

## **CODE OF PRACTICE: EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

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Quality Assurance & Enhancement Office  
Edinburgh College of Art  
Lauriston Place  
Edinburgh EH3 9DF  
Tel: 0131 2216042  
e-mail: m.sproule@eca.ac.uk**

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### 1 PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINING SYSTEM

- 1.1 The External Examiner system has long been the cornerstone of the College's quality assurance procedures. External Examiners assist in ensuring that the standards of programmes delivered by the College are comparable in standard to those of other equivalent departments in appropriate colleges and universities although their content will differ. They ensure standards in subject areas can be benchmarked across institutions. They also provide an external mechanism for monitoring fair practice in the assessment of student's performance.
- 1.2 External Examiners assist Edinburgh College of Art in the discharge of its duty to ensure the quality and standard of its academic provision. In particular, they provide **eca** with informed and appropriate external reference points for the comparison of academic standards; they offer independent, objective and impartial judgements on a range of matters, and provide professional advice and expertise in the form of findings and reports which contribute to the College's Quality Enhancement process.
- 1.3 Within the context, the External Examining system has three main purposes:
- It assists **eca** in the comparison of academic standards across awards and award elements
  - It verifies that standards are appropriate for the award for which the Examiner takes responsibility
  - It ensures that the assessment process is fair and fairly operated in all parts of the assessment procedure and the classification of student performance.
- 1.4 In order to achieve these purposes External Examiners are required to:
- participate in assessment procedures for the award of degrees
  - arbitrate in problem cases
  - comment and provide advice on assessment procedures.

### 2 SELECTION, QUALIFICATIONS, APPOINTMENT AND PERIOD OF SERVICE OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

- 2.1 The appointment of External Examiners for validated programmes is the responsibility of Schools. Head of Department/Programme Leader and Head of Schools have responsibility for recommending External Examiners to the College for appointment. The Academic Council through its committees has a monitoring role in terms of the appointment of External Examiners by way of approving the appointments.
- 2.2 The Learning and Teaching Board considers nominations in respect of External Examining appointments/re-appointments for undergraduate and the Postgraduate Studies Committee for taught postgraduate degree programmes.

If agreed by the Learning and Teaching Board/Postgraduate Studies Committee, nominations are recommended for approval by the Academic Council and forwarded to the validating universities.

2.3 Scrutiny of External Examiner nominations by the Learning and Teaching Board/Postgraduate Studies Committee should have regard to the following:

- (a) Only persons of sufficient standing with appropriate levels of expertise and experience in relation to the programme to be examined, and, whether drawn from within or outwith higher education, to be able to command respect and authority of their academic colleagues should be appointed.
- (b) Normally s/he should have sufficient recent examining experience, preferably having already acted as an External Examiner, or comparable related experience, to indicate competence in assessing students in the subject area concerned.
- (c) In order to have sufficient time for a thorough and proper performance of functions, it is recommended that no individual should hold more than one External Examiner appointments simultaneously at first degree level. Similar consideration should be given to the existing appointments held by External Examiners nominees for postgraduate degree programmes.
- (d) An External Examiner should not normally be appointed from a department in a university/college where a member of staff from the inviting (Edinburgh College of Art) subject discipline is known to be serving as an examiner. Reciprocity or interlocking of examiner should be avoided. In exceptional circumstances, a case for approval must be made in writing to the Convener of Learning & Teaching Board or Convener of Postgraduate Studies Committee.
- (e) External Examiners for the same programmes should not be drawn sequentially from the same institution. Should exceptions to this be unavoidable, a case for approval must be made in writing to the Convener of Learning & Teaching Board or Convener of Postgraduate Studies Committee.
- (f) Bearing in mind that External Examiners should be impartial in making judgements and that they should not have previous close involvement with the College which might compromise their objectivity. No person who has held an appointment on the teaching or research staff of the College or the validating universities (UoE & HW), or who has been granted honorary status in either University, is eligible to act as an External Examiner until a period of four years has elapsed since the termination of the appointment or the status. Additionally, a proposed External Examiner should not have been, in the previous 4 years: a member of staff, a governor, a student, or a near relative or friend of a member of staff or student in relation to the programme, or an Examiner on a cognate programme in the institution.
- (g) No External Examiner may hold office for a longer period than five consecutive years, and no person who has held an appointment as External Examiner for a period of five consecutive years is normally eligible for reappointment until that person has ceased to hold office for at least four years since the end of his/her last term of office. In exceptional circumstances, Convener of Learning & Teaching Board or Convener of Postgraduate Studies Committee may waive this rule.

