

# **Handbook for External Examiners of Taught Programmes**



Thank you for agreeing to be an External Examiner at Newcastle University.

This handbook has been developed to provide you with up-to-date information about the University assessment procedures and your role and duties. We hope you find it helpful and would welcome any suggestions you may have on how we might update the contents.

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## **APPENDIX**

- a. Policy and Procedures for External Examiners of Taught Programmes
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- d. External Examiners' System – Guidance for External Examiners

## 1. PREPARING FOR YOUR ROLE

The following section outlines the materials that you should expect to receive, both from the University and from the relevant academic unit.

### ***Provided upon appointment, with annual updates if appropriate***

From the University Educational Policy and Governance Service (EPGS):

- a. A confirmation email setting out the terms and conditions of appointment, including confirmation of the programme(s) and/or module(s) to which you are appointed;
- b. Links to key information including:
  - [The University Policy and Procedures for External Examiners of Taught Programmes](#)
  - [The University's General Regulations, Regulations for Taught Programmes – Assessment Regulations](#)
  - [University's Academic Queries and Appeals Procedure for Students](#)
  - [Rules for Boards of Examiners](#)
  - [The University's Education Strategy](#)
  - [Inclusive Exam arrangements](#)
- c. A virtual institutional briefing/induction in the form of this Handbook for External Examiners of Taught Programmes;
- d. Guidance on using the online External Examiners system for the submission of reports;
- e. Regular updates on institutional assessment policy and procedures to be provided by EPGS.

From the relevant Board of Studies:

- a. External Examiners reports and Board of Studies responses from the previous two years;
- b. The relevant Degree Programme Handbook;
- c. Procedures relating to relevant professional issues, e.g. Fitness to Practise.

### ***Provided annually by the relevant academic unit:***

- a. Details of any duties additional to those specified in the [University's Policy and Procedure for External Examiners of Taught Programmes](#)
- b. Examination conventions relevant to the degree programme;
- c. Any instructions issued to examiners and/or boards of examiners;
- d. Degree programme regulations, programme specifications and programme handbooks (including assessment criteria) for the relevant programme(s);
- e. Information about School moderation and scaling procedures;

- f. A full list of modules, module descriptions, including learning outcomes and assessment methods;
- g. Procedures relating to relevant professional issues, e.g. Fitness to Practise.
- h. Access to programme materials within the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) used by the school ([Guidance on Canvas is available](#) );
- i. Draft assessment types, including examination papers and coursework instruments, and, if appropriate, a description of the marking schemes for each type of assessment, and, if deemed appropriate by the Board of Studies, model answers for assessments.
- j. A selection of assessed student work (to be sent or made available to you). The principles for such selection should be agreed early in the academic year between the Chair of the Board of Examiners and the external examiner;
- k. Samples of Learning Agreements relating to any student placements or - if the placement is for credit- samples of assessed work.
- l. The arrangements, where appropriate, for the selection of candidates for viva voce examinations where the viva is a formal part of the assessment process (taught postgraduate programmes only);
- m. The arrangements for you to be given adequate opportunity to communicate with internal examiners and, where appropriate, others involved in teaching and assessment (such as placement providers/assessors);
- n. Information concerning your authority and role in the Board of Examiners;
- o. Early information concerning the dates and times of Boards of Examiners meetings;
- p. Minutes from meetings of Boards of Examiners which have taken place during the period of your appointment and at which student performance has been considered;
- q. Details of arrangements made, where appropriate, for you to meet with students on the programme (including, wherever possible, those on placements);
- r. By request, statistical reports showing analysis of cohort marks, including Mean, Standard Deviation, Sparkline, Lowest Mark, Lower Quartile, Median, Upper Quartile, and Highest Mark (which the School can generate from the NESS system).

In addition, you will receive a briefing from the Chair of the Board of Examiners and, if appropriate, the Degree Programme Director prior to the Board of Examiners' meeting which will cover all relevant examination conventions.

#### From the Board of Studies:

Feedback on any actions that have been taken as a result of the previous year's report (if applicable). If the Board of Studies has decided that no action should be taken on any issue, this will be stated and the reason(s) for this decision will be detailed.

You may request any documentation within your remit, even if it is not included in the list, and/or request to see specific materials at a particular point in time.

Should the information listed above not be provided, please contact the Chair of the Board of Examiners and/or the School Manager.

## **Data Protection**

We would be grateful if, during your appointment as an External Examiner you will abide by data protection legislation when handling data which identifies individual students or staff of the University. Care will need to be taken, for instance, if you ask us to communicate with you via a private email address which may be accessible to others.

## **2. DUTIES OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

### **Summary of key duties and expectations**

Further information on your role and duties as an External Examiner are outlined in section 44 of the [Policy and Procedures for External Examiners of Taught Programmes](#).

The key areas we ask you to consider and review are:

- Evaluating the standard of Newcastle University awards
- Evaluating assessments and marking
- Evaluating the curriculum and research-informed teaching

#### **Evaluating the Standard of University Awards:**

One of your key roles will be to provide comments upon the standard of University awards in relation to external referents, such as the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and subject benchmarks and in relation to your experience of similar provision at other UK Higher Education Institutions.

This will include reviewing the following examples to provide comment upon whether the level, standards and outputs are appropriate and similar to programmes delivered at other institutions:

- Reviewing the standards and intended learning outcome of the programme(s) and relevant modules
- Student performance
- Providing an independent view on any proposed changes to the existing programmes

Various opportunities will be made available to you to enable you to comment on the above such as:

- Programme and module documentation
- Attending student performances, practical and/or laboratory classes, practical and/or clinical examinations, exhibitions, and/or presentations;
- Holding one-on-one or group interviews with final year students;
- Reviewing samples of final year dissertations and projects to assess student standards, particularly at the high and low ends of the marking scale;
- Reviewing employability statistics

- Evaluating Assessments and Marking:

You will be asked to provide comment upon the standard of assessed work as well as on the consistency and clarity of the assessment and marking processes including for example:

- Consistency of internal marking and moderation.
- Provision of feedback to students in terms of impartiality, consistency and transparency
- Whether the assessment criteria have been effectively used and whether they enable the discrimination of student abilities and are useful for students to influence their future work.
- Whether the full range of the marking scale is being utilised and whether borderline marks are appropriate.

You will be provided with access to programme and module information, draft assessments, marking criteria, the School's moderation and scaling procedures in order to enable you to do this.

You will also be provided with a sample of assessed work, the size and range will be decided by you in collaboration with the Chair of the Board of Examiners. It is suggested as a minimum, you should have access to at least one piece of work from each module each year. For written examinations, you should see a sample of scripts from the top, middle and bottom of the range.

The academic unit will let you know how and when they will share information with you, this maybe via the VLE, Microsoft Teams, OneDrive.

### **Evaluating the Curriculum**

You are also asked to provide comment upon the appropriateness of the curriculum (e.g., whether it enables students to attain the intended learning outcomes) as well as on its inclusion of current research and scholarship. Examples of this type of activity you may be involved with are:

- a. Reviewing the assessment strategy to determine if there are opportunities for students to undertake independent research and/or to receive feedback on research skills.
- b. Evaluating the ways in which specific modules publicise the aims of the unit, address University initiatives and draw connections between research and teaching. Good practice may include the following:
  - I. Meeting with module leaders individually to discuss module curriculum;
  - II. Reviewing the use of the VLE to provide enhancement materials and activities.
- c. Meeting with students informally to discuss their experience of the programme curriculum and the impact of research-informed teaching upon it

### **Evaluating Transnational Education (TNE):**

Where you are also an External examiner of programmes that are the subject of a collaborative arrangement or part of the University's Transnational Education portfolio, you'll be asked to consider the following in addition to what is listed above:

- a. Any variations in learning and teaching between the Newcastle programme(s) and those of the partner.
- b. Any comparisons between the achievements of candidates from Newcastle University and from the partner institution, and whether the quality of the partner programme is adequate to support the attainment of the standards of the award.

For specific TNE programmes (at the moment only our Malaysia programmes), your report form you will have an additional set of questions to respond to on the external examiner report form. These questions ask for opinions on the comparability of standards with Newcastle only provision and on the level of student attainment.

Programmes with an Educational Partnership do not have an additional question section, but questions on whether information was received (section H) and the comparability of standards and student performances (section B) are posed.

### **Apprenticeships**

Where you are also an External examiner of an apprenticeship programme with credit-bearing end-point Assessment (EPA), your report form you will have an additional set of questions to respond to. These questions ask for opinions on how the programme meet the apprenticeships standard, as well as questions on assessment and feedback from employers.

## **3. BOARD OF EXAMINERS**

Each award bearing programme will have a Board of Examiners, the Board of Examiners may be responsible for a number of programmes.

The membership of the Board of Examiners is agreed by the relevant Board of Studies and includes relevant Degree Programme Directors, representatives of the main areas of study involved in the programme(s) and External Examiners.

