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# Mapping Against the UK Quality Code

## SECTION 6: EXTERNAL EXPERTISE

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# SECTION 6: EXTERNAL EXPERTISE

## INTRODUCTION

The Quality Code is split into 12 themes, available online on the QAA website at <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>. This section focuses on *External Expertise*. External Examiners and all other relevant aspects discussed in this section are integral to the effective management and assurance of appropriate standards in the University's delivery of teaching, learning and assessment. The Code describes this theme as follows:

*The Quality Code requires providers to seek external, impartial and independent academic and/or professional expertise ensuring that the standards and quality of a provider's courses cohere with the relevant national qualifications framework, Subject Benchmark Statements, Characteristics Statements and any relevant professional or other requirements. Providers can also use external expertise to identify good practice in learning, teaching and assessment, areas for enhancement and to inform the continuous improvement of their courses.*

In practice, UK Higher Education Institutions are obliged to seek external and independent views on their teaching, learning and assessment provision to ensure that standards are appropriate and comparable to other institutions.

In defining key terms that are used frequently in this section, the Quality Code notes the following:

**External examiners:** Degree-awarding bodies engage external examiners to provide impartial and independent advice, as well as informative comment on the degree-awarding body's standards and on student achievement in relation to those standards. External examiners confirm that the provider consistently and fairly implements their own policies and procedures to ensure the integrity and rigour of assessment practices. They also comment on the quality and standards of the courses in relation to the national standards and frameworks and comment on the reasonable comparability of standards achieved at other UK providers with whom the examiner has experience. External examiners also comment on good practice and make recommendations for enhancement.

**External advisers:** Used to provide academic and professional expertise during the development and validation of new courses and at other relevant times. They can be called upon to provide academic, professional and industry/employer/business expertise to inform course design and to contribute to lecturing or teaching at the provider or in a professional setting, for example, workplace supervisors/mentors for education, nursing, apprenticeships, and students on placement.

**Conflicts of interest:** Conflicts may arise during engagement or tenure, where providers reasonably believe the interests of one party affect the motivations or impartiality of another. This might include close personal or professional relationships with staff, students, or previous experts involved in their area of responsibility, an excessive influence due to their standing in other roles, or because their inclusion in a team of experts creates an unbalanced view.

**Reciprocal arrangements:** These may arise during the engagement or tenure of an external expert, if a reasonable person would interpret one service in exchange for another. For example, if one provider engages an expert from another provider and then provides an expert to the same or closely-related provision in return.

## SECTION 6: EXTERNAL EXPERTISE

The Quality Code has three different sections: the expectations for standards; the expectations for quality; and the guiding principles. The relevant expectations for standards and quality are detailed below. The Guiding Principles are mapped to the University's own policies, procedures and quality mechanisms. There are two separate sections for the University's practices, detailing what the University does and has in place to support that expectation/principle, as well as the supporting documentation, which includes reference to supporting policy, procedure, website or other document.

EXPECTATIONS FOR STANDARDS & CORE/Common PRACTICES	EXPECTATIONS FOR QUALITY & CORE/Common PRACTICES
The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.	Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.
The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.	The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.
The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.	Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.
The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.	The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise.
Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.	
The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.	
The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.	