- (h) There should be an appropriate balance and expertise in the team of External Examiners including:
- examining experience
  - academic and professional practice
  - a range of academic perspectives
- (i) External Examiners from outside the higher education system, for example, from industry or the professions, are appropriate in certain circumstances. However, where an External Examiner who is not an academic is appointed for a particular programme, the School needs to ensure that a mechanism for assuring academic standards is maintained (see para re induction), for example, by having another External Examiner, who is an academic, on the Board of Examiners.
- (j) If an External Examiner seeks early termination of the contract, this must be negotiated with the Head of School, or his or her nominee, on behalf of the College. Where possible, a report should be obtained from the External Examiners on the reasons for termination. If in exceptional circumstances, a School wishes an early termination of an External Examiner's contract, this should be negotiated with the Head of School, or his or her nominee, on behalf of the School. A report on the reasons for termination must be obtained from the School and the External Examiner concerned, to be submitted via the Head of Quality Assurance & Enhancement to the Learning and Teaching Board or Postgraduate Studies Committee for approval. The onus is on the Head of School to ensure that the relevant paperwork is completed and forwarded. The Head of School and Vice-Principal have the authority to jointly appoint a replacement External Examiner. Copies of all reports relating to the termination of an External Examiner's contract should be forwarded to the Secretary of the Learning & Teaching Board or Secretary of Postgraduate Studies Committee.

2.4 The Quality Assurance & Enhancement Office (Quality Office) will call for recommendations for the appointment of External Examiners. At the start of each academic session the Quality Office will notify Heads of Schools indicating the External Examiner vacancies which are about to arise in their taught programmes. Head of School make nominations to College after consultation with the staff members teaching the programme and having ascertained that the nominated External Examiner is willing to accept the appointment. Heads of Schools should introduce a rolling programme for the appointment of External Examiners to ensure continuity of experience.

2.5 External Examiners should normally be resident in the United Kingdom. If the examiner is resident abroad, the School proposing the appointment should take account of the cost and, where appropriate, check that **eca** is prepared to pay the cost of travel to Edinburgh before proposing the appointment.

2.6 It is recommended that the period of office for all undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes External Examiners normally begins on 1 October and ends on 30 September following. Once a nominee has been recommended for approval, Quality Office dispatches a formal letter of appointment. The letter should make reference to the programme(s) to be examined, estimated fee payable and to the fact that receipt of the External Examiner's report is a prerequisite for payment, together with the briefing materials listed in para 3 below.

- 2.7 All Examiners should take up their appointment on or before the retirement of their predecessors, and should remain available until after the last assessments with which they are to be associated in order to deal with any subsequent reviews or decisions.
- 2.8 Each External Examiner's term of office should be one, which allows the examiner to assess four successive cohorts of students, which would normally, mean four calendar years. The appointment will be for one year in the first instance. If there are no objections following the probationary period they are automatically appointed for a further four years (i.e. 1 + 4 years = five years in total).
- 2.9 A full list of examiners is available from the Quality Assurance & Enhancement Office.