### **Attendance**

You are a member of the Board of Examiners and you are required to attend the final meeting of the Board in person, or, via a video link. During your appointment you must visit the campus at least once.

Guidance on [attending the Board of Examiners virtually](#) is available on the website.

If due to unforeseen circumstances, you are not able to attend the Board of Examiners and there are no other external examiners present the Board of Examiners may only proceed on the condition that you

- have provided comments on the standards of the programmes for which you have responsibility;
- are available for consultation;

Afterwards you should receive a copy of the minutes and related documentation and you should complete and submit your annual report as normal.

### **Process**

Members of the Board of Examiners should declare any personal (i.e. non-academic) interest relating to any individual students to the Chair of the Board prior to the meeting.

Before the Board of Examiners takes place any moderation boards and Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) Committee will have met. You will receive the outcomes of the moderation board and the PEC committee.

The Board of Examiners will be held anonymously and will make and confirm decisions regarding student progression and the award of qualifications. No member of the Board of Examiners can alter the individual marks of students.

If the Board of Examiners is unable to reach a decision on any issue by common consent, a vote shall be taken and the matter shall be decided by the majority of Internal members then present and voting. The academic members of the Board and the Chair shall each have one vote. In the event of a tied vote, the Chair shall have a casting (i.e. second) vote. External Examiners are the arbiters of standards and not a decision maker of an award made by the University.

As an external examiner present at the Board of Examiners, you are to confirm that you are satisfied with the conduct of the assessment process, and with the overall standards. This confirmation should be recorded explicitly in the minutes of the Board of Examiners. If you are unable to attend the Board of Examiners, then you should confirm via email. In the event that you feel you cannot confirm that you are satisfied with the conduct of the assessment process, or the overall standards, the Chair of the Board of Examiners will report the matter to the Examinations Office. The Examinations Office will collate the relevant information and refer the matter to the Academic Registrar for consideration;

If at any point if it is necessary to call an additional or reconvened meeting of the Board of Examiners, you will be notified, and if you are unable to attend you will be given the opportunity to present your views.

### **Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) Committee**

The PEC Committee normally consists of a chair, secretary and two other senior members of

staff. You will not be a member of the PEC Committee but you will receive the outcomes of the meeting.

## **4. ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

The following section highlights some of the key Newcastle University regulations/procedures. There is no expectation that you are familiar with the detail of the full regulations and the Chair of the Board of Examiners will be able to provide you with any further guidance. You will have received the programme regulations for the programme(s) you are examining.

### **Moderation and Scaling**

You will have received a copy of the School Moderation and Scaling procedures which will provide information on School requirements.

The Module Moderation Board, or equivalent, will review the performance of modules taken in a given year.

Typically, all summative assessments which individually account for > 6 credits will be moderated (by sample) or double marked to confirm the fairness and validity of marking processes and standards. All dissertations and other appropriate pieces of work must be independently double marked.

Normally scaling would be considered by the Module Leader and the chair of the Board of Examiners. Scaling would be applied if the marks fail to reflect student performance adequately, typically if the marks as a whole appear to be too high or too low and would normally be applied to the entire cohort affected. Any instances of scaling will be reported to you before the Board of Examiners.

### **Re-assessment**

If a student passes a module (including by compensation or discretion), at any stage of the degree programme they cannot be reassessed for any component of that module, except with PEC approval under VI.A.9(f).

Undergraduate students have the right to a maximum of one re-assessment for each failed module. Students in the final stage of an Honours degree programme have the right to one re-assessment of some or all failed modules.

Postgraduate students have the right to one re-assessment for each taught module failed provided that:

- a. students on a 180-credit master's programme, no more than 60 credits of the taught element are failed at the first attempt;
- b. students on a postgraduate certificate programme, no more than 20 credits of the programme are failed at the first attempt.

## **Progression**

Undergraduate students are permitted to proceed from one stage to the next of the programme of study if they pass or have deemed to have passed all the modules in the current stage.

If a student fails up to 20 credits of non-core modules at Stage 2 of a 3-year programme after two attempts, or over Stages 2 and 3 of a 4-year programme, it is the normal expectation that the stage will be passed by discretion (in recognition of the fact that it is still possible for a student to gain an Honours degree by right subject to V.C.31). Board of Examiners deciding not to exercise discretion on this matter must minute a specific reason for not doing so.

To progress on an Integrated Masters programme, a student must meet the internal progression thresholds at the end of Stages 2 and 3, these will be specified in the programme regulations which you will have received. Students not meeting the threshold at the end of Stage 2 will be transferred onto the appropriate Bachelor's degree programme. Students not meeting the threshold at the end of Stage 3 will not be permitted to progress to Stage 4 and will be considered for the appropriate Stage 3 exit award, applying the principles of the Assessment Regulations for students on a 3-year degree. The Board of Examiners must consider all students whose final stage average (after rounding of marks) is within two marks of the progression threshold for the exercise of discretion as outlined in Regulation V.D.65.

For postgraduate students a Board of Examiners meeting will normally be held at the end of the taught component to consider progression. Students who remain eligible for the entry award of their programme may continue on the programme and those students who do not remain eligible, will not be permitted to continue on the programme.

## **Compensation**

Students at undergraduate level, except for final year students are deemed to have passed and be eligible to progress notwithstanding the fact that some fail marks have been obtained (marks of less than 40 in one or more modules for that stage), provided that each of the following conditions for compensation are met:

- a) The stage average is at least 40;
- b) No single mark for any module of Levels 4-6 is below 35;
- c) No single mark for any Level 7 module assessed is below 40;
- d) The modules for which marks lie between 35 and 39 (Levels 4 – 6) or 40 – 49 (Level 7) do not include core modules and have total credit value of no greater than 40 (out of the 120 credits studied).

The modules in d) above are deemed to be passed by compensation.

## **Discretion**

The Board of Examiners may use discretion to

- Deem a student to have passed specific modules;
- Deem a student to have passed the stage of a programme;
- Deem a student to have progressed to the next stage of a programme, despite not meeting a specific progress regulation or examination regulation;
- Recommend a student for an award, a higher award or a higher degree classification, subject to any restriction specified elsewhere in the regulations (including the Rules for Boards of Examiners).

Any discussions for exercising or not exercising discretion should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Please note that this use of discretion refers to the standard University Regulations. It should be read alongside any programme-specific exemptions, detailed in the programme regulations.

## **Borderline**

The Board of Examiners should consider any students in their final year who have the following programme averages 68 or 69, 58 or 59, 48 or 49, 38 or 39 and consider whether to award a higher classification or degree. The Board of Examiners should look at:

- a) The overall profile of individual marks achieved in modules;
- b) Exceptional performance by the student in any particular module, including, for example, research-based modules or in an oral examination where this is part of the degree programme regulations;
- c) Progressive improvement in performance by the student during the final 2 (or 3) stages of study, only where the stage weighting is 1:1.

The reason for exercising or not exercising discretion, should be recorded in the minutes.

## **Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC)**

Within the University regulations, the PEC procedure empowers the Academic Unit/Board of Examiners to make adjustments for individual student circumstances. The overarching principle is that a PEC Committee will only make a recommendation of 'Support' to a BoE where all other adjustment options have been exhausted, or where alternative adjustments would add to the circumstances affecting the student. Noting, where there is PEC 'support', BoE will only consider a higher award if the weighted average lies within 3 marks of the higher award boundary and where they believe there is a clear case for academic discretion in accordance with the grounds laid out in the regulations. Information on PEC can be found in the [Rules for Boards of Examiners](#).

The PEC Committee will meet before BoE take place. At this meeting, the committee members will:

- i. report all PEC decisions made since the last committee
- ii. consider any PEC forms that have been held for the meeting, and provide a recommendation of either 'Support' or 'No Support' to forward to the appropriate

BoE considering the student's profile and making progress or award decisions. This recommendation should take into account any appropriate adjustments already made, to avoid 'double-counting' and a recommendation of 'No Support' can be made for serious cases where appropriate adjustments have already been made.

For cases where a recommendation of 'Support' is provided to the BoE, the BoE will then consider whether there is a case for applying discretion. There may be occasions where the BoE feel (on consideration of the student profile) that a different adjustment, e.g for the student to retake the module, Semester or Stage again as a first attempt, would be more appropriate in which case the circumstance, with agreement of the student, should be reconsidered by a member of the PECC with the agreed decision communicated to the student. To maintain confidentiality, PEC circumstances should not be revisited and discussed in detail during a BoE meeting.

If the PECC supports a student's PEC circumstance, a number of adjustments are available in accordance with the University Regulations;

- Extensions within and beyond those permitted as part of the Submission of Work policy;
- Exemptions from minor elements of assessed work (normally a maximum of 20% of the module in question), where the mark for the module would need to be adjusted accordingly;
- Deferral of a formal examination or assessment attempt to the next normal occasion (generally August);
- Deferral of a formal examination or assessment attempt to a later normal occasion;
- Extraordinary examinations, including those outside of the regular assessment periods;
- Setting aside previous attempt(s) at a module, semester or stage and allowing repeat tuition if required;
- Allowing a student to retake a module, semester or stage with tuition (subject to payment of the appropriate tuition fees);
- Allowing a student to proceed to the next Stage of a programme carrying fails;
- To provide Boards of Examiners with a recommendation of support/no-support depending on the severity of the mitigating circumstances affecting a student, which have not been addressed in the ways outlined above or where alternative adjustments would unreasonably add to the circumstances (i.e. to recommend the use of discretion where appropriate).

