

## Subject External Examiners: Information, Support and Engagement with the University

In order to discharge the responsibilities of a Subject External Examiner at Sheffield Hallam University, information and support will be available and External Examiners will be engaged in the following ways -

- **Appointment, agreement and acceptance of role**

Initial contact with an External Examiner will normally be made by a member of academic staff who is responsible for the awards/modules/subject area for which the appointment is sought. The External Examiner responsibilities and these engagement processes may be provided for information, prior to, or along with an appointment form for completion.

The area of provision under the External Examiners duties, details of collaborative partners where appropriate, Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body responsibilities, appointment dates and fee will all be detailed on the appointment form. External Examiners are asked to agree these during completion of the form. It is worth noting that modules that do not contribute for the highest award for which the students are registered are not routinely sent to External Examiners for moderation, although External Examiners may be asked for advice regarding these modules.

The appointment form is reviewed against the QAA criteria and receives final approval from the University Head of Academic Quality and Standards. Upon appointment, the University will send the following information -

- an appointment letter that provides the External Examiners website address, an invitation to a University induction event, and details of UK Border Agency verification requirement
- the approved appointment form
- the External Examiner responsibilities
- Information, Support and Engagement with the University (this document)
- the previous External Examiner's Annual Report where available

Any changes to the appointment, e.g. additional duties, extension to appointment, will be done via amendments to the appointment form, then agreed with the External Examiner and approved by the University as set out above.

In case of queries or concerns, contact details for the [Senior Quality Officer \(External Examiners\)](#), Academic Quality and Standards will be included on the appointment letter and are provided at the end of this document.

- **The External Examiners website**

The External Examiners [website](#) is a resource provided for University staff and External Examiners. Information will include -

- Academic Quality Framework online guide
- Blank appointment forms
- Annual Report template
- Responsibilities of External Examiners
- Information, Support and Engagement with the University (this document)
- Induction information
- Contact details

The website will also link to -

- University vision statement
- Academic Calendar
- Standard University Assessment Regulations

- University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy
- Form to claim fees and expenses
- Operation of Assessment Boards
- Quality Assurance Agency
- Higher Education Academy handbook for External Examining
- UK Visas and Immigration - Preventing Illegal Working

Please contact the [Senior Quality Officer \(External Examiners\)](#), Academic Quality and Standards, if you have any queries or suggestions for the website.

- **Publication of External Examiner details for students**

The identity and current position of External Examiners will be published for students, normally via module Blackboard sites for on-site provision, and via student handbooks for students studying with collaborative partners. Along with this, there will be a statement for students, making it clear that it would be inappropriate for students to make direct contact with External Examiners. Students will be directed to formal mechanisms for engaging in the quality processes.

External Examiners should refer any direct contact received from a student to the University or Collaborative Partner. Any concerns should be raised with the [Senior Quality Officer \(External Examiners\)](#), Academic Quality and Standards.

- **Verification of eligibility to work in the UK**

Under the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006, the University has a legal obligation to check that all potential employees have eligibility to work in the UK and that they have continued eligibility for the duration of their employment. By making these checks, the University can be sure it does not break the law by employing illegal workers.

External Examiners must present original documents as specified by the UKVI at their Induction and before any work is undertaken.

- **Attendance at Induction**

University Induction events will be held at several times throughout the year. External Examiners will be invited to an event via appointment letters and followed up with further details as arrangements are made. External Examiners should attend an event prior to the commencement of their duties, if an External Examiner cannot make the first available event, they will be invited to future events. External Examiners will have access to all information via the [External Examiners website](#).

University induction events will include -

- roles and responsibilities of being an External Examiner at the University
- standard assessment regulations
- operation of assessment boards
- verification of assessment tools
- case studies for group discussion

Induction will also provide an opportunity for each External Examiner to meet a University academic colleague for the provision, along with the collaborative partner where possible. During this meeting, the following information will be provided -

- course/ module descriptors, marking criteria, and professional considerations e.g. fitness to practice, as necessary
- assessment schedule
- method to be used for moderation of student work - e.g. Blackboard, on-site visit
- processes and guidance for visiting collaborative partners, and/or placement sites, and/or meeting students can be discussed as required

Exceptionally, an individual induction could be arranged to suit the External Examiner's requirements.

If an External Examiner is unable to attend an induction event prior to the commencement of duties, the University will advise them to read the information via the [External Examiner website](#), and the particular course and module information will be provided in advance.

If an External Examiner is new to the role, a range of additional support is available, for example it may be possible to arrange for the External Examiner to -

- observe a Subject Assessment Board
- review previous annual reports and/or moderation comments with the outgoing External Examiner
- be mentored by an experienced External Examiner

During induction, many opportunities will be provided where questions and concerns can be answered, however if questions remain after the event, they should be raised with the [Senior Quality Officer \(External Examiners\)](#), Academic Quality and Standards.