### **3 INFORMATION FOR EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

- 3.1 On appointment, Edinburgh College of Art will ensure that all of its new External Examining appointees are sent the briefing material outlined below. This material is in addition to the formal letter of appointment outlining in general terms their duties and fee payment arrangements, which all new appointees receive:
- (a) an opportunity to visit the College to meet with staff and students before formally taking up the role; this is particularly important where examiners are being appointed from outwith the Higher Education sector.
- (b) all new external examining appointees will receive the following from the Quality Office.
- details of the programme to be examined, its place in the College's overall portfolio, and its main elements and awards; this will normally take the form of a Programme Specification;
  - Student Handbook
  - copies of the reports of the outgoing External Examiner;
  - copies of the reporting pro-forma they will be required to complete, with explicit instructions as to whom it should be sent;
  - information as to how and when they will receive feedback on any action taken as a result of their report;
  - a copy of this Code of Practice.
- 3.2 Additionally, all new Examiners will be required to attend a short induction session, normally held on the first morning of the assessment period. These induction sessions will be attended by the Head of School and the Vice Principal or Head of Quality Assurance & Enhancement.
- 3.3 All examiners will also receive a briefing pack prior to the assessment diet each year. This will, as a minimum, include:

- Timetable for Examination Board
- External Examiners' report form
- External Examiners Expenses form
- Copy of student handbook
- Details of Hotel Accommodation
- Minutes from previous meeting of the board
- Any material updated since the previous assessment diet.

#### 4. BRIEFING OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

4.1 The effectiveness of the External Examining system is dependent on a number of things, not the least being that **eca** makes explicit:

- (a) the aims of its system of External Examining
- (b) the roles and duties of the External Examiner
- (c) the particular outcomes expected as a result of the External Examining process.

4.2 To assist and enable External Examiners to perform their role effectively, all Examiners must be thoroughly briefed to ensure that they are aware of:

- (a) the expectations of the validating bodies University of Edinburgh / Heriot-Watt University and Edinburgh College of Art;
- (b) the regulations governing the programme being examined, including marking practices (eg double marking, double marking by sample); arrangements for the sampling of scripts and other assessable work contributing to the final award, including student presentations and viva voces, displays and exhibitions;
- (c) assessment structures, assessment procedure in relation to agreed learning outcomes;
- (d) grading criteria and marking schemes;
- (e) arrangements for the access to any work contributing to the final award so as to have evidence that the internal marking has been carried out according to the marking schemes and the classifications are of an appropriate standard;
- (f) principles governing the selection of candidates for viva voce examinations, and their role in conducting these (if appropriate);
- (g) their authority and role, particularly in relation to the Board of Examiners;
- (h) their role in advising **eca** in respect of any proposed major or minor modifications to existing validated programmes or in respect of any proposed new programmes.

#### 5 PARTICIPATION IN ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

*No recommendation for an award of a degree should be awarded without participation in the examining process by at least one examiner external to **eca**.*

An External Examiner has the right to see any work that contributes to the assessment and the degree classification, or the documentation which relates to the work. Where it

is agreed that the External Examiner will see assessed coursework, the principles governing the selection must be agreed in advance.