A PECC may, on occasion, need to consider other adjustments in response to a student's personal extenuating circumstance case. Adjustments other than those listed above must be approved by an appropriate Dean.

## **Award**

### **Undergraduate Students**

Undergraduate students will be recommended, as of right, for the award of an appropriate Honours degree if all the requirements for the award are met, and

a) All the modules beyond Stage 1 in the degree programme are passed,  
or

- b) No more than 20 credits beyond Stage 1 are failed;
- c) All final stage core modules are passed; and
- d) The final programme average (calculated as specified in V.C. 34) is not less than 40.

The degree programme regulations shall specify the weight to be given to each stage beyond Stage 1. The stage averages shall be combined, according to the prescribed weightings, to produce an overall average, which is also rounded to one decimal place. The final programme average is then obtained by rounding the overall average to the nearest whole number.

*Recommendation of other than an Honours Degree*

Pass Degree – a student has passed at least 300 credits, of which 60 must be at level 6, and the final programme average is not less than 35.

Higher Education Diploma – a student has passed at least 240 credits, of which at least 90 credits are at level 5 or above.

Higher Education Certificate - a student has passed at least 120 credits, of which at least 90 are at level 4 or above.

**Postgraduate Students**

Postgraduate students will be recommended, as of right, for the award of an appropriate Master's degree, Postgraduate Diploma or Postgraduate Certificate if all the requirements are met and all the modules are passed.

A postgraduate student who passes all core modules and fails up to 20 credits of non-core modules from the taught stage of the programme is recommended, as of right, for the award of an appropriate Master's degree or Postgraduate Diploma, provided that the final programme average is at least 50.

Such a student on a classified programme will be eligible as of right only for the award of a pass; a student would only be entitled to a Merit or Distinction, as indicated by their final programme average, if they have passed all modules (at either first or second attempt), or have accumulated no more than 20 credits in condoned fails). The same principle applies to the award of a Postgraduate Certificate to a student failing up to 10 credits of non-core modules.

Postgraduate Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate entry awards may be classified if this is stipulated in the programme regulations. In such cases, the classification is determined by the principles below.

- a) Students are entitled as of right to the class of award yielded by the final programme average.
- b) Masters students with final programme averages of 48 or 49, 58 or 59, 68 or 69, (after rounding of marks) shall always be considered for the next higher class of award.
- c) Postgraduate Diploma and Certificate students with final programme averages of 48 or 49 shall always be considered for the award of a Pass. Postgraduate Diploma and Certificate students with final programme averages of 58 or 59, and 68 or 69 shall be considered for the next higher class of award if provision for classification is included in the programme regulations.
- d) The Board of Examiners, when considering the exercise of discretion, shall have regard to the following:
  - i. Any recommendation from the Personal Extenuating Circumstances Committee on the effect and scope of medical or other mitigating circumstances that were submitted to the Personal Extenuating Circumstance Committee, on the effect and scope of medical or other mitigating circumstances that were submitted to the Personal Extenuating Circumstances Committee.

In cases where the final programme average is within two marks of a class boundary as defined in clauses b) and c) above:

- ii. The overall profile of individual marks achieved in modules;
- iii. Exceptional performance in any particular module, including, for example, research based modules;
- iv. Progressive improvement in performance by the student.

### **Aegrotat**

The Board of Examiners may award an Aegrotat degree to a student who has registered for the final stage of an undergraduate programme but who presents sufficient evidence of ill health or any other extenuating circumstance such that, in the judgement of the board, there is no reasonable possibility that the student can complete the degree programme.

For students on taught postgraduate programmes they must have demonstrated ability over typically at least 50% of the programme they are registered on. The Boards of Examiners should be mindful of the possibility of enabling the student to sit the assessments at a later date, and so be eligible for a classified degree. In addition, the Board should consider the appropriateness of awarding an appropriate exit award. It is not open to the Board to grant an aegrotat to students registered on certain professionally accredited programmes. A student to whom an aegrotat is awarded shall be deemed to have obtained honours but without classification.

The Board of Examiners shall have the power to award a degree posthumously as it sees fit.

## 5. EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

You are required to report annually to the University on the quality, standards and procedures of the programme(s).

### Completion and Submission of Report

Reports should be submitted via an online submission system, which is available here: <https://apps.ncl.ac.uk/Examiners> You will log in using your own institution email details.

Please note that you need to provide an answer to each question in order to progress through the report.

There is further [guidance on using the online submission system and completion of your report](#) and if you have any support queries on using the system please contact [ext.examiners@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:ext.examiners@ncl.ac.uk).

Please try to be specific in each section of the report and ensure that your report contains clear feedback on the quality and standards, and include any areas on good practice and areas for enhancement. One word or one sentence responses throughout the report may not provide the subject area with enough information to enhance their programme(s). All sections within the report must be completed; if the section is not applicable, please insert N/A.

When you are completing the report, please do not mention individual staff or students by name.

The report consists of various sections

- *Section A – External Examiner details*

This section will provide details of the programmes which you are examining.

- *Section B – Academic Standards and Output*

This section asks questions regarding the quality and standards of the programmes.

- *Section C – Programme and Curriculum*

This section asks broad questions on curriculum design and delivery.

- *Section D – Assessment and Feedback*

This section asks questions about assessment and feedback.

- *Section E – Transnational Education*

This section is only for those programmes part of specific transnational education arrangement (at the moment only our Malaysia programmes).

- *Section F – Apprenticeships with credit-bearing EPA*

This section is only relevant for programmes which are apprenticeships with credit-bearing end-point Assessment (EPA).

- *Section G – Procedures*

This section on procedures asks you about procedures as part of the assessment process for the academic year.

- *Section H – checklist*

The checklist is designed to provide confirmation that you have received sufficient evidence and support to fulfil your role.

- *Section I - Summary*

This section is to allow you to summarise good practice, areas for enhancement and anything you want to raise to the attention of Faculty or University.

- *End of appointment*

This section is for your final year of appointment and allows you to provide an overview report.

- *Further comments - optional*

This section is option and allows you to add any further comments for consideration.

Once you have completed your report, please submit by the following deadlines:

- For undergraduate programmes (except for MBBS and BDS programmes) – **1 September**
- For taught postgraduate programmes – **30 November**

Please do let us know if you will be late in submitting your report. If you have not submitted your report by the deadline a reminder will be sent to you. Failure to submit your report could result in your appointment being terminated. On receipt of your report the Examinations Office will make arrangements for your fee to be paid.

#### **Matters of Serious Concern**

If you wish to raise a matter of serious concern with the Vice-Chancellor, you should contact the Vice Chancellor, Newcastle University, King's Gate, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU. Serious concerns might include those which put academic standards or quality at risk, such as:

- Significant deficiencies in academic provision by a School;
- Substantial differences in the application of assessment criteria within the same School;
- Major irregularities or deficiencies in the examination and assessment processes;
- Lack of facilities appropriate to the standard normally expected for a particular programme of study.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education will conduct necessary investigations and will respond directly to you.

### **What happens to your report**

Following receipt of your report will be circulated to the following:

- School Learning & Teaching Manager (for Board of Studies attention)
- Faculty Education Committee
- Educational Governance and Policy Service

The report will be considered by the Board of Studies which will include student representatives. The Chair of the Board of Studies will ensure that a written response is sent to you. The response will address all issues raised in the report and should outline any actions to be taken and/or reasons for disagreeing with any recommendation(s). You should expect to receive the response directly from the School within the following timescale:

- Undergraduate programmes (except MBBS and BDS) – No later than the end of November
- Taught postgraduate programmes – No later than the end of January

If you made a recommendation to the University, this will be considered by either the Educational Policy and Governance Service or the University's Taught Programme Sub-Committee and a response will be provided to you.

## **6. FEES & EXPENSES**

### **Fees**

As an external examiner you will be compensated for your service. Information on Newcastle University External Examining Fees can be found on our webpages:

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/exams/staff/externalexamining/>

All fee rates include one annual visit (for up to 3 days) for purposes of moderation and attendance at the Board of Examiners. You may claim a fee of £50 per visit for up to 2

additional visits per year if it has been agreed with the Chair of the Board of Examiners that these are essential to the role. These visits may be used, for example, to facilitate meetings between you and students or to enable you to attend student presentations, performances, etc.

You will be paid additional fees for modules or programmes which are offered at multiple locations (See [webpages](#), and Annex A of the fees section “External Examining for taught programmes or modules offered in multiple locations”).

