



Scope

The policy is intended to provide a framework for the management of External Examiners and includes:

- Nomination
- Responsibilities
- Contribution to Quality Assurance and Enhancement

During the transition away from UAL and to awarding Ravensbourne awards this policy should be read in conjunction with Appendix 1

Regulation: N/A

Aligned to: Revised UK Quality Code and UK Quality Code - Advice and Guidance External Expertise, November 2018

Date approved/re-approved:

16 February 2017, re-approved with amendments on 25 June 2020.

Date for review To be reviewed every 5 years by Academic Board

Approved by: Academic Board

To be read in conjunction with:

- Assessment Regulations
- Annual Course Monitoring Policy
- Changes to Validated Courses

Document Owner: Quality

Ravensbourne External Examiner Policy

1) BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Quality Code (May 2018) requires universities to seek external, impartial and independent academic and/or professional expertise in ensuring that the standards and quality of their courses are appropriate, comparable with those of other universities and in line with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), Subject Benchmark Statements, Characteristics Statements and any relevant Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements.

Guiding Principle 2 in the *UK Quality Code - Advice and Guidance on External Expertise, November 2018* requires universities to 'engage independent external examiners to comment impartially and informatively on academic standards, student achievement and assessment processes for provision that leads to the award of credit or a qualification'.

Ravensbourne has put this policy in place to ensure 'processes for the nomination, approval and engagement of external examiners' (Guiding Principle 3) which are clear and transparent and are accessible to students, staff and other stakeholders (Guiding Principle 4). Ravensbourne seeks to ensure external examiners are supported effectively to fully understand and appropriately fulfill the roles set out in Section 3 below (Guiding Principle 5) and effective mechanisms are in place to respond to their reports and take action as appropriate (Guiding Principle 5).

External Examiners

External examiners are experienced academics from other institutions who offer an independent assessment of academic standards and the quality of assessment at Ravensbourne. In line with the expectations of *UK Quality Code - Advice and Guidance on External Expertise, November 2018*, External examiners 'will have sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers, and where appropriate, professional peers'.

They should have knowledge and experience of delivering the standards relevant to the award on which they are external examining in other UK institutions as well as those set out in the QAA FHEQ, Characteristics Statements, Subject Benchmark Statements, and any Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) requirements relevant to the course.

Ravensbourne University London makes scrupulous use of external examiners by appointing at least one external examiner to all higher education provision offered from a recognised academic institution. The responsibilities of external examiners are set out in Section 3 below.

Industry External Examiners

It is noted that given the industry focussed nature of Ravensbourne's provision it

may be desirable to appoint external examiner from industry and this will always be in addition to an academic examiner and in the case of courses with PSRB requirements, a strong understanding of the relevant body's expectations would also be expected. The responsibilities of industry external examiners do not differ in any respect from those of other external examiners as set out in Section 3 below.

Lead External Examiners

For courses with more than one external examiner Ravensbourne will appoint a Lead External Examiner, who will be an experienced academic from other institution.

The Latter carry additional responsibilities in addition to those of normal appointees. In summary, a Lead External Examiner leads a team of external examiners and takes an overview of Ravensbourne's assessment and quality assurance systems across the provision for which they are appointed. When dealing with awards holding prescription or accreditation by a PSRB, the Lead External Examiner takes a critical overview of the adequacy of these systems and makes recommendations for their improvement. The additional responsibilities of Lead External Examiners are set out in Section 3 below.

Collaborative Provision and Multiples Modes

Ravensbourne will have responsibility for appointing external examiners for any collaborative or partnership provision in line with this policy. Consideration will be given in the set up of external examining systems for provision which is comparable to provision delivered directly for comparison of cohorts across location and provider.

Similar arrangements will be put in place when more than one mode is in operation (for instance accelerated, part-time, or online).

2) CRITERIA FOR APPOINTMENT, NOMINATION, AND TENURE

Due attention must be paid to the relevant expertise of potential external examiners is required before nomination and appointment.

The ideal candidate for nomination as an external examiner will have evidence of the meeting the following criteria:

- A high degree of competence and experience in the fields covered by the course of study, or parts thereof, and have a good understanding of the UK higher education sector, including the requirements and standards of the relevant (Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body) PSRB;
- The necessary academic experience and subject knowledge to assess threshold standards and achievement beyond the threshold level consistently. When a course(s) is prescribed or accredited by a PSRB, the examiner must be competent to identify the threshold standards, criteria and requirements of the relevant bodies;
- Appropriate experience in course design and student assessment at the level of the award to enable them to identify good practice and to recommend enhancements to the assessment process and enable informed course modification;
- Experience in acting as an external examiner, or are supported by the provider in undertaking their duties, for example, through training and

mentoring;

- Impartiality of judgement and be wholly independent of the provider and its staff (including the governing body), and any relevant partners
- Do not personally benefit from any student outcomes, nor have any connection to any student being assessed
- Sufficient experience in quality assurance to enable them to discharge their role effectively
- When a course(s) is prescribed or accredited by a (PSRB), it is expected that the nominee must have relevant experience in teaching, assessing and ideally examining of provision with the same accreditation or prescription.
- Comply with all relevant employment legislation, including any relating to safeguarding and UKVI, as appropriate,

Nomination

The Course Leader or equivalent should identify a suitable candidate for nomination who meets the criteria above seeking the support of their Programme Director or equivalent if necessary. If for some reason, the Course Leader and Programme Director are finding it difficult to identify a candidate then the support of Quality should be sought who may be able to seek help via relevant networks and bodies.