- 5.1 *Curriculum.* External Examiners should have made available to them the full details of each programme on which the examinations are set.
- 5.2 *Assessment Papers.* All draft degree assessment papers should be seen by the External Examiner(s) for comment.
- 5.3 *Examination Scripts.* The guiding principle for any selection of scripts is that External Examiners must have enough evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and are consistent. An External Examiner has the right to see all degree examination scripts and any other coursework including other invigilated examination scripts contributing to the assessment. External Examiners should see samples of scripts from the top, the middle and the bottom of the range. Where it is agreed that an External Examiner will see a selection of scripts or other written work, the principles governing the selection must be agreed in advance. The External Examiner should consider borderline cases. Borderline cases are those which relate to the decisions of the Board of Examiners on pass/fail boundaries, progression, or in the case of final year candidates, the classification or award of a degree.
- 5.6 *Viva Voce Examinations.* Where a *viva voce* or oral examination is held for a proportion, but only a proportion, of the candidates, the principles for the selection of candidates should be agreed in advance with the External Examiner(s). Such an examination should normally be conducted by an External Examiner who may be assisted by one or more Internal Examiners.
- 5.7 *Attendance at Examiners' Meetings.* All meetings of Examination Board must have an External Examiner present. The signature of at least one External Examiner should be appended to the following declaration, which must appear on the Result Lists, 'I declare that I approve the process of examination which produced the examination results reported on this List'. If no External Examiner will sign the final List or if an External Examiner refuses to sign it, then the Head of School after consultation with the External Examiner(s), and then with the Principal and Vice-Principal, has delegated authority from the Senatus Academicus to sign a List. After exercising such authority, the Head of the School must fully report the circumstances, including the views of the External Examiner(s), to the Principal. For resit or reconvened Boards of Examiners, where an External Examiner is unable to attend, it is acceptable for him or her to contribute, ideally by video- or tele-conferencing and otherwise by email or fax. Even when they cannot be physically present, External Examiners should be involved in the scrutiny of scripts and should have access to assessed coursework as appropriate. The External Examiner's signature must appear on the final degree examination results list; when time is a constraining factor it is acceptable for this to be faxed initially providing the signed paper copy follows. In this context, an email is not acceptable mode to append an External Examiner's signature.
- 5.8 *Personal Interest.* No External Examiner shall be involved in the conduct or assessment (whether by setting, invigilating, marking or otherwise) of any examination, including an examination for a prize or scholarship, in which he or she may reasonably be regarded as having a strong personal interest because of close relationship or friendship with a candidate whom she or he would otherwise be expected to examine. In circumstances in which a member of staff or external examiner is a close relative to a candidate, she/he shall decline to act as examiner. Categories of 'close relative' shall comprise a proposed, current or previous spouse or partner, a parent or a child, a brother or a sister.

- 5.9 *Illness.* Where any External Examiner is taken ill during the examination period, or is unable to attend due to other unforeseen circumstances, the Head of the School and Vice Principal shall have the authority to appoint a replacement External Examiner.
- 5.10 *Classification.* The views of an External Examiner must be taken into account, particularly in the case of disagreement on the mark to be awarded for a particular unit of assessment, or on the final classification to be derived from the array of marks of a particular candidate at the Examination Board meeting. The signature of the External Examiner(s) must be appended to the final list of degree results as evidence that he/she accepts the classification.

## **6 REPORTS AND REMUNERATION**

- 6.1 In accordance with best practice, each External Examiner shall send annual reports within one month following the Examination Board. A final report will also be submitted at the end of the period of appointment to the Principal of Edinburgh College of Art and Head of College of Humanities and Social Science (CHSS, UoE). The External Examiner is encouraged to make use of opportunities to communicate with the School about the teaching of the programme, assessment issues and the overall performance of the students.
- 6.2 Edinburgh College of Art is responsible for acknowledging receipt of reports to the External Examiner. Responses to External Examiners ensure that the reports are properly considered and, where appropriate, acted upon, and for informing the External Examiner either;
- information on the consideration of their comments
  - an indication of any action taken as a result of their reports
  - or the reasons for not accepting particular recommendations or suggestions.
- 6.3 Documentation for the above course of action to be collated through the Head of Quality Assurance & Enhancement. Heads of School have responsibility for ensuring that robust mechanisms exist in Schools to handle External Examiners reports and appropriate action is taken on their comments. The Head of School, has the responsibility for responding to External Examiners' report using EE3: 'Head of School Comment & Action Form'.
- 6.4 In the case of a joint programme, agreement will be reached in each case on where responsibility lies.
- 6.5 External Examiners are required to report annually on the conduct of assessment at the end of each complete diet of examinations, as well as at the end of the Examiner's period of office and on issues related to assessment, including;
- The adequacy of information supplied on the programme, including its aims and learning objectives and methods of assessment and whether the aims and programme structure meet the needs of students
  - Whether the stated learning outcomes for the programme are appropriate to the subject matter, the level of the programme and the students