The payment of fees is conditional upon receipt of completed reports by the deadlines provided in section 5 and is done automatically. Fees will be paid into your bank account on the last day of the month only if the report is received by the University before 12th of the same month, otherwise, payment will be made on the last day of the following month.

Please note that all fees are taxed.

## **Expenses**

Newcastle University will reimburse you for the following types of expenses:

- Travel
- Accommodation and related costs
- Meals

Further guidance on External Examiner Expenses can be found on the [Exams webpages](#).

Expenses can be claimed by accessing <https://apps.ncl.ac.uk/examiners>. More [information on how to claim expenses](#) is available on our website.

## **7. CHANGES TO APPOINTMENT or CHANGE IN CIRCUMSTANCES**

If your circumstances change after you have been appointed in such a way that a conflict of interest might arise (e.g. a change of job), you should notify the University ([ext.examiner@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:ext.examiner@ncl.ac.uk)) of this change.

Your appointment may be temporarily suspended, for up to one year, by yourself or the University due to illness, maternity leave or other unforeseen circumstances. Please notify your academic unit and [ext.examiner@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:ext.examiner@newcastle.ac.uk).

If you wish to terminate your appointment for any reason, you should write to the Vice-Chancellor, Newcastle University, King’s Gate, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU, giving no less than three months’ notice.

## USEFUL INFORMATION

*Please be aware you will need to be logged into Newcastle University website to access these pages*

University Regulations

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/regulations/>

University Quality and Standards Handbook

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/epgs/policies-and-procedures/handbook/>

Policy and procedure for external examiners of taught programmes

[Policy and Procedure for External Examiners of Taught Programmes](#)

Education Strategy

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/who-we-are/education-strategy/>

Rules for Boards of Examiners

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/mediav8/university-regulations/files/2526%2006%20VI%20Rules%20for%20Boards%20of%20Examiners.pdf>

Guidance on attending the Board of Examiners virtually

[Guidance on virtual attendance at the BoE](#)

Guidance on accessing Canvas (VLE)

[Canvas Guidance for External Examiners](#)

Module Catalogue

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/module-catalogue/module.php>

Report Submission

<https://apps.ncl.ac.uk/Examiners>

Guidance on online submission

[External Examiners' system – Guidance for External Examiners](#)

Guidance on Fees

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/exams/staff/externalexamining/>

Document last modified by EPGS, June 2024.	
This document is primarily intended for:	External Examiners
Contact:	<a href="mailto:ext.examiners@ncl.ac.uk">ext.examiners@ncl.ac.uk</a>

### Version History

Version	Date	Details
1.0	August 2023	Published.
1.2	November 2024	Updated section 6 (Fees) to bring in line with the Policy.
2.0	November 2024	Revision: - Section 3. Board of Examiner Process: Removal of the requirement of EEs to sign a paper copy of the list of final degree result, and making the role of EE at the Board of Examiners more explicit (i.e. commenting on the conduct of the assessment process, and the overall standards).
3.0	March 2025	Revision: Updates to sections referring to the old report form, to bring in line with the new one.
3.1	June 2025	Update section on Discretion on page 10 – to be read alongside any programme-specific exemptions to the use of it.
3.2	September 2025	Removal of reference to Moderation and Scaling Policy, as this Policy was retired.

## **Introduction**

1. This policy covers all taught programmes, both undergraduate and postgraduate, wherever and however they are delivered. It aims to provide a framework within which all examiners must operate in order to comply with the University's Statutes and, in particular, to enable the Senate to fulfil its responsibilities as the supreme governing body in all academic matters (Statutes 27-29).

## **Principles of the University's use of external examiners**

2. The University is responsible for the quality and standards of all academic awards made in its name. The function of external examiners is to assist the University in discharging this responsibility. In order to ensure the quality of the education it provides and the maintenance of the standards of its awards, the University makes scrupulous use of its external examiners by:
  - a. Requiring them to provide independent and impartial advice, as well as informative comment on the University's standards and on student achievement in relation to those standards;
  - b. Drawing upon their professional advice and expertise and giving full and serious consideration to their reports.

## **External examiners and Educational Partnerships**

3. It is the responsibility of the University, when it is making an award, to appoint an external examiner, irrespective of whether all or part of the programme is delivered by a collaborative partner (or partners). The following minimum standard applies to external examining arrangements for programmes that are the subject of an educational partnership:-
  - a. Where appropriate, external examiners should be the same as those overseeing similar programmes delivered at Newcastle so that they can ensure comparability of standards. If separate examiners are used (e.g. for dual awards or another institution's modules included on Newcastle programmes), arrangements should be made to bring together the judgements of the different examiners regarding the standards of the programmes, i.e. the Newcastle Board of Studies should consider the reports of all examiners;
  - b. the external examiner(s) must visit the TNE or partner provision once during their period of appointment, and can attend by video conference at other times;
  - c. the Agreement should set out the need for the Newcastle external to sample review some of the partner's assessment and what that sample would consist of. This is not required for a UK partner once their quality management processes have been considered as equivalent and appropriate (in these cases a copy of their external examiner report going to the Newcastle BoS would suffice);
  - d. any costs of travel and/or translation must be borne by the Newcastle school or by the partner (depending on what is agreed when the partnership is established, and specified in the Agreement);
  - e. The use of external examiners for maintaining and enhancing quality and standards is not commonplace in many countries and is one area where further information on this area of practice may be required to aid the partners' understanding of the role.

4. The extent to which a collaborative partner becomes involved in aspects of the process is a matter for the University to determine with the partner. Such arrangements will be explicitly covered in the Memorandum of Agreement setting out the partnership arrangements.

## **Research degree programmes**

5. For programmes containing research and taught elements (such as professional doctorates or Integrated PhD), a single external examiner may be appointed for both elements. This policy covers the taught elements of such programmes. External examining arrangements for the research elements of such programmes (and all other research degree programmes) are covered in the University's [Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees](#).

## **Special types of provision**

6. The specific responsibility of each external examiner is dependent on the role allocated by the institution on appointment, and may be at different levels depending on the nature of the provision and the way in which decision-making processes about assessment are structured at the programme or module level. The policy can therefore be adapted to suit specific subject area needs, as in the case of Combined Honours provision and the PARTNERS programme, for example. For distance learning programmes, points a. b. and d. above should be regarded as additional guiding principles in determining external examining arrangements.

## **Purpose and role of external examiners**

7. The University requires its external examiners to:
  - a. confirm whether the standards of the University's awards meet or exceed the academic standards specified in external reference points such as the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, the UK Quality Code, subject benchmark statements, and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies;
  - b. confirm whether the academic standards of the University's awards are consistent with those of similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions;
  - c. report on whether the University's processes for assessment measure student achievement rigorously and fairly and are conducted in line with University policies and regulations;
  - d. identify, where appropriate, examples of good practice and innovation in learning, teaching and assessment;
  - e. comment on opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning experience provided to students.
8. A detailed list of duties is outlined in paragraphs 45-48.

## **Nomination and Appointment**

### *Nomination*

9. For each taught programme, module, or element, the Board of Studies undertakes the task of establishing and maintaining the output standards of the award. The Head of School is responsible for ensuring that this task is undertaken effectively. One or a combination of external examiners for

each programme (or part thereof), or module, is nominated by the Head of School or a delegated nominee. The University reserves the right to appoint a 'principal' where a team of external examiners is used, if this is deemed necessary by the Chair of Faculty Education Committee.

10. The nomination form is available at: <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/epgs/policies-and-procedures/external-examiners/>
11. External examiners are normally appointed for a period of four years. This does not preclude schools appointing external examiners for a shorter period of time if that is desirable for both parties. In exceptional circumstances it may be considered appropriate to extend the appointment of a current external examiner for a fifth and final year to achieve continuity, for example, where a programme is being withdrawn or suspended. Requests for such extensions must be submitted for consideration and approval by the Chair of Faculty Education Committee, and subsequently reported to University Education Committee.
12. An external examiner appointment may temporarily be suspended by the University or the external examiner, for example due to illness, maternity leave or other unforeseen circumstances for up to one year. Another suitable external examiner will then be appointed to take on the role on a temporary basis to cover the period of absence. The original end date remains as advised at appointment.
13. Nominations should be considered by the relevant Board of Studies prior to consideration by the Faculty Education Committee. The Chair of the Board of Studies should sign the nomination form as evidence that BoS consideration has taken place. The Head of School should sign the nomination form prior to submission to Educational Policy and Governance Service (EPGS) ([ext.examiners@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:ext.examiners@ncl.ac.uk)). EPGS is responsible for checking all nominations to ensure compliance with the criteria (minus the eligibility to work check) for appointment prior to seeking Chair of Faculty Education Committee approval for each nomination.
14. The University must, by law, ensure that prospective external examiners are eligible to work in the UK. This will be carried out after the Faculty Education Committee Chair has approved the nomination. The check **must** be carried out before the confirmation of appointment email is sent to the external examiner and no less than 24 hours before any work whatsoever is undertaken by the external examiner. EPGS is responsible for obtaining and checking copies of examiners' identity documents in order to comply with legal requirements. [Guidance for the Right to Work check](#) for EPGS on this is available on the website.
15. Subject to the receipt of a satisfactorily completed nomination form and supporting documents, recommendations for appointment are approved by the Chair of Faculty Education Committee. An annual report from each Faculty Education Committee recording all appointments approved for the current academic year is provided to Senate via the Taught Programme Sub-Committee (TPSC) and the University Education Committee.

