

Induction and appointment of external examiners

Selection of external examiners

Potential external examiners are generally identified and approached by academic colleagues, on the understanding that those who teach on a module or course are well placed to identify appropriate externals (through networking, conference attendance, etc.). Academic colleagues make nominations to Faculty in September/October each year, and external examiners are therefore officially appointed by the Faculty (under delegated powers of the Senate).

Externals who are invited to examine for Liverpool are required to provide evidence of their general suitability for the role via submission of a current CV (and eligibility to work in the UK through a copy of their passport). This ensures that they meet [QAA expectations](#), and are appropriately qualified to take on the role. However, the QAA guidance focuses mainly on the required knowledge and experience of potential examiners, while academic colleagues also report basing their decisions, at least partly, on who they believe might also have the interpersonal skills and right approach to do the job effectively.

These skills include:

- An ability to be constructively critical
- A collaborative approach to the task
- The ability to take a developmental approach to the role
- A supportive, helpful attitude
- The ability to be tactful and/or diplomatic in interactions with academic and support staff

How opinions and views are expressed is a critical part of the process. Knowing how and when to give feedback, and how to give feedback in ways that are likely to be accepted and made use of, are important qualities of being an effective External Examiner

Guide to the Process of Academic External Examining (HEA, 2005)

Academics who are looking to appoint external examiners also report that they consider:

- Whether the person is likely to have empathy for the approach to learning and teaching that is taken in the department
- Whether s/he has other roles or responsibilities that might prevent him/her from carrying out the external role effectively and efficiently (such as being an assessment officer in his/her home institution, being a Dean or other senior manager or being an external at several other institutions – each of these roles may mean that a person is, in effect, too busy to carry out their external examiner duties).
- The extent to which the potential examiner is likely to be realistic when making recommendations for improvement. Externals may not, for instance, fully realise the implications of the recommendations that they are making, or may raise issues that are more appropriately addressed by an accrediting Professional Body rather than the specific department or institution.

A recent HEA Report also highlights ‘assessment literacy’ as a key skill for an effective external examiner: “for example, how aware they are of the complex influences on their standards and

judgement processes, how well they understand the provenance of their own standards and the influence of their background and experience; how strong is the temptation to draw largely on their experience as an indicator of what standards should be rather than recognising the potential bias in that approach, and how aware are examiners of the influence of a particular context, student body, or professional experience?" ([A review of external examining arrangements across the UK](#), HEA, 2015)

Appointment of external examiners

External examiners are generally appointed for a **maximum tenure of four years** (although, in exceptional circumstances, the department can apply for an extension of one further year) and are re-appointed annually during that time. Nominations are made during September and October, and Faculties must confirm appointments by 31st October. External examiners who are being re-appointed will have their details rolled over during the summer.

At the end of the period of appointment, externals are asked to comment on their tenure as a whole in a specific part of the annual report form.

Once they are appointed, external examiners will receive an e-mail confirming the appointment and containing their **HERMES** log-in details (note that externals who are reappointed will receive new HERMES log-in details which they must use for that year's work). HERMES (Handling External examiner Reports, Maintenance of appointments, and Expense claim Submissions) is the workflow system that the University of Liverpool uses to manage all aspects of the external examining process for taught provision. Externals must submit their annual report via the system, using the template available. A series of FAQs about the HERMES system is available on the [Student Administration and Support Division](#) website along with a [User Guide for External examiners](#).

External examiners will also submit their expenses claim through HERMES (the University cannot accept invoices from businesses or individuals for external examining work), and use the system to view official departmental responses to their reports.

Depending on how they are to receive and review documentation, some externals might also receive log-in details for other University of Liverpool systems, including VITAL (Liverpool's version of Blackboard), for which externals will need a University of Liverpool staff username and password, and/or VOCAL (Liverpool's version of SharePoint). Access to these systems will be arranged, where necessary, by host departments.

Names of external examiners are made available to students on the [external examiner directory](#), but students are reminded that they should not contact examiners directly. In the unlikely event that a student does contact the external with a complaint, the external has several potential courses of action depending on the nature and seriousness of the complaint. Generally, the external would be encouraged not to get involved, but to refer the student back to the department or to the University of Liverpool [complaints procedure](#). However, if the external deems it appropriate, s/he might use the normal channels for reporting concerns or issues open to externals (i.e. raising the complaint with the department as part of the consultation and reporting process, writing in confidence to the VC and/or raising the issue with the QAA)

Induction and preparation

Induction practices for new external examiners vary across the University (and across the Higher Education Sector as a whole). Some schools and departments provide an induction where externals

are introduced to staff, given an overview of the department and programme and given the opportunity to ask questions. Other schools will provide some (or all) of these opportunities when externals attend for Board meetings. It is often the case that externals have some informal contact with the academic who suggested their appointment and/or the module or programme leader, although this is not always the case. External examiners often claim that they learn(ed) about the role from observing other externals at work, although some also report having learned about the role from engagement with learning and teaching networks (HEA report (June 2015)). There is also an [external examiners Jisc mailing list](#) – this is often used to recruit externals, but is also a forum for discussion around the practice of external examining.

Whether or not a formal induction to the role is offered, externals should expect to have (and contact the department if they don't have):

- a named contact from within the School or department's administrative team who they can direct queries to
- a timeline or set of key dates so that they know when work will need to be carried out (including when examination papers have to be returned, when Board Meetings will be held and when the annual report must be submitted). This helps externals to plan their workload at a time when they will inevitably be busy with assessment in their home institution
- access to, or copies of, relevant paperwork that will help to set the module or programme in context so that externals can get a good sense of what the teaching team is trying to achieve. Annexe 1 of [Appendix H of the University's Code of Practice on Assessment](#) contains a checklist of documentation that external examiners should be provided with – externals may wish to check that they have received all of the relevant materials.

In addition to the paperwork suggested by the Code of Practice, external examiners may wish to gather other evidence on which to base their decisions and recommendations. For instance, external examiners may wish to request access to:

- Reports provided by previous external examiners (and the departmental responses)
- Exam Board minutes
- Other information that is given to students and/or model answers.
- Course participants – examiners are often given the opportunity to meet with some students or participants to get their view of the course.

Newly appointed external examiners should feel free to contact their host school or department if they have any queries about the workload, timeline or tasks and responsibilities associated with the role. More general questions about, for instance, the HERMES system or payment of fees and expenses, should be directed to the Student Administration and Support Division via their external examiners e-mail address: extexam@liv.ac.uk

Ending the contract

Most external examiner contracts will be renewed annually and come to an end after a four year tenure. However, there may be certain circumstances in which either the external or the University will wish to end the contract before the period of tenure is up (information on the process of termination of the contract by the University is available in section 6 of [Appendix H of the University's Code of Practice on Assessment](#)). Where the examiner wishes to end the contract early, it is better if the current examiner is able to complete the cycle up to and including submission of the annual report. This makes it much easier for a new external to step into the role. Where this is not possible, it is clearly helpful for the external to remain in contact with the department so that alternative arrangements can be made.

External examiners are invited to comment on their tenure as a whole in their final annual report, and this is an opportunity to offer an overview of the development of the module or programme over the last four (or five) years. It also offers out-going externals the opportunity to comment on their experience, and to make any final recommendations for things that might be changed in order to help the next examiner.