- Whether the examination, together with any other forms of assessment used, adequately covered the learning objectives and he/she is satisfied with the methods of assessment
  - Whether he/she is satisfied with the details of the assessment process, including, where appropriate, the marking schemes and allocation of marks, the criteria for degree classification
  - Whether the teaching and learning strategies are appropriate to the programme
  - The administration of the examination and any form of assessment used, including such matters as time available for scrutiny of student work, the format of the information provided to you on the marks awarded by Internal Examiners, and the impartiality with which the process was conducted
  - Whether the marking by internal examiners is broadly appropriate in terms of standards, consistency and internal moderation. The External Examiner will have the right to see any work which contributes to the assessment and degree classification
  - The standard of students' work associated with the various degree classifications or pass/fail borderline(s) in comparison with other institutions of which he/she has knowledge
  - The overall performance of candidates, including pass rates and honours degree classification profiles
  - The procedures followed at the meeting(s) of the Board of Examiners
  - Whether or not he/she has been consulted in the last year by the department on proposed changes to programmes or on the introduction of new programmes
  - The programme's areas of strength, and areas which require to be further developed
  - Strengths and weaknesses of knowledge, understanding and skills demonstrated by students
  - In addition, the External Examiner may make use of an invitation to communicate in confidence to the Head of School or Head of Quality Assurance & Enhancement or Vice-Principal on sensitive matters requiring confidential consideration.
- 6.6 External Examiners' Report forms will be available from the Quality Office. Although External Examiners may choose to download and complete reports electronically, they are required to sign a paper copy of the report.
- 6.7 Completed External Examiner's Report forms are returned in the first instance to the Principal of the Edinburgh College of Art via the Quality Office. No claims in respect of examining fees will be processed unless there is evidence of an external examining report having been returned to the College. Expense claims will be approved by the Head of Quality Assurance & Enhancement.
- 6.8 Examiners reports are considered by Programme Committees at the start of the next academic session, and Heads of Schools are required to report on action taken in

their Annual Programme Monitoring Reports (APMR). Edinburgh College of Art must report on action taken in response to External Examiners' reports in its Annual Report to the validating universities. Any reports which the Head of School judges to be particularly serious or important, or which raise issues of wider significance for the College, are copied directly to the Principal. This is only likely to occur in exceptional cases and the reports will be ones where institutional action is necessary or where serious quality assurance issues, which affect more than one degree programme or School, have been identified. Copies of final External Examiners Reports to be collated by the Head of Quality Assurance & Enhancement for submission in the Annual Report.

- 6.9 Given the timetable outlined above, it is critical that External Examiners meet the 1 month deadline for submission of reports. External Examiners give important feedback on the operation of programmes and timely receipt of reports allows the College to take early actions to address any issues raised. Heads of School must encourage their Examiners to meet the established deadline.
- 6.10 Replies and responses from the School are sent via the Head of Quality Assurance & Enhancement to External Examiners after receipt of their reports. Responses to External Examiners may provide information on the consideration of their comments; an indication of any action taken as a result of their reports; and reasons for not accepting particular recommendations or suggestions.

## **7 EXPENSES AND FEES**

Payment of External Examiners' fees and expenses is the responsibility of the Edinburgh College of Art, Quality Assurance & Enhancement Office. Payment of fees is done after receipt of a completed report from the External Examiner. The School may be expected to provide a modest level of hospitality to the External Examiner, especially as this may provide valuable occasions for informal contact with those involved in teaching the programme. All correspondence relating to fees and expenses should be addressed to the Quality Assurance & Enhancement Office, in the first instance.

## **8. REVIEW AND ENHANCEMENT**

The policy will be subject to review on an annual basis to ensure compliance with best practice, legislation and the QAA Code of Practice.

### *Annexes and other references*

- *Examination Board Guidelines*
- *Nomination form for the Appointment of External Examiners EE1*
- *External Examiner's report form EE2*
- *Head of School comment & action form EE3*