## Criteria for selection

### *General*

16. In making nominations, Heads of Schools or their delegated nominee must, in consultation with colleagues, apply the following UK-wide set of criteria for appointing external examiners (as defined

in [UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: External Expertise](#)). The criteria need to be met for each programme/module being examined through one or a combination of external examiners.

17. *Person Specification* (The University will appoint external examiners who can show appropriate evidence of the following):
  - a. knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality
  - b. competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof
  - c. relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate
  - d. competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures
  - e. 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
  - f. familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed
  - g. fluency in English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that external examiners are provided with the information to make their judgements)
  - h. meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies
  - i. awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula
  - j. competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.
18. At least one external examiner for each programme should work for a higher education institution within the UK (or have worked at one within the last five years).
19. *Conflicts of interest* (The University will not appoint as external examiners anyone in the following categories or circumstances):
  - a. a member of University Council or Senate, or a governing body of one of the University's collaborative partners;
  - b. a current employee of the University;
  - c. anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study;
  - d. anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study;
  - e. anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study;
  - f. 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 modules in question;
  - g. former staff or students of the institution unless a period of five years has elapsed, and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s);
  - h. a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution;
  - i. the succession of an external examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home department and institution;
  - j. the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution.

20. In addition, the University will not appoint as external examiners:

- former external examiners, unless a period of five years has elapsed since their last appointment;
- external examiners holding more than two external examiner appointments at any institution for taught programmes/modules at any point in time.

21. If an external examiner moves to a new post at a different institution, the external examiner should advise the University so that no conflict of interest arises. Should such a conflict of interest occur, the relevant Chair of Faculty Education Committee will liaise with EPGS in order to take any necessary action.

*Exceptions and special cases*

22. The University will appoint as external examiners individuals who do not meet all the above criteria only in exceptional circumstances where there is a legitimate case for making such an appointment. A case for an exception should be detailed in the nomination form and will be subject to consideration and approval by both the Chair of Faculty Education Committee and the PVC Education. Exceptions will be reported to University Education Committee via TPSC.

23. Examples of possible exceptions would be:

- External examiners drawn from business, industry or the professions who are unable to fulfil all the criteria (such as qualifications, academic background or experience of assessment);
- external examiners who, as researchers, have eminent standing in their discipline, but lack experience of providing and enhancing the student learning experience;
- nominations for external examiners in specialist disciplines where the pool of potential external examiners is restricted

24. Consideration of such cases may be assisted where the nominee is not the sole external examiner for the provision, hence her/his expertise would be complemented by that of others who do fulfil all the criteria.

25. Retirees, or individuals who plan to retire during a proposed period of appointment, may be considered for appointment provided there is sufficient evidence of their continuing involvement in the academic area in question, sufficient to meet the criteria listed above.

*Appointment of first-time external examiners and handover arrangements*

26. The University encourages the nomination of suitably qualified colleagues to undertake their first post as external examiner and gain experience in the role, and also wishes to encourage the transfer of knowledge between successive examiners. In cases where individuals are nominated who have no previous external examining experience at any institution, or where a single external examiner is appointed for a single programme, Schools should make arrangements for examiners to be appointed to a team of external examiners, or to support handover or shadowing arrangements, or to be provided with suitable briefing by relevant members of University staff as preparation for the examination process.

*Use of external advisers from programme approval and external subject specialists from Learning and Teaching Review (LTR)*

27. Individuals who are asked to fulfil the role of external adviser for a new programme proposal may also be appointed to serve as external examiner for the programme once it is introduced. The University permits this firstly, on the grounds that it represents good practice for such individuals to engage with a programme from proposal through to completion of a first cohort of students, and secondly, as the University seeks to ensure that the pool of external examiners is not unnecessarily restricted. The latter reasoning also applies in the case of external subject specialists from LTR, who may be appointed to serve as external examiners even if the LTR has taken place during the past five years. However, a current external examiner may not be asked to serve as an external subject specialist in LTR.

## Appointment

28. Following confirmation of appointment, examiners are sent from EPGS:

- A confirmation email setting out the terms and conditions of appointment, including confirmation of the programme(s), module(s) to which the external is appointed;
- Links to key information including:
  - The University Policy and Procedures for External Examiners of Taught Programmes;*
  - The University's General Regulations, relevant Regulations for Taught Programmes – Assessment Regulations, and the University's Academic Appeals Procedure for Students;*
  - Guidance for Boards of Examiners;*
  - The University's Education Strategy*
  - Information for [Candidates with Special Requirements in Exams](#)*

29. Examiners are sent from the relevant Board of Studies:

- External examiner reports and BoS responses from the previous two years;
- The relevant Degree Programme Handbook;
- Procedures relating to relevant professional issues, e.g. Fitness to Practise.

## Termination of appointments

30. An external examiner may terminate their appointment for any reason, in which case they should write to the Vice-Chancellor, Newcastle University, King's Gate, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU. For appointments effective from 2017-18, the external examiner must give no less than three months' notice when terminating their appointment.

31. The University can terminate an examiner's appointment at any time in the event that:

- the examiner fails to attend a Board of Examiners (where required to do so and without good cause and/or making alternative arrangements);
- the examiner fails to submit an annual report by the deadline determined by the University, or submits an incomplete report;
- an unresolvable conflict of interest develops.

32. The Chair of Faculty Education Committee is responsible (in liaison with EPGS) for suggesting cases where terminating an examiner's appointment should be considered. The PVC Education is responsible for approving such requests and will write to the external examiner on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor with an explanation of the reasons. EPGS will provide the academic unit with an

explanation of the reasons, ask the academic unit to nominate a suitable replacement, and also inform the Examinations Office.

## **Change in circumstances of an external examiner**

33. If the circumstances of an external examiner change after they have been appointed in such a way that a conflict of interest might arise (e.g. a change of job), they should notify the University of this change where an assessment of the continuation of appointment will be undertaken by the relevant Faculty Education Committee in liaison with EPGS. In cases where it is considered that the examiner remains suitably independent to continue in the role, the matter will be reported to TPSC acting on behalf of University Education Committee.

## **Institutional responsibilities in relation to external examiners**

34. The University Education Committee is responsible for ensuring to Senate that the nomination and appointment process has been conducted in fair and rigorous manner and for consideration and confirmation of appointments by Faculties at the Institutional level; to fulfil this role University Education Committee receives (via TPSC) an annual report of the appointments from each of the Faculties which includes the following:
  - a. Name and title of nominee;
  - b. Institution of the nominee;
  - c. Institution of the previous external examiner;
  - d. Degree Programme(s) to which they have been appointed;
  - e. Institutions of other external examiners for the same degree programme(s).
35. EPGS maintains a central register of appointment and periods of tenure and maintains the ongoing institutional overview of appointments. The Examinations Office is responsible for the arrangement of the payment of fees, which is conditional on receipt of written annual reports, and of expenses incurred in fulfilment of the role. Details of fees are available on the [Exams Office webpages](#).
36. The University gives full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiners' reports, and provides external examiners with a considered and timely response.

## **Support for external examiners**

37. Each year, external examiners can expect to receive from the appropriate Chair of Board of Examiners:
  - a. Details of any duties additional to those specified in paragraphs 45-48 of this policy;
  - b. Regulations for Taught Programmes – Assessment Regulations relevant to the degree programme;
  - c. Any instructions issued to examiners and/or boards of examiners;
  - d. Degree programme regulations, programme specifications and programme handbooks (including assessment criteria) for the relevant programme(s);
  - e. Information about School moderation and scaling procedures;
  - f. A full list of modules, module descriptions, including learning outcomes and assessment methods;
  - g. Procedures relating to relevant professional issues, e.g. Fitness to Practise.

