an action plan which addresses each issue; where no action is proposed, a clear reason must be given for that recommendation. The External Examiner's report and the proposed action plan should be appended to the Annual Monitoring Report and submitted to AQP (Partnership) in December, for consideration at the Annual Monitoring Event and at UEC.

22.3. UEC will consider the External Examiner reports and associated action plans and either endorse the action plan or ask for further action to be taken.

22.4. The relevant officers in the partner institutions (in consultation with the principal officer responsible for quality assurance) are responsible for writing to the External Examiner to inform him/her of the action taken or planned. A copy of the response should also be sent to the AQP Office (Partnership).

22.5. The AQP Office (Partnership) will write back to the External Examiner on behalf of the Pro Vice-Chancellor to address institutional issues raised.

22.6. The AQP Office (Partnership) will monitor responses.

22.7. The Pro Vice-Chancellor will write to thank all outgoing External Examiners.

22.8. In the following year's Annual Monitoring Report, the partner institution should confirm that all action has been implemented, monitor progress of any actions not yet implemented and evaluate the effectiveness of any changes made.

SECTION H: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

23. Fees and expenses

External Examiners will receive an annual fee which covers all the duties that have been carried out on behalf of the University. The minimum expectations from the External Examiner in order to receive the annual fee are the following:

- Progression and Award Board (PAB) attendance
- Provide comments on assigned moderation samples before accepting or rejecting the sample via Sussex direct moderation page
- Completion of External Examiner Report
- Sign off exam papers and essay titles for modules that they are assigned to
- External moderation for modules that they are assigned to

The payment of External Examiner fees will be initiated by the AQP office upon receipt of a report, after which the authorising body will be asked to review and confirm the payment. We will endeavour to pass payments through the approval process as efficiently as possible. All External Examiner reports must be completed on the latest version of the External Examiner Report template which can be accessed on the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office (AQP) website:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/standards/externalexaminers>

A basic fee of £320 will be paid to each undergraduate or postgraduate External Examiner per annum. In addition, a workload fee of £50.00 per module (either UG or PG) will be paid to reflect the workload allocated to the External Examiner. The workload fee will vary depending on the number of modules that the External Examiner is appointed to. However, the overall fee, with the exception of the additional fees for specific activities below, will be capped at £800.

An additional fee will be paid for:

- (i) Resit PAB attendance: £100.00
- (ii) Appointment as a Lead External Examiner on a course with more than one External Examiner: £100.00
- (iii) Acting as a Mentor for an inexperienced External Examiner/s: £50.00
- (iv) External Examiners moderating 10 or more modules will receive a single additional payment of £50 per year.

No External Examiner will receive less than £320 or more than £800 (excluding additional fees and expenses).

Partner Institutions: Fee levels are set by the Partner Institution and payment of expenses are the responsibility of the Partner Institution (unless other arrangements have been agreed with the University).

The Inland Revenue requires all universities to deduct income tax, at the basic rate, from all payments of fees for examining (except postgraduate degrees). When payment is made, a payslip can be downloaded from the XMS system and will show the tax deducted. This should be retained and submitted with the annual tax return.

Expense claims may be submitted as soon as expenses have been incurred during the course of the academic year. Expenses claim forms must be completed correctly and supported by the appropriate receipts and/or travel tickets. Expenses cover travel and subsistence expenses. These should be sent separately to your relevant Faculty administrative contact. Expenses will be paid independently from fees and will not be delayed until receipt of the annual report.

The University of Sussex Visitor Expense Form can be found at:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/finance/forms>

24. Proving your Right to Work in the UK

In order to comply with the legal requirements, UG External Examiners will be asked to provide evidence that they are legally entitled to live and work in the United Kingdom (UK) at the start of their appointment

Please note that fee payments may be significantly delayed without production of these documents or combination of documents.

If your visa expires before your contract ends, you may be able to apply for a Permitted Paid Engagement visa. For this visa the University has to invite you to undertake a short-term, fee-paid engagement.

This will enable you to visit the UK to examine students for up to one month and receive payment.

Please note that due to the nature of the PGT External Examiner role, External Examiners who are appointed to PGT courses are not required to undertake a Right to Work check.

For more details: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/visiting/paid-engage/engagements/>

25. Pension

In accordance with statutory pensions automatic enrolment requirements, you will be assessed for pensions automatic enrolment the first time that we pay you, and when you are subsequently paid. You will be contacted by the Sussex Pensions team who will advise if you have been or will be enrolled into a Sussex pension scheme.