QUALITY CODE PRINCIPLES	UNIVERSITY PRACTICES	SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION
GUIDING PRINCIPLES		
<p>1. Providers use one or more external experts as advisers to provide impartial and independent scrutiny on the approval and review of all provision that leads to the award of credit or a qualification.</p> <p>Providers should make use of a range of external experts appropriate to the provision that is being developed or that is under review. These advisers may include PSRBs, employers, subject experts, past students, students and academic staff from other courses, subject librarians, care users, and so on. To ensure independence of decision-making, those involved with the submission of a proposal should not be the same as those who approve it.</p>	<p>External Examiners are appointed specifically to ensure that standards are maintained on a comparable level with universities throughout the UK and that the system of assessment is seen to be transparent and fair to all students.</p> <p>The University uses External Examiners to feed into all our Education provision. The role includes consultation on assessment for a particular course, and membership of Examiners’ meetings. In the latter aspect of the role, they provide external verification and comparability of student assessment and results aiming to ensure that standards are achieved and maintained. Part of their role includes highlighting good practice as well as identifying areas for development.</p> <p>In some Schools, Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) input into course and programme provision. For example, PSRBs may have a role in curriculum design to meet professional requirements. Input is also obtained from Programme Advisory Boards. These Boards include expertise from industry and employers and can provide expertise in teaching, learning and assessment.</p> <p>External Expertise is embedded into the University’s Internal Teaching Review processes. External Subject Specialists are <del>employed</del> engaged as panel members reviewing the quality and enhancement of any given School’s pedagogic offering. External Subject Specialists provide valuable insight into our practices enabling us to learn from good practice across the sector.</p>	<p><a href="#">External Examining (UG/PGT) (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">External Examiners (PGR) (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Roles and Responsibilities of External Examiners, AQH (Document)</a>  <a href="#">Internal Teaching Review (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Programme Advisory Boards (Webpage)</a></p>
<p>2. Degree-awarding bodies engage independent external examiners to comment impartially and informatively on academic standards, student achievement and</p>	<p>As part of the quality annual monitoring processes, each External Examiner is required to submit an annual report for the courses or programmes which have been examined in the past year. The report outlines whether the provision examined meets the required standards and is appropriate and comparable with other Higher Education Institutions in the UK. The report also allows for areas of good practice to</p>	<p><a href="#">External Examining: Reporting Instructions and Information, AQH (Document)</a>  <a href="#">External Examiners Reporting Template (Document)</a>  <a href="#">Nomination and Appointment of External Examiners, AQH (Document)</a>  <a href="#">Nomination Form for External Examiners (Document)</a></p>

<p>assessment processes for all provision that leads to the award of credit or a qualification.</p> <p>External examiners need to be experts on the subject matter and the intended mode(s) of delivery and they will be familiar with quality and standards and quality assurance in a higher education context. Where this cannot be achieved by one external examiner, or the workload is extensive, additional engagements may need to be made, for example, where a programme is accredited by a professional body there may be a requirement for one external examiner with academic expertise and another from professional practice.</p>	<p>be highlighted, as well as areas for development and issues to be raised at School or University-level.</p> <p><del>Each</del> Every School's annual reports are submitted to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) for scrutiny of matters raised in the report and to ensure that action is taken to enhance any areas identified as requiring development. <a href="#">This is also a mechanism for identifying and sharing good practices noted in external examiner reports.</a> When the report has been fully considered, feedback on any actions taken is returned to the Examiner. <a href="#">Following a response from the Head of School and the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), the reports are also uploaded to MyAberdeen to close the feedback loop with respect to students.</a></p> <p>The University has a robust appointments approval process to ensure that External Examiners engaged in activity with the University are appropriately qualified and meet the relevant requirements. External Examiner nominations are approved through the University's QAC which has approval powers on behalf of the University Senate.</p>	
<p>3. Degree-awarding bodies have processes for the nomination, approval and engagement of external examiners and other independent external experts.</p> <p>Degree-awarding bodies provide clear guidance and procedures that set out the nomination process for the external examiners and other external advisers that need to be engaged to provide an appropriate range of expertise to inform the design and review of all</p>	<p>The University operates a robust, central process for the nomination, approval and engagement of External Examiners. All correspondence and nominations are managed by the <del>Registry</del> <a href="#">Academic Services Team</a>.</p> <p>The criteria for nomination of External Examiners are detailed in <del>our</del> <a href="#">the Nomination and Appointment of External Examiners document</a>. This document also highlights those who will not be appointed as External Examiners due to possible conflicts of interest. A list of University staff who are acting as External Examiners at other institutions is being developed to ensure the avoidance of reciprocal arrangements with other Universities. This list will be held centrally <a href="#">and updated annually</a>.</p> <p>Schools are required to submit nomination forms for every external examiner they seek to employ on their programmes. This form details the rationale for appointment as well as including a CV of the proposed</p>	<p><a href="#">Nomination and Appointment of External Examiners, AQH (Document)</a>  <a href="#">Nomination Form for External Examiners (Document)</a>  <a href="#">Human Resources (Webpage)</a></p>