- h. Access to programme materials within the Virtual Learning Environment used by the school;
- i. Draft assessment types, including examination papers and coursework instruments, and, if appropriate, a description of the marking schemes for each type of assessment, and, if deemed appropriate by the Board of Studies, model answers for assessments.
- j. A selection of assessed student work (to be sent or made available to external examiners). The principles for such selection should be agreed early in the academic year between the Chair of the Board of Examiners and the external examiner and include, where appropriate, details of sampling across various locations of delivery or educational partnerships;
- k. Samples of Learning Agreements relating to any student placements or - if the placement is for credit- samples of assessed work.
- l. The arrangements, where appropriate, for the selection of candidates for viva voce examinations where the viva is a formal part of the assessment process (taught postgraduate programmes only);
- m. The arrangements for the external examiner to be given adequate opportunity to communicate with internal examiners and, where appropriate, others involved in teaching and assessment (such as placement providers/assessors);
- n. Information concerning the authority and role of the external examiner in the Board of Examiners. (NB This must be consistent with the relevant Examinations Conventions: Regulations for Taught Programmes – Assessment Regulations;
- o. Early information concerning the dates and times of Boards of Examiners meetings;
- p. Minutes from meetings of Boards of Examiners which have taken place during the period of their appointment and at which student performance has been considered;
- q. Details of arrangements made, where appropriate, for them to meet with students on the programme (including, wherever possible, those on placements) they are appointed to examine. The purpose of such meetings should be made clear well in advance. In order to facilitate this, external examiners may claim a small fee for up to two additional visits per year if they are essential to the role. Alternative arrangements, such as the use of Skype and dial-in conferencing, may also be made to maximise the number of interactions between students and external examiners;
- r. Information, where appropriate, on any Educational Partnership activity including any differences in syllabus, module content, intended learning outcomes, programme structures and the reasons for any such differences.

38. In addition, external examiners will receive a briefing from the Chair of the Board of Examiners and, if appropriate, the Degree Programme Director prior to the Board of Examiners' meeting which will cover all relevant Regulations for Taught Programmes – Assessment Regulations.

39. It is particularly important for those with no previous experience of external examining to attend this briefing. All external examiners, however, should be offered other opportunities to visit the University at any time during the term of their contract and consultation with external examiners throughout the year is encouraged.

40. It is the responsibility of the relevant School to provide the external examiner with clear information as to the precise nature of the evidence that will be made available, as well as to how and when this will happen.

41. External examiners can expect to receive, from the University:-

- a. A virtual institutional briefing / induction in the form of the [Handbook for External Examiners of Taught Programmes](#);

- b. [Guidance on using the online External Examiners system](#) for the submission of reports
- c. Additional paper- and web-based information outlined in paragraph 38 above;
- d. Regular updates on institutional assessment policy and procedures to be provided by EPGS

42. A full list of supporting documents can be accessed via the External Examiners page on the [EPGS website](#).

43. External examiners for programmes that are the subject of an educational partnership can expect to receive, from the appropriate School:-

- a. A briefing on the nature of the partnership and clear explanation of the relationship and the roles and responsibilities of each partner.

## Duties

44. In order to report to the University on the soundness and fairness of the assessment process and on the standards of student achievement, the duties of external examiners of taught programmes are:

### Core:

- a. To comment upon the standard of University awards in relation to external references, including the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, subject benchmarks and in relation to other UK Higher Education Institutions, and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies;
- b. To review and evaluate examinations and other forms of assessment which contribute to students' degree results;
- c. To review and evaluate the assessment process;
- d. To ensure consistency in the assessment process;
- e. To participate in viva voce examinations, if they are held (taught postgraduate programmes only);
- f. To comment on the structure and academic standards of the relevant programmes;
- g. To comment on the content and teaching of the relevant programmes, particularly with regard to how the programme is informed by current research and scholarship, and how the programme is delivering in terms of graduate employability;
- h. To comment, if invited to do so by the University, on specific questions arising from academic appeals made by candidates;
- i. To comment, if invited to do so by the University, on the academic consequences of cases of suspected or proven cheating / assessment offences by students;
- j. To review the extent to which the assessment for a programme of study enables students to demonstrate that the Intended Learning Outcomes have been met through the annual approval of an Assessment Framework. The framework will include the assessment strategy for the programme, a full list of modules, indicating their status and their form of assessment.
- k. External examiners may request further detail on any assessment type and see any draft assessment type, including examination papers and coursework.
- l. All assessed work will be made available to an external examiner if requested. As a minimum, external examiners should see at least one piece of work from each module each year which contribute to the final degree classification. This should include samples of assessed work from for-credit placement modules. For written examinations external examiners should see a sample of scripts from the top, middle and bottom of the range, (the sample selection should be made in consultation with the external examiner, and arrangements will reflect the volume and nature of assessment).

- m. The scripts of all candidates who have been severely penalised because they have failed to obey instructions relating to the assessment should be drawn separately to the attention of the external examiner.

45. In addition, external examiners may be asked to:

- a. Fulfil, if requested by the academic unit, the core duties for external examiners (as listed above) in relation to any stand-alone modules taken for credit where the module is either part of, or in a discipline cognate with, a named programme of study for which the individual has been appointed as external examiner.
- b. Observe clinical practice, or oral/aural performance, or demonstration of work (e.g. poster, design or artistic work). Such duties, if the external examiner is involved, will normally be conducted for the whole cohort of students, with the guidance of one or more internal examiners;
- c. Comment upon students' work undertaken at Stages 0 and 1;
- d. Provide, if appropriate, an independent external view on changes proposed to existing programmes to ensure that standards are comparable with similar programmes elsewhere.

46. All external examiners are required to provide an overview report at the end of their term of appointment.

47. Boards of Examiners are required to make these additional expectations explicit to external examiners on their appointment and annually.

## **Procedure of Board of Examiners and the role of external examiner**

### *Role of the External Examiner*

48. Full guidance on the operation of Boards of Examiners can be found in the [Rules for Boards of Examiners](#). The University expects external examiners to be conversant with this guidance.

- a. The external examiner appointed for a programme is a member of the relevant Board of Examiners and is required to attend the final meeting of the Board in person, or, via a video link (the external examiner must visit at least once during their appointment) in order to carry out the required duties;
- b. In normal circumstances, a decision on the award of a qualification to a candidate shall only be made by a Board of Examiners if the appointed external examiner is present;
- c. External examiners have the right to speak on any matter regardless of whether their opinion has been specifically invited. However, the Board is not obliged to defer to their judgement in taking decisions;
- d. The external examiner has no special role in individual cases relating to mitigating circumstances and therefore will not be invited to take part in School Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) committees, although they should expect to be informed of its decisions;
- e. No member of the Board of Examiners, including the external examiner, can alter the individual marks of students;
- f. The external examiner present at the Board of Examiners is to confirm that they are satisfied with the conduct of the assessment process, and with the overall standards. This confirmation should be recorded explicitly in the minutes of the Board of Examiners. If the external examiner is unable to attend the Board of Examiners, then they should confirm via email. In the event that the external examiner is not able to attend a Board in person, they should confirm via email to the Chair of the Board of Examiners. In the event

that the external examiner is unwilling to confirm that they are satisfied with the conduct of the assessment process, or the overall standards, the Chair of the Board of Examiners should report the matter to the Examinations Office. The Examinations Office will collate the relevant information and refer the matter to the Academic Registrar for consideration;

g. External examiners are encouraged to attend resit Board of Examiners meetings either in person or via video link. Although attendance is not compulsory, all external examiners for the provision should be consulted prior to these meeting, and are required to engage with this stage of the assessment process.

49. For Joint and Combined Honours degrees, external examiners from relevant single Honours subject areas are asked to provide separate comments on the comparability of standards and student performance specifically relating to joint or combined honours. For the degree of BA with Honours in Combined Studies and the BSc Joint Honours in Science, external assessors are appointed by the appropriate Faculty Education Committee in line with the criteria for external examiners. The external assessor is not required to scrutinise the work of candidates but is required to attend the meeting of the relevant Board of Examiners and to report to the University on the reliability and integrity of the process of deciding awards. For all Boards of Examiners, internal examiners must be present to provide effective liaison where appropriate and practicable.

### **Absence of an external examiner**

50. In the unavoidable absence of an external examiner, the Board of Examiners may proceed on condition that the external examiner:-

- has provided comments on the standards of the programmes for which they have responsibility;
- is available for consultation;
- receives a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Examiners and related documentation;
- completes and submits their annual report as normal.

51. In such cases, an alternative external examiner attending the same Board of Examiners meeting can report on the operation of procedures by the Board.

52. If the external examiner is unable at the last minute to attend the Board of Examiners in person, they may be deemed to be present and in attendance through a video link, on condition that it can be ensured that they are well-informed as other members of the Board, has access to all necessary documents, and that a visual link can be maintained. [Guidance on virtual attendance](#) is available on the website.

53. If it is clear at an earlier stage in the academic year that an external examiner will not be able to fulfil all the duties required of them, it may be appropriate for an emergency replacement external examiner to be appointed for that year.

54. Absence, and the reason for that absence, must be documented and reported to the Board of Examiners by the Chair of the Board of Examiners.