26. Misconduct

The University will thoroughly investigate any reports of inappropriate behaviour. In instances of alleged misconduct by an External Examiner, an investigator, who does not work closely with the individual under investigation, will be appointed by the Hearing Manager. The investigator will liaise with the institution to gather relevant evidence, and to carry out interviews with any relevant colleagues. Any evidence gathered by the investigator will be made available to the External Examiner, who will then be invited to

make a written statement regarding the allegation. The investigator will provide the Hearing Manager with a report of their findings, and the Hearing Manager will then assess the case and outline the next steps. The possible outcomes of any investigation of External Examiner misconduct are as follows:

- No case to answer
- Withdrawal of any further offers of work

27. Misuse of data

As External Examiner a sample of student work will be made available to you. This material is confidential and is made available for the express purpose of carrying out your duties as an external examiner. The University acts as a Data Controller when University of Sussex appointed external examiners process personal data for students while carrying out their duties. Under data protection legislation the University is required to process personal data for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and ensure the data is not further processed in a manner that is incompatible with those purposes. This is the 'purpose limitation' principle. Using information, you are privy to in your role as external examiner for an unrelated action that is not compatible with the original purpose (i.e., external examining) is not an appropriate use of personal data.

SECTION I: ELECTRONIC INFORMATION AND CONTACT ADDRESSES

28. All centrally produced information, including report forms, expenses forms and handbooks, can be found on the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office (AQP) web pages at:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/standards/externalexaminers>

Enquiries concerning the University's External Examiner policy and procedures, administrative matters, appointments and payments should be sent to:

Academic Quality and Partnerships
Office Room 326
Sussex House
University of Sussex Falmer
Brighton
BN1 9RH

externalexaminers@sussex.ac.uk

External Examiner reports should be sent to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) at the following email address:

externalexaminers@sussex.ac.uk

All enquiries about Partnership and Validated courses should be addressed to:

Academic Quality and Partnerships
Office Room 325
Sussex House
University of Sussex Falmer
Brighton
BN1 9RH

Partner/Validated Reports should be sent to:

partnership@sussex.ac.uk

Appendices

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Appendix 1 - UNIVERSITY of SUSSEX – EXTERNAL EXAMINER ACTION PLAN

Faculty:

Academic Year:

Level (UG or PG):

Course title(s)	
Name of External	

Comment requiring Faculty action	Proposed actions and delivery method	Timescale	Responsibility	Evaluation Method

**Note that institutional responses will be the responsibility of the AQP Office and will be sent to the FEC for information.*

Appendix 2 - Documentation available to External Examiners

Carried out by	Following appointment	During appointment	Annually
Academic Quality and Partnerships Office	<p>Letter of appointment which sets out the contractual arrangements including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course/module for which you are responsible, period of appointment, annual report requirement, acceptance form along with confirmation of eligibility forms <p>Examination and Assessment Regulations Handbook will be made available to External Examiners via the University of Sussex website:</p> <p>http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adge/standards/externalexaminers</p> <p>This includes information on the progression and award regulations, examination boards, academic misconduct policy, and exceptional circumstances procedure.</p> <p>Handbook on the policy and procedures for the External Examining of taught courses:</p> <p>http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adge/standards/externalexaminers</p> <p>This includes the duties and powers of External Examiners, procedures for nomination and appointment, induction of External Examiners, completion of annual reports, fees and expenses payable, forms and key contacts at the University.</p>	<p>Information on how fees are calculated</p> <p>Updates to External Examiner appointments (where necessary the reallocation of duties or extension of tenure)</p>	<p>Induction: New External Examiners will receive an induction carried out centrally by the University</p> <p>Updated versions of the following will be made available via the University of Sussex website:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examination and Assessment Regulations External Examiners' Handbook <p>Acknowledgement of External Examiner annual report by email. External Examiner Reports will be summarised and made available on the website. Examples of good practice and common issues across Faculties will be highlighted.</p>
Faculty/Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course specifications setting out course structure and modules List of modules to be externally moderated Course/module aims and learning outcomes Faculty assessment policy – including information on marking criteria, modes of assessment Reading lists Copy of previous External Examiner's report 	<p>Sample of assessments following the internal moderation process (level 5 and above) – including indication of number of scripts</p> <p>Arrangements for the PAB meetings (and other visits)</p>	<p>Copy of most recent Annual Course Review Report</p> <p>Action plan: Feedback on how comments made in the External Examiner report are to be addressed</p> <p>Date of Progression and Award Board (PAB) meetings.</p>

Appendix 3- The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (October 2014- Updated February 2024)

Extracts from 4 - The qualification descriptors

4.1 Qualification descriptors demonstrate the generic outcomes and attributes of the main type of qualification at each framework level. They make clear how the qualification differs from other qualifications, both at that level and at other levels. They are generic because they cover the full range of disciplines rather than a specific subject; QAA Subject Benchmark Statements fulfil this purpose.