<p>of its provision. The approval and engagement processes are also clear and transparent, sufficiently robust and avoid conflicts of interest including reciprocal arrangements.</p>	<p>candidate. Forms are considered for approval by the relevant QAC member. Once approved, all information is passed to colleagues in Human Resources to ensure their employment details are added to the system and a contract/appointment letter is issued.</p>	
<p><b>4. Providers ensure that the roles of those providing external expertise are clear to students, staff and other stakeholders.</b></p> <p>All providers will provide clear and transparent information on the roles of external experts (examiners and advisers) involved in the assurance of standards, maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience. This information will be accessible to students, staff and other stakeholders.</p>	<p>The University has a dedicated central webpage for all External Examining activity, including the policies, procedures and guidance associated with External Examining. The roles and responsibilities document outlines the duties and activities in which the External Examiner will be engaged.</p> <p>External Examiners, as academics with research, scholarship and/or industrial expertise, ensure the meeting of academic standards and quality of provision. With the submission of External Examiner Reports, External Examiners comment on student achievement, assessment processes and comparability to other Higher Education Institutions and Sector-Wide standards. The role of External Examiners is communicated as part of a <i>Key Education Policies for Students</i> communication at the start of each academic year.</p> <p>External Examiners are required to submit a report annually for programmes and courses. These reports confirm that academic standards have been maintained and any observations therein. The reports also cover aspects of good practice and recommendations for quality enhancement. External reports also evaluate the quality of learning and teaching, and content of programmes/courses. Upon their final report, External Examiners <del>are able to</del> <u>can</u> provide a holistic summary of their tenure as an External Examiner. External Examiner Reports are published for students to access via the University's Virtual Learning Environment in a dedicated site, <i>Acting on Feedback</i>. <u>The site is updated annually with reports from the previous academic year.</u></p> <p>Schools are required to provide details of the External Examiner (name, position and institution) as part of the course and programme information provided to students.</p>	<p><a href="#">External Examining (UG/PGT) (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">External Examiners (PGR) (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Roles and Responsibilities of External Examiners, AQH (Document)</a></p>

	<p>Some Schools have provision which is regulated by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and which therefore have input into course and programme provision. Where this is the case, Schools are responsible for ensuring that students are aware of the role of the PSRB and the requirements for accreditation.</p>	
<p>5. Providers ensure that external experts are given sufficient and timely evidence and training to enable them to carry out their responsibilities.</p> <p>External examiners and external advisers will need to be supported by the provider to fully understand and appropriately fulfil the role that they are asked to undertake. This may include a range of training and guidance and may vary depending on any previous experience in the role. External experts will need access to a range of evidence to enable them to fulfil their role; providers should be clear on what evidence will be provided and ensure that it is made available in a timely manner in line with the requirements of the experts' responsibilities.</p>	<p>The University recognises the importance of ensuring that External Examiners are provided with appropriate training and induction to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities.</p> <p>External Examiners are provided with a dedicated email address managed by Academic Services to which they can send any queries in relation to their role. Information, provided on appointment to External Examiners by Academic Services includes a "Division of Responsibilities" grid, which details the relative responsibilities of Schools and the Academic Services Team <del>in regard to</del> <a href="#">regarding</a> key matters relating to External Examiners.</p> <p>External Examiners are also provided with access to a dedicated area in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), MyAberdeen. This houses links to policy and institutional information that is pertinent to all External Examiners. The organisational area also has <del>a link to a short video</del> <a href="#">information</a> providing an overview of MyAberdeen and how to navigate to course and organisation areas in MyAberdeen as their role can require them to access specific assessment information in course areas. Examiners are also provided with access, by their School, to the MyAberdeen areas for the programmes and courses they are responsible for. Additionally, a number of Schools have organisational areas for School-specific information for External Examiners which provide further guidance, School contacts and key dates as required throughout the year. <del>CAD</del> <a href="#">The Centre for Academic Development (CAD)</a> also provide an annual optional training session for Examiners which outlines how to use MyAberdeen, in particular relating to course assessment and feedback. CAD also contribute to School-specific training for Examiners on MyAberdeen.</p>	<p><a href="#">External Examining (UG/PGT) (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Induction of External Examiners, AQH (Document)</a>  <a href="#">Final Recommendations of the EE Academic Review Task and Finish Group (Document)</a></p>