- **Access to Blackboard**

Shortly after induction and UKVI verification, a Blackboard account will be created and individual user ids and passwords will be emailed to each External Examiner. The SHU member of staff responsible for individual Blackboard sites will then contact the External Examiner to explain what use will be made of Blackboard and will enrol the External Examiner to sites as necessary.

Queries regarding your account details should be directed to the [Administrator \(Quality\)](#), Academic Quality and Standards. Queries regarding access to the Blackboard sites should be directed to the academic contact.

- **Verification of coursework and exam assessment instruments**

Verification of assessment instruments (coursework or practical briefs and examination questions) ensures that their form and content are appropriate and valid in terms of:

- quality, standards and use of Plain English,
- assessment of learning outcomes,
- syllabus coverage,
- level of challenge,
- fairness to students.

The operation of the verification of assessment instruments is managed by the University Examination Service. Verification is carried out via a SharePoint site, rather than sent to External Examiners via email.

#### Accessing assessment documents via SharePoint

- When all the modules for which an External Examiner is responsible are ready for verification, the academic lead will send the External Examiner an email to advise that the assessment tasks are ready for review.
- The email will contain:
  - guidance documentation containing full instructions on the process
  - a link to the relevant module assessments on the University's SharePoint site
  - a feedback form to record your comments relating to the assessments
- External Examiners should use their existing Blackboard user id and password to access the assessment tasks on SharePoint.

#### Reviewing assessment documents

- The SharePoint site will contain a list of modules that are ready for review
- External Examiners should select the module they wish to review, review the assessments and any supporting documentation, and complete the feedback form
- Return the completed feedback form to [shuverification@shu.ac.uk](mailto:shuverification@shu.ac.uk) within **two weeks**. If External Examiners are unable to meet this deadline, they are asked to please let the University Examination Service know so that a revised deadline can be agreed.
- The feedback form is passed on to the module leader(s) concerned, who review External Examiner comments and make any necessary amendments to the assessments
- Any response from the module leader is held on SharePoint along with the final assessments

If you have any queries regarding the process, please contact the Assessment, Awards and Regulations team via [shuverification@shu.ac.uk](mailto:shuverification@shu.ac.uk) or on 0114 225 3079.

For collaborative provision for registered students, liaison and the verification of all assessment tools will be managed by the collaborative partner, with oversight by the Link Tutor within the Faculty.

- **Moderation of student work**

Moderation of student work is managed by individual academic staff, administration staff or collaborative partner as appropriate. Contact details and methods of viewing work will vary depending on the External Examiners nature of appointment and subject area; this can be discussed during the induction meeting between the External Examiner and University academic staff. Methods for viewing work include Blackboard, email, post, drop box, and on-site.

A schedule of when to expect work will be provided at the beginning of the academic year, and where possible 3 weeks will be allowed for external moderation. Samples for external moderation are based on 3 per band (including fails), or 10%, whichever is the greater. Where a student's assessed work is the unique product of the student's research or creativity, or where there is a specific professional body need, each student's work should be seen by the External Examiner.

The role of moderation is to -

- confirm module mark sets
- make recommendations for the further internal moderation of module marks
- recommend adjustments to whole mark sets

Where it is impractical for External Examiners to receive student's assessed work, e.g. for presentations or performances, an agreement should be made between the academic contact and External Examiner for the most appropriate method of reviewing the assessment process and the outcome of the students' work.

Concerns regarding moderation should be directed to the academic contact, or collaborative partner, and a number of options will be discussed, for example an External Examiner may request to see a larger sample of work. It will be agreed whether the concerns need to be addressed before final decisions regarding marking are made

Queries regarding contact details should be raised with the [Senior Quality Officer \(External Examiners\)](#), Academic Quality and Standards.

- **Placement visits where appropriate and/or meetings with students**

Visits to placement locations and/or meetings between External Examiners and students may be valuable in enabling External Examiners either to gain a deeper understanding of module(s) and/or to explore further the operation of particular methods of assessment.

Placement visits should be discussed with the University academic contact, possibly during the induction meeting. Arrangements to meet students, if required, should be made through the academic contact, or collaborative partner. Contact details will vary depending on the nature of appointment and the External Examiner's subject area.

The purpose of these meetings is to gain student feedback on modules, course and experience. It would not be appropriate to discuss individual people and/or assessments.

**NB:** External Examiners on Nursing and Midwifery, and Teacher Education programmes are required to visit practice every year and include a review of their findings within their report.

Queries regarding contact details should be raised with the [Senior Quality Officer \(External Examiners\)](#), Academic Quality and Standards.