4.2 Qualification descriptors are in two parts. The first part is a statement of outcomes, achievement of which is assessed and which a student should be able to demonstrate for the award of the qualification. This is a statement of the national threshold academic standard for the qualification. This part is of particular relevance to degree-awarding bodies in designing, approving, assessing and reviewing academic courses. They need to be satisfied that, for any course, the learning opportunities and assessment provides every student with the opportunity to achieve, and to demonstrate achievement of, the intended course learning outcomes.

4.3 The second part of the descriptor is a statement of the wider abilities that a typical student would be expected to have developed, and supports conversations with employers and other stakeholders about those capabilities.

4.4 At most levels, there is more than one type of qualification that may be achieved (for example, postgraduate diplomas and certificates in addition to master's degrees at Level 7 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS). Within each level, the various types of qualifications involve different volumes of learning (for example, master's degrees entail more learning than postgraduate certificates). As a consequence of this, there are differences in the range and nature of intended course learning outcomes. Not all of the qualification types at each level therefore meet all of the expectations of the qualification descriptor.

4.5 Where a qualification type other than the main qualification has a smaller volume of learning, the qualification descriptor for the degree is used as a reference point and the sub-degree qualification is expected to meet the descriptor in part. The information beneath each coloured descriptor explains which qualifications meet the descriptor in full, and where the qualification descriptor is used as a reference point for other qualifications at the same framework level.

4.6 Short courses are frequently offered as continuing professional development opportunities. The qualification descriptors provide points of reference that help providers determine which level of the relevant UK framework should be assigned to any qualifications resulting from these courses. Courses use titling conventions set out in paragraphs 6.13- 6.19.

3 2

4.7 QAA keeps under review the need for any additional qualification descriptors, or amendment to them, in the light of the development of other points of reference, such as Subject Benchmark Statements and Characteristics Statements (see paragraphs 5.2-5.4) or European developments - for example, arising from the Bologna Process, or the 2018 Council of Europe publication of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.

4.8 Because there are two frameworks, the following descriptors can apply to either the FHEQ, the FQHEIS, or both. The qualification descriptors that relate to the FHEQ are tinted green and those that relate to the FQHEIS are tinted blue. Those qualification descriptors tinted purple are common to both the FHEQ and the FQHEIS. So there are:

- two separate descriptors for the CertHE (one for the FHEQ and one for the FQHEIS)
- a qualification descriptor for the foundation degree on the FHEQ and a qualification descriptor for the DipHE on the FQHEIS
- a qualification descriptor for the bachelor's non-honours degree in Scotland

- two separate descriptors for bachelor's degrees with honours (one for the FHEQ and one for the FQHEIS)
- a single qualification descriptor for bachelor's degrees (FHEQ Level 7/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS), and
- a single descriptor for master's degrees (FHEQ Level 8/SCQF Level 12 on the FQHEIS).

4.9 Providers in England should also refer to the OfS sector-recognised standards which align with the content of the descriptors appearing here.

4.10 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 4 on the FHEQ Certificate of Higher Education

The descriptor provided for this level is for any Certificate of Higher Education, which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other qualifications aligned with Level 4 of the FHEQ. Certificates of Higher Education are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- knowledge of the underlying concepts and principles associated with their area(s) of study, and an ability to evaluate and interpret these within the context of that area of study
- an ability to present, evaluate and interpret qualitative and quantitative data, in order to develop lines of argument and make sound judgements in accordance with basic theories and concepts of their subject(s) of study.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems related to their area(s) of study and/or work
- communicate the results of their study/work accurately and reliably, and with structured and coherent arguments
- undertake further training and develop new skills within a structured and managed environment.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility.

a) Holders of a Certificate of Higher Education will have a sound knowledge of the basic concepts of a subject, and will have learned how to take different approaches to solving problems. They will be able to communicate accurately and will have the qualities needed for employment requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility. The Certificate of Higher Education may be a first step towards obtaining higher-level qualifications.