	<p>Schools play a central role in inducting and supporting External Examiners to enable them to be informed to undertake their role. Importantly, Schools provide induction on the relevant programmes and courses, together with matters relating to teaching, learning and assessment which are pertinent to the curriculum and information on key dates and School contacts.</p> <p>A short-life Task and Finish Group was set up in late 2021/22 to review the Academic aspects related to External Examining, notably roles and responsibilities; training and induction; fees and expenses; and communication. This work concluded in November 2022 and was approved by Senate on 19 April 2023.</p> <p>Communication of any institutional changes to University Education Policy is centrally communicated to External Examiners by the Academic Services Team to ensure they are kept abreast of any changes pertinent to their role.</p>	
<p>6. Providers have effective mechanisms in place to provide a response to input from external examiners and external advisers.</p> <p>External examiners and external advisers offer an important service to providers to ensure that all provision can meet a range of requirements including the achievement of quality standards and quality assurance, alignment with external frameworks, standards and benchmarks and a range of other stakeholder needs. Providers will have effective measures in place to ensure that input from external experts is</p>	<p>External Examiners are required to complete an Annual Report at the end of each academic year, and a Final Report at the end of their term of appointment.</p> <p>Annual Reports are submitted to <del>Registry</del> <a href="#">Academic Services</a> from where they are distributed to Schools for comment on any issues raised. The External Examiners' Annual Reports, together with responses from the Schools, are then considered by the University's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC).</p> <p>After considering the External Examiners' Annual Reports and the School responses, QAC provides a formal response to the External Examiners and to the School. In responding to the School, actions requiring attention are highlighted. Where matters raise relate to institutional matters (e.g. relating to policy) these are referred to the relevant Committee for consideration.</p>	<p><a href="#">External Examining: Reporting Instructions and Information, AQH (Document)</a>  <a href="#">External Examiners Reporting Template (Document)</a>  <a href="#">Annual Monitoring (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Internal Teaching Review (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Quality Assurance Committee (Webpage)</a></p>



<p>considered, and where appropriate is actioned, a timely and reasoned response is made to the experts on actions taken or not taken as a consequence.</p>	<p>External Examiner Reports are made available to students and are published on the University’s Virtual Learning Environment in a dedicated site, <i>Acting on Feedback</i>. The dedicated site provides a central repository for External Examiner Reports for all Schools.</p> <p>As part of the Internal Teaching Review (ITR), Schools draw upon External Examiners’ Reports as evidence to support and inform the review process. The annual ITR Follow-Up Report provides updates to QAC on progress in addressing recommendations identified as part of the review.</p> <p>Where relevant, Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) reports following accreditation are also used to inform enhancement of provision. Where recommendations or issues are raised by a PSRB, the School is responsible for ensuring these are addressed. Reports from PSRBs are scrutinised routinely by QAC, and with actions required being followed up as appropriate.</p>	
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