Nominations should be submitted on the relevant pro-forma to Quality by the Course Leader or curriculum lead. Nominations must be approved by the Programme Director or equivalent prior to submission to Quality.

Quality will scrutinize the suitability of the nomination against the criteria above, and identify any conflicts of interest (see below) prior to submission to the relevant Board of Studies. In exceptional cases, where the Board of Studies cannot agree on a nomination, it will refer the nomination to the next meeting of the Academic Board for their consideration. For collaborative provision the Board of Studies with relevant subject knowledge for the course will consider the nomination.

When a nomination is approved, the external examiner will be invited to participate in the relevant induction event.

Tenure and Cover

Ravensbourne's external examiners tenures last for four academic years. In the final year of appointment a replacement external examiner will be appointed to allow an element of continuity and to widen the pool of potential external examiners to include those without prior external examining experience. This is seen as beneficial to Ravensbourne given the specialist nature of its provision.

Ravensbourne will monitor the diversity of the external examiners appointed with the expectation that examiners appointed will reflect the diversity of the communities served by the University.

It is recommended that bigger courses (such as with more than 100 student cohorts), would nominate and appoint additional external examiner(s). In such cases, one external examiner should be designated a Lead External Examiner, who will undertake the additional responsibilities which are set out in the section 3 below.

Conflict of interest

A Conflict of Interest is a situation in which the aims, concerns or motivations of two different parties may be incompatible. If there is reason to believe that there are factors which might impinge on their impartiality or critical distance as an external examiner then they should not be nominated and cannot be

appointed. Below is a non-exhaustive list of circumstances which represent conflicts of interest and in which appointment cannot be made:

- a member of a governing body or committee of the appointing body or one of its partners, delivery organisations or support providers, or a current employee of the appointing body or one of its partners, delivery organisations or support providers
- anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the course
- anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the course
- anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the course
- anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme(s) or units in question
- former staff or students of the higher education provider unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s)
- a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another higher education provider
- the succession of an external examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home department and provider
- the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same higher education provider.

If there are any queries regarding the nomination of an external examiner, advice should be sought from the Quality Office.

A conflict of Interest may arise during the tenure of an external examiner and that will necessitate a termination of tenure and the appointment of a new external examiner.

Change in circumstances

It is the responsibility of the external examiner to update the Quality Office with a change in details as soon as possible, such as their contact information, and particularly if the change in circumstances may result in a conflict of interest.

Extension/Re-approval

As stated above, external examiners are appointed for a term of 4 academic years. In exceptional cases their appointment may be extended to allow continuity or running out of a course (usually up to a maximum of two years). These extensions will be reported to the Board of Studies on the relevant proforma.

Following the end of their tenure, external examiners will not be reappointed to the same course or another offered by Ravensbourne until five years have elapsed.

Termination of appointment

During an external examiner's tenure their appointment can be terminated by either party – the external examiner can email to resign their appointment to the Quality Office.

Ravensbourne expects external examiners to fulfil their duties as laid out in this policy and in their contract of employment with the institution. Should an external examiner fail to fulfil their duties, Ravensbourne will take the following action depending on the extent of the failure:

- Minor - Ravensbourne will write to the examiner to remind them of their duties, and if necessary invite the external examiner to the relevant induction. Examples of minor failures include non-attendance at the Exam Board
- Major – Ravensbourne will consider the impact of the failure and where necessary, write to the external examiner to inform them of the termination of their contract. Examples of major failures include non-submission of the external examiner report.

Where a Course Leader is concerned about an external examiner fulfilling their duties, they should raise their concerns with a member of the Quality Office.

External examiners may not normally hold more than two concurrent external examiner appointments at one time.

3) RESPONSIBILITIES

External Examiners

Ravensbourne expects its external examiners to provide comment and recommendations upon whether or not:

- The degree-awarding body is maintaining the threshold academic standards (pass) set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable Subject Benchmark Statements
- The profile for student attainment beyond the threshold level is reasonably comparable with those achieved in other Universities (ie those achieving higher grades or classification)
- The assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcome of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the degree awarding body's policies and regulations
- The academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK degree-awarding bodies of which the external examiners have experience
- Specifically when applicable, the threshold standards, criteria and requirements of the relevant PSRBs were met by the students on a course that is accredited or prescribed by PSRB.