4.11 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at SCQF Level 7 on the FQHEIS Certificate of Higher Education

The Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) is available in a number of Scottish higher education institutions, typically as an exit award after the equivalent of one year of full-time study. Some CertHEs are awarded for achievement over a breadth of subject areas while others focus on one subject, in some cases with a strong vocational focus. The precise focus and outcomes will be identified in the definitive record for the relevant course.

Certificates of Higher Education are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- an outline knowledge of the scope and main areas of the subject(s) and its links with related subjects, and a more extensive knowledge of some of the key areas

- an understanding of the major theories, principles and concepts
- familiarity with some of the routine materials, techniques and practices of the subject
- skills for the gathering, basic analysis, and presentation of routine information, ideas, concepts and quantitative and qualitative data within a clearly defined context; this will include the use of information and communications technology (ICT) as appropriate to the subject. Typically, holders of the Certificate of Higher Education will be able to:
 - use their knowledge of the subject and its techniques in a routine manner to evaluate and formulate a range of arguments and solutions to problems and issues of a routine nature
 - communicate the results of their study and other work accurately and reliably, and within structured and coherent arguments
 - undertake further learning within a structured and managed environment
 - apply their subject-related and transferable skills in contexts where individuals may have some limited personal responsibility, but the criteria for decisions and the scope of the task are well defined.

4.12 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 5 on the FHEQ Foundation degree

The descriptor provided for this level of the FHEQ is for any foundation degree which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other qualifications at Level 5 of the FHEQ, such as Diplomas of Higher Education and Higher National Diplomas.

Foundation degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed
- ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied, including, where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context
- knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the subject(s) relevant to the named award, and ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study
- an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.

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Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- use a range of established techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis
- effectively communicate information, arguments and analysis in a variety of forms to specialist and non-specialist audiences and deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively
- undertake further training, develop existing skills and acquire new competences that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within organisations.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making.

a) The foundation degree is an example of a qualification that meets, in full, the expectations of the qualification descriptor (see the Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement).

b) Holders of qualifications at this level will have developed a sound understanding of the principles in their field of study, and will have learned to apply those principles more widely. Through this, they will have learned to evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems. Their studies may well have had a vocational orientation - for example, HNDs - enabling them to perform effectively in their chosen field. Holders of qualifications at this level will have the qualities necessary for employment in situations requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making.

4.13 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at SCQF Level 8 on the FQHEIS

Diploma of Higher Education

The Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) is typically offered after the equivalent of the first two years of full-time higher education in Scotland.

Some DipHEs are awarded for achievement over a breadth of subject areas, while others focus on one subject, in some cases with a strong vocational focus. The precise focus and outcomes will be identified in the definitive record for the relevant course.

Diplomas of Higher Education are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a knowledge and understanding of the scope and main areas of the subject(s) and its interactions with related subjects; detailed knowledge of some key areas which may include some knowledge of current issues in limited specialised areas
- familiarity and understanding of a range of the essential theories, principles and concepts and an awareness of major issues at the forefront of the subject(s)
- familiarity and effective deployment of essential/routine materials, techniques and practices of the subject(s)
- skills for the gathering, critical analysis and presentation of information, ideas, concepts and/or quantitative and qualitative data that is core to the subject(s); this will include the use of ICT as appropriate to the subject(s).

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- use their knowledge, understanding and skills to critically evaluate and formulate evidence-based arguments and identify solutions to clearly-defined problems of a generally routine nature
- communicate the results of their study and other work accurately and reliably using a range of specialist techniques
- identify and address their own major learning needs within defined contexts and to undertake guided further learning in new areas
- apply their subject-related and transferable skills in contexts where the scope of the task and the criteria for decisions are generally well defined, but where some personal responsibility and initiative is required.

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4.14 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at SCQF Level 9 on the FQHEIS Bachelor's (non-honours) degree in Scotland

The bachelor's (non-honours) degree in Scotland is typically achieved after the equivalent of three years of full-time higher education. In the main, and depending on the subjects or professional area(s) studied, it is awarded as either a Bachelor of Science (BSc), or a Bachelor of Arts (BA). Although all degrees will exhibit a balance of breadth and depth, some degrees will be highly focused while others will develop greater breadth of outcomes. The particular characteristics of each degree will be articulated in the definitive record for the course. Many degrees that have a specific vocational focus carry recognition by the appropriate professional or statutory body. In a small number of universities, in some faculties, this qualification is titled 'MA' (see paragraph 4.17 (f)). The bachelor's (non-honours) degree in Scotland is a recognised entry requirement to a number of professions across the UK.