## Reporting

55. The University requires its external examiners to submit annual reports through its online submission system which is accessible at: <https://apps.ncl.ac.uk/examiners> and, at the end of their period of appointment, provide a final written overview report. [Guidance on using the online system](#) is available at on the website. These reports are given serious and timely consideration.
56. Feedback is given to external examiners on any actions taken as a result of their report following the consideration of external examiners' reports by the Board of Studies; the Chair of the Board of Studies will provide a written reasoned response to the report. This written response will address all issues raised in the external examiner's report. If the Board of Studies has decided that no action should be taken on any issue, this will be stated and the reason(s) for this decision detailed in the response.
57. The University requires the external examiner in their annual report:
  - a. To report on the appropriateness of the standards of its awards, by reference to published national subject benchmarks, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, programme specifications and other relevant information;
  - b. To report on the comparability of standards with those of similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions;
  - c. To comment upon the appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes for the programme(s) and the extent to which the curriculum enables students to attain these outcomes;
  - d. To report on the extent to which its processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are sound and have been fairly conducted;
  - e. To report on the standards of student achievement including the strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort;
  - f. To comment upon examination and administrative procedural matters such as the provision of timely and sufficient information in order to fulfil their roles; the operation of the Board of Examiners;
  - g. To comment upon specific areas where programme(s) are collaborative in nature;
  - h. To identify, where appropriate, examples of good practice in teaching and learning.
58. For External examiners of Transnational Education provision supplementary questions in Section E will be required. If responses in Section E raise particular concerns, EPGS may investigate the matter further including direct contact with the External examiner.
59. For External examiners of apprenticeships with credit-bearing End Point Assessment (EPA), supplementary questions in section F will be required. If responses in Section F raise particular concerns, EPGS may investigate the matter further including direct contact with the External examiner
60. External examiners are asked not to identify individual staff or students by name in their annual report. Any names included in reports may be subject to redaction by the University. Positive comments will not be redacted.

## Procedures for the submission and consideration of reports

### *Introduction*

61. These procedures have been developed to:

- ensure that reports from external examiners are received as soon as possible after the boards of examiners have met;
- ensure that matters of concern are identified and responded to promptly;
- identify any University-wide themes and trends, and examples of good practice.

### *Submission of reports*

62. External examiners are required to complete and submit their reports electronically via the online system <https://apps.ncl.ac.uk/examiners>. Acknowledgement of receipt of reports is sent to external examiners by EPGS.

63. Following receipt of a report, the Examinations Office will arrange for the external examiners' fee to be paid.

64. As stated in the letter of appointment, the University expects external examiners to submit reports by the following dates:

For undergraduate programmes	1 September
For taught postgraduate programmes	30 November

65. If a report has not arrived by the appropriate deadline EPGS will notify the academic unit to check whether there are exceptional reasons for the delay. If no reason is identified, EPGS will contact the external examiner direct to remind them of the need to submit their report as soon as possible. EPGS will include the relevant Chair of Board of Studies and Faculty Education Committee secretary in any communication with the external examiner on this matter.

66. If the report is not received after such reminders, the Head of EPGS will contact the external examiner to advise them that the matter is being referred the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education for further consideration.

67. If the report is not received by the time of the referral, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education will write to the external examiner to terminate the external examiner's appointment.

68. Payment of fees is conditional on receipt of completed reports.

### **Circulation of reports**

69. On receipt of an external examiner's report copies of the report are sent by EPGS immediately to the academic unit that administers the degree programme. The University encourages the circulation of reports to all those concerned with the teaching of programmes. The Head of School should ensure that any complimentary comments about programmes are conveyed to those concerned.

1. For the MBBS and BDS programmes offered by the Faculty of Medical Sciences, the Faculty will arrange for the external examiners' fee to be paid.

## **External examiners' recommendations to the University and serious matters of concern**

69. In the event of an external examiner doing the following, EPGS will bring the report to the attention of the Dean and, if appropriate, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education and/or Vice-Chancellor:-

- a. requesting clarification or further information on a matter of University policy;
- b. recommending that a University policy be reviewed;
- c. highlighting a serious matter of concern.

70. Serious matters of concern are those which put academic standards or quality at risk, for example:

- a. significant deficiencies in academic provision by a School;
- b. substantial differences in the application of assessment criteria within the same programme;
- c. major irregularities or deficiencies in the examinations and assessment processes;
- d. lack of facilities appropriate to the standard normally expected for a particular programme of study.

71. In consultation with relevant senior staff, EPGS will produce a considered response setting out what, if any, action will be taken. This response will be sent to the external examiner by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education. The University has the right to reject the view of an external examiner, but will only proceed on this basis following careful consideration of the issues raised. To ensure that institutional oversight of such issues takes place, TPSC will meet to consider the response before it is finalised, and will notify University Education Committee of the final outcome. A copy of the final response will be sent to the relevant Faculty and academic unit, the latter having responsibility for informing professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, where applicable.

72. In addition to submitting their report, external examiners may also send a confidential letter to the Vice-Chancellor, Newcastle University, King's Gate, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU, under separate cover from their annual report. When such a letter is received the Vice-Chancellor will conduct such investigations as they deem appropriate, and reply to the external examiner's confidential letter. The Vice-Chancellor's office will notify EPGS that a response has been sent to the confidential letter. EPGS will inform relevant staff and student representatives of the substance of any confidential letter, or of the action arising, where these have implications for them. A copy of the final response will be sent to the relevant Faculty and academic unit, the latter having responsibility for informing professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, where applicable.

## **Consideration of reports**

73. All external examiners' reports for undergraduate programmes, taught postgraduate programmes, and taught elements of research degree programmes, should be considered by the relevant Board of Studies. The discussion of external examiners' reports by the Board of Studies should be fully minuted.

74. External examiners reports should be considered by the Board of Studies within the following timescale:

Undergraduate programmes	No later than the end of November
Taught postgraduate programmes	No later than the end of January

75.

76. Following the consideration of external examiners' reports by the Board of Studies, the Chair of the Board of Studies is responsible for ensuring that a written reasoned response is provided, addressing all issues raised in the reports. The Board of Studies response should be undertaken through the online External Examiner Database; further [guidance](#) is available on the EPGS website. Where the Board of Studies does not agree with an external examiner's recommendation, the response should outline to the examiner(s) the reasons for this view. The response of the Board of Studies, together with the external examiner's report, should be received for information by the relevant Student-Staff Committee.

77. Boards of Studies written responses to external examiners' reports should be forwarded to Faculty Learning and Teaching teams within the following timescale:

Undergraduate programmes	No later than the end of November
Taught postgraduate programmes	No later than the end of January

78. Faculty Education Committees are responsible for ensuring that appropriate action is taken by Boards of Studies in response to external examiners reports. All reports and Board of Studies responses are considered by a faculty quality circle, leading to the production of a faculty summary report that is considered by Faculty Education Committee. The faculty quality circle will ensure that all issues raised by external examiners have been satisfactorily addressed. The Chair of Faculty Education Committee (or nominee) provides written feedback to each Board of Studies. Where the quality circle considers that a written response does not address all the issues raised by an external examiner, this response will be referred back to the Board of Studies for further consideration. Where a written response from a Board of Studies is judged appropriate, Faculty Education Committee is responsible for notifying the Board of Studies of this.

79. Faculty Education Committees should consider Boards of Studies responses to external examiners' reports within the following timescale:

Undergraduate programmes	No later than the end of February
Taught postgraduate programmes	No later than the end of April

80. Following the meeting of Faculty Education Committee at which the faculty summary report on external examiners' reports and responses is considered, the summary report, together with an extract from the minutes of the meeting of Faculty Education Committee where it was considered, should be forwarded, with any recommendations, to the TPSC acting on delegated authority from University Education Committee.

81. TPSC is responsible for considering any University-wide themes and trends arising from external examiners' reports, and, if appropriate, considering whether University Regulations, policies, procedures or guidelines need to be revised. In order to fulfil this responsibility, TPSC considers reports from Faculty Education Committees on the consideration of external examiners' reports, and overviews prepared by EPGS of all external examiners' reports on taught programmes. Separate overviews are prepared for undergraduate programmes and taught postgraduate programmes.

82. TPSC's consideration of University-wide issues arising from external examiners' reports should take place at the earliest opportunity following Faculty Education Committee consideration. At the earliest opportunity following TPSC consideration, TPSC shall submit an annual summary report to

University Education Committee on the general issues and themes arising from the year's external examiners' reports.

83. The first meeting of the next academic year of TPSC will consider reports from Faculty Education Committee on any outstanding external examiner reports and Board of Studies responses.

## **QAA - Concerns about standards and quality in higher education**

84. Where an external examiner has a serious concern relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme or programmes and has exhausted all published applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor they may invoke QAA's concerns scheme or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.

85. For information about how the concerns scheme applies to external examining, reference should be made to [QAA's concerns scheme](#). The scheme must not be used for one-off cases of ineffective practice, or to raise a personal grievance or issues relating to an external examiner's appointment.

Policy last modified by EPGS, November 2024.	
Document last modified by EPGS, November 2024.	
This document is primarily intended for:	Chairs of Boards of Examiners Degree Programme Directors External Examiners School Managers/Admin
Contact:	<a href="mailto:education.policy.governance@newcastle.ac.uk"><u>education.policy.governance@newcastle.ac.uk</u></a>

### **Version History**

Version	Date	Details
1.0	May 2021	Published.
2.0	November 2024	<p>Revisions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Section 3b: bringing the number of visits made by EEs for TNE or partner provision in line with those of EEs on regular programmes.</li><li>- Section 48: Removal of the requirement of EEs to sign a paper copy of the list of final degree result, and making the role of EE more explicit (i.e. commenting on the conduct of the assessment process, and the overall standards).</li></ul>
3.0	March 2025	<p>Revisions:</p> <p>Updates to sections linked to old version of the report form.</p>

# Canvas Guidance for External Examiners

## Logging In

Once an External Examiner has had their temporary Newcastle University IT account enabled this will add them as a user to Canvas. The School or subject area will add External Examiner's to the relevant courses in Canvas with the **read-only 'External Examiner' role**.