- **Attendance at Subject Assessment Boards**

Subject Assessment Boards are managed by the Board Secretary who will be part of the Student Administration Teams in Assessment, Awards and Regulations, or collaborative partner and contact details will vary. External Examiners are expected to attend Assessment Boards and invitations will be sent with as much notice as possible. Also, External Examiners are sent information in relation to all Boards for comment.

Subject Assessment Boards will focus on the verification of module marks and results. The role of the Subject Assessment Board is to -

- confirm that all modules have been delivered according to the module descriptor
- confirm that internal and external moderation has taken place and verify students' marks
- receive Academic Conduct (ACP) and Extenuating Circumstances (ECP) decisions
- have responsibility for confirming overall module results (these cannot be changed at the ratification stage)

At the end of the Board, the External Examiner will be asked to endorse the decisions made; this will be noted in the minutes, along with whether the decisions are final or are to be taken to a higher Body. If the External Examiner does not endorse the decisions of the Board, the minutes will record the reasons and what action is to be taken next. A particular reason for this is to ensure that the consequences are understood for students whose marks are being considered. Student Administration Teams will inform students if there is to be any delay in finalising and communicating their results.

External Examiners do not have the power to ask for alterations to be made to marks for individual students.

During the visit to attend a Subject Assessment Board, there will also be the opportunity for External Examiners and academic contacts to discuss the operation of the modules. The outcomes of these discussions will inform the annual module review and will be documented on the Module Review form by the Module Leader. Module Leaders are required to complete a Module Review each year form not later than two weeks after the relevant Subject Assessment Board.

Queries regarding contact details should be raised with the [Senior Quality Officer \(External Examiners\)](#), Academic Quality and Standards.



- **Submission of an annual report**

Annual reports should be submitted electronically to the [Senior Quality Officer \(External Examiners\)](#), Academic Quality and Standards. Reports should normally be submitted within 1 month of the main Subject Assessment Board, using the standard template available through the External Examiner website. The University will email External Examiners with a reminder; however it is the responsibility of the External Examiner to submit their annual report.

External Examiners should note that annual reports will be made available to students and for that reason, individual staff and students should not be named. All students will have access to the summaries of reports and students can request to see individual annual reports.

The University will acknowledge the receipt of an annual report, and circulate it to relevant University staff in Faculties, Academic Quality and Standards and collaborative partners for consideration. Responses to the reports will be returned to the External Examiner as soon as possible and normally within 6 weeks of circulation to University colleagues. The University will also submit annual reports to Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies as required.

The University will summarise annual reports and the responses, these will be published for:

- Faculty consideration
- University consideration, including informing the Institutional Profile
- collaborative partner consideration, where relevant
- students to access, via the Students Union Blackboard site and via Collaborative Partners
- student representatives to discuss at staff/student meetings

Actions arising from annual reports will be taken forward through the University's annual module and course review process. External Examiner reports will also be considered as part of the University's Departmental Periodic Review process. External Examiners will have the opportunity in their annual report to indicate whether they are satisfied that issues they have previously raised have been addressed.

External Examiners should also note that failure to submit a complete annual report will result in non-payment of their fee.

Any queries should be raised with the [Senior Quality Officer \(External Examiners\)](#), Academic Quality and Standards.

- **External Examiner as a 'Critical Friend' of the course team**

The External Examiner's role as a 'critical friend' to the course team is an important part of the review and development of provision. Ongoing dialogue between the course team and External Examiner may take place throughout the year. In particular, the course team may consult Examiners during course planning and preparation for re-approval of the provision, and for example, the External Examiner may be invited to a meeting of the course planning team.

- **Payment of fees and expenses**

The University operates a fee schedule (implemented from September 2012) based on the number of modules under an External Examiner's responsibility, attendance at Subject Assessment Boards, any collaborative nature of the provision, and submission of the annual report. Individual fees are set out in the appointment form and agreed by the External Examiner during completion and approval of the form. The total payment includes the fee plus holiday pay (based on 12.07% of the fee).

Claims for expenses should be made within 3 months of the expense being incurred. Claims for fees should be made annually and can be submitted along with, or following, the submission of the annual report, however all claims must be received within 3 months of the main Subject

Assessment Board. The University will email External Examiners with a reminder to claim fees and expenses; however it is the responsibility of the External Examiner to make a claim for payment. All claims must be submitted using the University's standard claim form which will be available, along with guidance, via the External Examiner web site.

Claims for fees and expenses may be submitted electronically or by hard copy. Claims for expenses must be accompanied by receipts, either original receipts or scanned copies will be accepted. All claims should be submitted to the Administrator (Quality), see the end of the document for contact details, and the receipt of the claim will be acknowledged.

Claims for expenses only will be processed upon receipt and payment will normally be within 2 weeks. Claims which include a fee and are received and processed by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month will be paid on the 18<sup>th</sup> of the following month. Payment of fees will only be made following receipt of a complete annual report.