Bachelor's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a broad and comparative knowledge of the general scope of the subject, its different areas and applications, and its interactions with related subjects; a detailed knowledge of a defined subject or a more limited coverage of a specialist area balanced by a wider range of study; in each case, specialised study will be informed by current developments in the subject
- a critical understanding of the essential theories, principles and concepts of the subject(s) and of the ways in which these are developed through the main methods of enquiry in the subject; an awareness of the provisional nature of knowledge
- familiarity and competence in the use of routine materials, practices and skills, and of a few that are more specialised, advanced and complex
- well-developed skills for the gathering, evaluation, analysis and presentation of information, ideas, concepts and quantitative and/or qualitative data, drawing on a wide range of current sources; this will include the use of ICT as appropriate to the subject(s).

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- use their knowledge, understanding and skills, in both identifying and analysing problems and issues and in formulating, evaluating and applying evidence-based solutions and arguments
- communicate the results of their studies and other work accurately and reliably in a range of different contexts using the main specialist concepts, constructs and techniques of the subject(s)
- identify and address their own learning needs, including being able to draw on a range of current research, development and professional materials
- apply their subject-related and transferable skills to contexts where criteria for decisions and the scope of the task may be well defined but where personal responsibility, initiative and decision-making is also required.

4.15 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 6 on the FHEQ

Bachelor's degree with honours

The descriptor provided for this level of the FHEQ is for any bachelor's degree with honours which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other qualifications at Level 6 of the FHEQ, including bachelor's degrees and graduate diplomas.

Bachelor's degrees with honours are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline
- an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
 - to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline
 - to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in discipline
- an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge
- the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for

example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects
- critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution - or identify a range of solutions - to a problem
- communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
- the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
- decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts
- the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature.

a) Holders of a bachelor's degree with honours will have developed an understanding of a complex body of knowledge, some of it at the current boundaries of an academic discipline. Through this, the holder will have developed analytical techniques and problem-solving skills that can be applied in many types of employment. The holder of such a qualification will be able to evaluate evidence, arguments and assumptions, to reach sound judgements and to communicate them effectively.

b) Holders of a bachelor's degree with honours should have the qualities needed for employment in situations requiring the exercise of personal responsibility, and decision-making in complex and unpredictable circumstances.

c) Bachelor's degrees with honours form the largest group of higher education qualifications. Typically, learning outcomes for these courses would be expected to be achieved on the basis of study equivalent to three or four full-time academic years and lead to qualifications with titles such as Bachelor of Arts, BA (Hons) or Bachelor of Science, BSc (Hons). In addition to bachelor's degrees at this level are short courses and professional 'conversion' courses, based largely on undergraduate material, and taken usually by those who are already graduates in another discipline, leading to, for example, graduate certificates or graduate diplomas.

4.16 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at SCQF Level 10 on the FQHEIS

Bachelor's degree with honours in Scotland

The bachelor's degree with honours in Scotland is typically offered through the equivalent of four years of full-time higher education. It is awarded mainly as either a Bachelor of Science (BSc Hons) or a Bachelor of Arts (BA Hons). All honours degrees will exhibit a balance of breadth and depth as will be clear from the definitive records for individual courses. Many honours degrees will have a specific vocational focus, and in some cases will carry recognition by the appropriate professional or statutory body. In a small number of universities, in some faculties, this qualification is titled 'MA (Hons)' (see paragraph 4.17.6 (f)). The honours degree is the recognised 'normal' entry requirement to postgraduate study and to many professions across the UK.

Honours degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic, extensive and comparative knowledge and understanding of the subject(s) as a whole and its links to related subject(s); a detailed knowledge of a few specialisms and developments, some of which are at,

or informed by, the forefront of the subject

- a critical understanding of the established theories, principles and concepts, and of a number of advanced and emerging issues at the forefront of the subject(s)
- a critical understanding of the uncertainty and limits of knowledge and how it is developed, and an ability to deploy established techniques of analysis and enquiry within the subject
- a comprehensive knowledge and familiarity with essential and advanced materials, techniques and skills including some at the forefront of the subject
- skills in identifying information needs, and in the systematic gathering, analysis and interpretation of ideas, concepts, qualitative and quantitative data, and information from a range of evaluated sources including current research, scholarly and/or professional literature.