This role gives read only access to course content including Announcements, Discussions, and Assignments, and view only access to the course Gradebook.

- External Examiners should use the following URL to log into Canvas:  
<https://canvas.ncl.ac.uk/login/>
- Click on 'Login' and enter the username in the format <login>@newcastle.ac.uk and enter the password provided by Newcastle University IT.
- An incognito or private browser may be required to prevent own institution Microsoft login credentials blocking access.

## Navigating Canvas

- There is Canvas guidance on [global navigation](#) and using the [dashboard](#).
- On the dashboard an External Examiner should see the courses that the School or subject areas has added them to. Clicking on a course card in the [dashboard](#) will take the user to the course.
- Alternatively, all courses can be viewed and accessed from ['courses'](#) on the global navigation.
- Once in a course, different areas of that course including announcements, discussions, assignments and the gradebook can be accessed using [course navigation](#).
- An External Examiner can use [student view](#) to preview the course as a student.

## Announcements

- [Announcements](#) can be accessed using the course navigation and may have been used to communicate with students in the course.
- There is specific Canvas guidance on [how to view announcements](#).

## Assignments

- [Assignments](#) such as file submissions, graded discussions and quizzes can be accessed from the Assignments course navigation link. There is specific Canvas guidance on how to [view assignment details](#).
- There is guidance for both [Classic Quizzes](#) and [New Quizzes](#), the two quizzing tools currently available in Canvas. The School or subject area can advise which has been used.

## Discussions

- All [Discussions](#) used in course can be accessed using the Discussions course navigation link.
- There is specific Canvas guidance on [how to view discussions](#).

## The Gradebook

- The [Gradebook](#) is where all student marks can be viewed.
- There is specific Canvas guidance on [using the Gradebook](#).

## Modules

- [Modules](#) are used within Canvas to organise course materials. Most content types available in canvas can be added to a module.
- There is specific Canvas guidance on how to [navigate modules](#).

## Still need help?

Contact the School or subject area who can advise on course structure in Canvas or signpost relevant IT support.

# **Guidance on Virtual External Examiner attendance at Board of Examiners**



## **Purpose**

This document aims to provide you with guidance on how to ensure Board of Examiners work smoothly on occasions when External Examiners are unable to attend the meetings in Newcastle and participate remotely.

## **Meeting protocols:**

- The Chair of the Board of Examiners/Professional Services staff should contact the External Examiner in advance of the meeting to schedule a test and run through the arrangements for the meeting.
- During the meeting all members of the Board of Examiners should be introduced to the External Examiner, this is important in cases where not all members might be in view.
- Documentation for the Board of Examiners should be circulated to the External Examiner in advance of the meeting via a secure method.
- If the meeting is to be recorded, consent from all participants should be obtained in advance.

## **Technical aspects:**

- Ensure that the meeting room at Newcastle has suitable equipment including microphone, camera and screen/projector to ensure that the External Examiner can both see and hear the Newcastle attendees.
- Ensure that the External Examiner is in a well-lit room, with good Wi-Fi/internet connection and equipped with a headset with a microphone as this will reduce any feedback.
- Make use of Teams, which are supported by NUIT.
- Contact NUIT for guidance on the best room set up and further information on the support available for videoconferencing can be accessed at: <http://videoconferencing.ncl.ac.uk/>
- It is good practice to have trial connection ahead of the meeting, although this will not guarantee a good connection on the day of the meeting it will help ensure that both parties are aware of the set up and can trial the audio.
- Ensure that there are backup plans in place to allow the External Examiner to participate if the videoconferencing fails, for example telephone connection.

Last Approved by UEC, June 2018  
Last modified by EPGS, July 2023.

Intended for use by	Chair of Board of Examiners School Administrators Faculty Learning and Teaching Teams
Contact	<a href="mailto:education.policy.governance@newcastle.ac.uk">education.policy.governance@newcastle.ac.uk</a>

#### Version History

Version	Date	Details
1.0	June 2018	Published.
1.1	July 2023	Team name updates.
1.2	May 2025	Updates: Removed Skype for Business and Zoom from the suggested video conferencing list supported by NUIT, and replaced by Teams.

## 1. Accessing the system

- a. Go to <http://apps.ncl.ac.uk/examiners>
- b. Enter your email address (this will be the one you use to communicate with your host School at Newcastle University)
- c. If using the system for the first time, click on 'Password Reminder' to send yourself an email which will reveal your password (NB. use this button also if you lose your password)
- d. Enter password to log in
- e. After logging in, you will see 4 tabs along the top of the screen. These are (from l-r) Home; Examiner; Expenses; Reports

## 2. Examiner

- a. After clicking on the Examiner tab you will see a grid containing your details. You can click on 'Edit Details' to maintain personal information such as your postal address (work and correspondence), email, etc. which will assist Newcastle University in communicating with you promptly

## 3. Expenses

- a. Go to Expenses tab
- b. Click on 'view/add expenses claim'
- c. Enter a description of the activity giving rise to the claim e.g. 'Attendance at Board of Examiners'
- d. Click 'start new claim'
- e. Go to relevant claim in the table and click 'add/view expense item'  
(You can add up to seven items on one claim: if you have more items you can start a new claim.)
- f. To add an item complete the fields under 'Expenses on selected claim'.  
Click 'Add expense'. (If, after adding some items, you wish to save the claim form and add to it later, just navigate away from the tab without clicking 'Finish claim': your claim will be saved automatically.)
- g. When all items have been added click 'Finish claim' then 'Print Claim form'. Once the claim is finished, it cannot be edited.
- h. Print and sign the completed form and email with original receipts for each item of expenditure to the Examinations Office:  
[exams@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:exams@newcastle.ac.uk)

If you are an examiner for Newcastle University International Study Centre (formerly INTO) or PARTNERS, do not submit your claim through the database. Expenses are managed and processed by the school, please email the relevant contact for further information:

- Newcastle University International Study Centre (formerly INTO) - [ext.examiners@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:ext.examiners@newcastle.ac.uk)
- Partners - [partners@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:partners@ncl.ac.uk)

## 4. Reports

- a. Click on this tab to see a table of the annual reports that are required from you by Newcastle

b. University. These are listed by academic and year and programme with their due date. From this screen you will be able to track the progress of your report through the University's procedure.

central University department responsible for monitoring the external examining process), and the date your fee is processed. If there is no date visible, the action has not yet taken place.

- c. Click on 'Edit Report' to compile a report online.
- d. Report Section A – Your personal details and those of the programme on which you are reporting will appear here automatically.
- e. As a general rule, to proceed and submit the report, you must provide an answer to each question and within each text box of the report in the subsequent sections.
  - I. Yes/No responses only require further open comment follow-up when the answer is No.
  - II. Provide sufficient context and detail in response to open questions. This ensures the School can fully engage with your comment.
  - III. If there are questions that do not apply to you, please note N/A to continue (e.g. question B6).
  - IV. Section E applies only to programmes that are part of a specific Transnational Education offer (at the moment only our Malaysia programmes) and will not be shown if not relevant.
  - V. Section F applies only to programmes that are apprenticeships with credit-bearing end-point Assessment (EPA). It will not be shown if not relevant.
  - VI. The Further Comments box is for voluntary use. You may leave this blank if you prefer.
  - VII. The End of Appointment Overview should be completed by all external examiners whose term of appointment is concluding.
  - VIII. External examiners are asked not to identify individual staff or students by name in their annual report. Any names included in reports may be subject to redaction by the University. Positive comments will not be redacted.
- f. Report Submission page
  - I. to change anything in your report, please click on 'back' to navigate back through the report.
  - II. You can save your report and return to amend it later (Each time you move to the next page your responses are saved by our systems. You will be able to return to review and make changes to your responses until you submit your report.)
  - III. **Submit Report – this action is final. Once submitted, you cannot return to edit a report.**
  - IV. You can download a pdf copy of your report from the Reports tab.

## Help

For enquiries or help regarding reports please contact [ext.examiners@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:ext.examiners@ncl.ac.uk)

For enquiries or help regarding expenses and fees contact [exams@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:exams@ncl.ac.uk)

Document last modified by EPGS, May 2025.	
This document is intended for:	External Examiners
Contact:	<a href="mailto:education.policy.governance@newcastle.ac.uk">education.policy.governance@newcastle.ac.uk</a>

## Version History

Version	Date	Details
1.0	May 2025	Revisions: Sections were updated to be in line with the new external examiner report form.