External Examiners are considered as workers for tax purposes. The University has an obligation to make sure all workers pay tax, therefore the University will deduct tax at source.

The only exception to the above process is for those External Examiners who are self-employed and submit an invoice for payment of the gross amount to a Limited Company. In this case, the University defers its responsibilities and expects that the Limited Company will be concerned with the payment of tax.

Any queries should be raised with the [Administrator \(Quality\)](#), Academic Quality and Standards.

- **Current External Examiner details**

External Examiners are asked to provide their preferred contact details on the appointment form and confirm these on the annual report. External Examiners whose details have changed, including change of employment or other details, at any other time are asked to notify the [Senior Quality Officer \(External Examiners\)](#), Academic Quality and Standards. This allows the University to:

- ensure student work is submitted to the correct address
- ensure External Examiners receive important communication sent from the University
- check whether the change results in any conflicts of interests that must be addressed
- ensure the details provided for students are correct

- **Submission of written comments if required in connection with student appeals or complaints**

The advice of an External Examiner may be sought either during the investigation of a student complaint or appeal, or as part of the review of the student case if the appeal is admitted and referred back to the Subject Assessment Board. If the assistance of an External Examiner is required, they will be contacted by a member of the Student Administration Team. It should be noted that this would be a rare occurrence.

- **External Examiners have the right to raise any matter of serious concern with University Vice-Chancellor**

If an External Examiner has serious concerns that can't be satisfied through normal processes, or where an External Examiner deems it necessary to name an individual member of staff, they have the opportunity to submit a separate confidential written report. The report should be submitted to the University Vice-Chancellor, via the address at the end of this document.

The University will provide a considered and timely response, outlining any actions that will be taken as a result. Also appropriate staff and/or student representatives will be informed of the implications of any confidential report, or the action arising from such a report.

The normal annual report should also be submitted containing matters not deemed confidential.

Queries regarding this should be directed to the [Senior Quality Officer \(External Examiners\)](#), Academic Quality and Standards.

- **External Examiners who have a serious concern relating to systematic failings with the academic standards of provision and have exhausted all published applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the University Vice-Chancellor, may invoke the QAA's concerns scheme or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body**

External Examiners are referred to the QAA's concerns scheme: guidance for External Examiners, noting that recourse to the scheme will only take place in cases where internal mechanisms for following up concerns have been exhausted.

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/concerns/pages/default.aspx>

- **External Examiner appointments can be terminated at any time, subject to approved institutional procedures, for failure by the External Examiner to fulfil his/her obligations or if a conflict of interest arises which cannot satisfactorily be resolved.**

The importance of the role of the External Examiner in contributing to the University's management of quality and standards means that any failure to fulfil the role is viewed seriously by the University. Efforts will be made to encourage engagement between External Examiner and the University as set out above. However if failure occurs then action, including early termination of the contract where appropriate, will be taken. In particular, the failure to attend Subject Assessment Boards without making exceptional alternative arrangements, the failure to submit moderation comments within the appropriate timescale, the failure to submit annual reports, or the provision of incomplete annual reports may be appropriate grounds for early termination.

Terminations may also be required following a change to the provision; examples include the closure of a course, or the realignment of modules to subject areas.

A conflict of interest may arise during an External Examiner's term of office. Where this cannot be resolved, normal practice is for the External Examiner to resign. However, as a last resort, the University may terminate the appointment in order to protect the independence of its External Examining arrangements.

Termination is not restricted to a particular time period, e.g. the end of an academic year. If a termination is deemed appropriate, the University will write to the External Examiner, clearly outlining the reasons for the termination. Decisions will be based on sound evidence and approved by the Head of Academic Quality and Standards.

Queries should be directed to the [Senior Quality Officer \(External Examiners\)](#), Academic Quality and Standards.



**External Examiners will have regular contact with University and collaborative partner staff, many of these will vary depending on the particular subject area and nature of appointment. The following is a list of contacts that will be required by all External Examiners.**

- The External Examiners website (contact details can also be found here)  
<http://extra.shu.ac.uk/sas/quality/ExternalExaminers.html>

- Naomi Hardy, **Senior Quality Officer (External Examiners)**  
Academic Quality and Standards  
[n.hardy@shu.ac.uk](mailto:n.hardy@shu.ac.uk) and 0114 225 4307

- Ruth Feather, **Administrator (Quality)**  
Academic Quality and Standards  
[r.feather@shu.ac.uk](mailto:r.feather@shu.ac.uk) and 0114 225 4836  
Sheffield Hallam University, Academic Quality and Standards,  
Oneleven Building,  
City Campus,  
Sheffield,  
S1 1WB

- University Examination Service  
Assessment, Awards and Regulations  
[shuverification@shu.ac.uk](mailto:shuverification@shu.ac.uk)  
0114 225 3079

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