Typically, holders of the honours degree will be able to:

- use their knowledge, understanding and skills in the systematic and critical assessment of a wide range of concepts, ideas and data (that may be incomplete), and in both identifying and analysing complex problems and issues;

demonstrating some originality and creativity in formulating, evaluating and applying evidence-based solutions and arguments

- communicate the results of their study and other work accurately and reliably using the full repertoire of the principal concepts and constructs of the subject(s)
- systematically identify and address their own learning needs both in current and new areas, making use of research, development and professional materials as appropriate, including those related to the forefront of developments
- apply their subject-related and transferable skills in contexts of a professional or equivalent nature where there is a requirement for:
 - the exercise of personal responsibility and initiative
 - decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts
 - the ability to undertake further developments of a professional or equivalent nature.

4.17 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7 on the FHEQ and SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS

Master's degree

The descriptor provided for this level of the Frameworks is for any master's degree which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other qualifications at Level 7 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS, including postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas. Master's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice
- a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship

- originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline

- conceptual understanding that enables the student:

- to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
- to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- deal with complex issues - both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level
- continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
 - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
 - decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations
 - the independent learning ability required for continuing professional

development.

a) Much of the study undertaken for master's degrees is at, or informed by, the forefront of an academic or professional discipline. Successful students show originality in the application of knowledge, and they understand how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research. They are able to deal with complex issues - both systematically and creatively, and they show originality in tackling and solving problems. They have the qualities needed for employment in circumstances requiring sound judgement, personal responsibility and initiative in complex and unpredictable professional environments.

b) Master's degrees are awarded after completion of taught courses, courses of research or a mixture of both. Longer, research-based courses may lead to the degree of MPhil. The learning outcomes of most master's degree courses are achieved on the basis of study equivalent to at least one full-time calendar year and are taken by graduates with a bachelor's degree with honours (or equivalent achievement).

c) Master's degrees are often distinguished from other qualifications at this framework level (for example, advanced short courses, which often form parts of continuing professional development courses and lead to postgraduate certificates and/or postgraduate diplomas) by an increased intensity, complexity and density of study. Master's degrees, in comparison to postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas, typically include planned intellectual progression that often includes a synoptic/research or scholarly activity.

d) Some master's degrees - for example, in science, engineering and mathematics - comprise an integrated course of study spanning several levels. Such courses typically involve study equivalent to at least four full-time academic years in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and five in Scotland. Of this, study equivalent to at least one full-time academic year is at Level 7 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS and the final outcomes of the qualifications themselves meet the expectations of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS in full. Study at bachelor's level is integrated with study at master's level and the courses are designed to meet the qualification descriptors in full at Level 6 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 10 on the FQHEIS as well as those at Level 7 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 of the

FQHEIS. Such qualifications are often termed 'integrated master's' as an acknowledgement of the prior period of study at lower levels (which typically meets the expectations of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 6/Level 10).

e) First degrees in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science comprise an integrated course of study and professional practice spanning several levels. While the final outcomes of the qualifications themselves typically meet the expectations of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7/Level 11, these qualifications may often retain, for historical reasons, titles of Bachelor of Medicine or Bachelor of Surgery; Bachelor of Dental Surgery; Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine or Bachelor of Veterinary Science, and are abbreviated to MBChB or BM BS, BDS, BVetMed and BVSc respectively. The use of the title 'Dr' by medical doctors is a historical abbreviation for the profession; it does not indicate a qualification at doctoral level (Level 8 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 12 on the FQHEIS).

f) In Scotland, a small number of universities (Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh and St Andrews - the Scottish Ancients) have a long tradition of labelling certain undergraduate academic degrees as Master of Arts 'MA'. This title reflects historic Scottish custom and practice; there is no implication that the outcomes of the courses are at SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS. These courses are at SCQF Level 9 or 10 on the FQHEIS.

g) The Master of Arts (MA) awards granted by the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge are not academic qualifications. The MA is normally granted, on application, to graduates of these universities with a bachelor's degree. No further study or assessment is required, but the recipient may be required to pay a fee. At the University of Oxford, the MA may be granted during or after the twenty-first term from matriculation, and at the University of Cambridge, the MA may be granted six years after the end of the first term.