This is achieved through the submission of an annual report on the relevant pro-forma which will offer comment on good practice and innovation relating to learning and teaching & assessment as observed and opportunities to improve or enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students. If there are multiple modes then comment should be made on the equivalency of standards and outcomes across these modes.

This report should be submitted at the end of the academic year and as soon as possible following the Assessment Board.

Lead External Examiners

In addition to the responsibilities for all external examiners set out above, the Lead External Examiner will lead and develop the external examiner team including:

- Leading the external examiner team
- Mentoring new or inexperienced external examiners;
- Chairing meetings of the external examiners and/or meeting separately with each of them;
- Resolving disputes and differences of opinion between external examiners;
- Supporting and advising the internal examiners in ensuring that all external examiners have sufficient information and access to perform their duties
- Ensuring clarity and consistency for the external examiner team in relation threshold standards and grading as well
- Ensuring that there is absolute clarity and consistency about how external examiners ensure that PSRB criteria are met by candidates and how external examiners confirm, evidence and report that.

Lead External Examiners are expected to confirm that the criteria of relevant PSRB have been met, the Lead External Examiner will also produce a report with a specific focus on students meeting the PSRB criteria, explaining and confirming whether students had met the criteria and on what basis that this view was formed.

All External examiners will be able to comment and provide recommendations on the above through their involvement in the following:

- Assessment Approval

External examiners will be invited to comment on the assessments set for students that contribute towards an award, or higher level of study. This includes project briefs and any examination papers.

- Engagement with students

It is expected that the external examiner will meet with groups of students at all levels to gain an understanding of whether the assessments set are appropriate for the students and also to allow comment on the student experience at Ravensbourne.

The names of the external examiner(s) appointed to each course will be available to students.

External examiners should not discuss an individual student's performance and should a student raise issues of this nature, the external examiner should refer them onto the relevant Course Leader.

- Sampling of student work

The external examiner will usually sample all student work proposed to receive the highest qualification and those who are proposed to have failed, alongside samples of those suggested at all other levels. The amount of work to be sampled will be determined by the Course Leader.

External examiners do not have the right to intervene in the marks awarded to an individual student. However, should they have concerns about the internal marking, they should raise these with the Course Leader at the first relevant opportunity.

The external examiner reserves the right to sample all student work for the year, if appropriate, however, this should only occur in exceptional circumstances.

- Attending the final Assessment Board

External examiners are expected to attend the final assessment board annually and at least one external examiner is required to attend the final Assessment Board in order for it to proceed.

In exceptional cases the external examiner may not attend the Assessment Board, however, they will be required to submit comments in advance of the board. Consistent absence from the Assessment Board can constitute a failure of the examiner to fulfil their duties.

This enables the external examiner to endorse the assessment outcomes for the relevant course, and this is achieved by the external examiner offering a verbal report at the Board and signing the Board Sheet to formally record their agreement.

For Retrieval Boards, normally, the external examiner delegates their responsibility to the Board, unless:

- in exceptional cases, in which case the Board's decision is provisional until the relevant external examiner has been consulted.
- When it is a requirement of a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) that the external examiner reviews all student retrieval work is of a standard meeting the criteria for prescription or accreditation and/or is expected to attend the Retrieval Boards.

Should the external examiner not endorse the assessment outcomes this should be noted in the verbal report and the examiner would not be required to sign the Board Sheet.

- Changes to validated courses

Where there are modifications to validated courses, the Course Leader will request the external examiner to comment on the proposed changes. Their response will be recorded at noted at the relevant Board of Study.

Should an external examiner become aware of serious concerns in the fulfilment of their duties outlined above they should raise them with the Head of the Institution as soon as possible. Examiners are reminded that should their concerns persist after raising them with Ravensbourne, they have recourse to the QAA Concerns scheme.

Response to reports

Ravensbourne's Quality Office will acknowledge receipt of the report and forward it into the relevant Course Leader(s) who will provide an initial response to the examiner.

External examiner reports feed into the Annual Course Monitoring process and each report will have an Action Plan generated by the course(s) which is monitored at the relevant Board of Study. This will be provided to the external examiner once the Action Plan has been completed, and this is usually by the end of the following academic year.

An overarching report is written by the Quality Office and is reported to Academic Board to share cross-departmental issues and good practice.

External examiner reports are available to staff and students via Ravensbourne's intranet.

4) REMUNERATION

External examiners will receive remuneration on completion of their duties for the academic year (that is on submission of their report).

The exact amount will be agreed with the external examiner on their appointment and will take into consideration:

- Number of other examiners for the course
- Cohort size
- Number of visits

Ravensbourne will also cover all reasonable expenses incurred by external examiners in the fulfilment of their duties.