

# Taught Course Programmes - External Examiners

<b>Approving committee:</b>	Academic Board
<b>Minute reference:</b>	TCC/11/12/10, A/7/12/3(ii),4(iv)
<b>Document owner:</b>	Academic Services - Education Policy and Quality
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<b>Date of Equality Impact Assessment:</b>	28/07/2017
<b>Equality Impact Assessment Outcome:</b>	No impact
<b>Latest review date:</b>	25/04/2022
<b>Next review date:</b>	31/07/2024

This document covers taught postgraduate programmes at the Institute of Cancer Research. The ICR is responsible for the quality and standards for taught postgraduate awards made in its name. The purpose of this document is to set out the principles of using External Examiners, and the procedures for their appointment and support, and the procedures for the implementation of the provisions in the ICR Regulations which relate to External Examiners.

## 1. Principles

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The ICR believes External Examiners are a key aspect of the system for ensuring that its taught course awards are set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that the role of the External Examiners and the arrangements for their nomination and appointment and for responding to their reports should be clear and comprehensible, and consistent with the national framework.

## 2. Register of External Examiners

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The Academic Governance and Quality Manager (AGQM) will maintain a Register of all External Examiners appointed by the ICR, with their dates of office and affiliations. A list of all nominations, including those not resulting in appointment, shall also be retained confidentially.

## 3. Nomination and Appointment of External Examiners

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Academic Regulations specify the process for appointing external examiners and that evidence will be sought of a nominee's compliance with the person specification set out in the External Expertise theme of the QAA's [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#). Nominees will be expected to comply wherever possible with all relevant aspects of the person specification.

### Person specification

The ICR has adopted the person specification set out in the QAA's Quality Code. In approving the person specification Academic Board noted that the ICR's ability to ensure that the best person could be chosen for the job should not be restricted. Applications may proceed if evidence cannot be obtained, or if some aspects of the person specification are not met, and a note of the reasons why the nominee is nonetheless recommended should be included when the decision is put to Academic Board.

The QAA stipulates that institutions appoint external examiners who can show appropriate evidence (via the Nomination Form below) that they:

- i.** have a high degree of competence and experience in the fields covered by the course of study, or parts thereof, and have a good understanding of the UK higher education sector;
- ii.** are appropriately experienced in course design and student assessment at the level of the award;
- iii.** have the necessary academic experience and subject knowledge to assess standards in an effective manner, identify good practice and recommend enhancements to enable informed course development;
- iv.** are experienced in acting as an external examiner (or are supported by the provider in undertaking their duties, for example, through training and mentoring);
- v.** are impartial in judgement and wholly independent of the provider and its staff (including the governing body), and any relevant partners;
- vi.** do not personally benefit from any student outcomes, nor have any connection to any student being assessed;
- vii.** have had sufficient experience in quality assurance to enable them to discharge their role effectively;
- viii.** are drawn from a relevant variety of institutional or professional contexts and traditions in order that the course benefits from wide-ranging external scrutiny;
- ix.** comply with all relevant employment legislation, including safeguarding, as appropriate; and
- x.** normally hold a limited number of concurrent external examining engagements (for example either one or two).

In addition the ICR also requires that external examiners:

- xi.** have relevant academic and / or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and / or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate;
- xii.** have sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers;
- xiii.** have fluency in English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s); and
- xiv.** meet applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (where appropriate).

Any conflicts of interest should be noted.

## 4. Information Provided to External Examiners on appointment

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On appointment external examiners are provided with a number of documents (i) the current Learning and Teaching Strategy (ii) Student Handbook (iii) The ICR's Academic Regulations (iv) the Assessment Policy (v) Module Guides (vi) Marking Criteria and any other documents deemed appropriate at the time of appointment. The letter should also include a link to the QAA's website regarding the UK Quality Code, and should include HR requirements regarding tax responsibilities and confirmation of right to work in the UK. External Examiners are given read-only access to course material and policies via the

VLE and additionally to an Exam Board specific space containing information pertinent to the Board and assessments.

## 5. Reporting

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**5.1.** The ICR requires its External Examiners to submit a report after each Examination Board using a standard form. Where required, action is taken as a result of the report and the ICR provides formal feedback to the External Examiners on the action taken.

**5.2.** Payment of fees/ travel expenses to External Examiners is conditional on the receipt of written reports. Requests to submit reports (along with a deadline for submission) will be sent to External Examiners after each Examination Board by the AGQM to whom they should be returned.

Reports should be submitted on the standard report form. This form is part of the operating procedure and any amendments to it can be made only with Taught Courses Committee (TCC) and Academic Board approval.

**5.3.** External Examiner reports are considered fully and seriously by the ICR.

Student representatives on TCC and on Academic Board are informed on election that their remit includes sight of external examiners' reports and that they are welcome to comment on these, as on all other business before these committees.

A copy of the external examiner reports is made available on the VLE following discussion by Academic Board.

Reports are circulated to the Course Manager by the AGQM, who forwards them to the relevant Course Directors and the Chair(s) of the Examination Board for consideration and to implement any immediate actions.

If the Chair of the Examination Board / Course Directors consider that a serious concern has been raised requiring immediate action they will raise it as a matter of urgency with both Academic Board and TCC members.

The AGQM provides a report to the TCC on the external examiner comments and where required provide details of any actions which will be taken. Where it is considered by TCC that no action should be taken detailed reasons must be provided. Additionally, the Course Manager maintains a log of actions following Exam Board and the Course Directors comment on the external examiner reports via the AME provided to TCC annually.

These reports should also inform TCC of the actions taken to implement the agreed recommendations of the previous set of External Examiners' reports.

Academic Board considers the report from the TCC along with the External Examiner reports and agrees actions to be taken. The relevant extract from Academic Board minutes is sent to any Course Directors who are not members, and to the Course Manager, by the AGQM. Urgent or minor changes may be implemented immediately with written consent from all affected students.

Actions requiring either changes to the ICR regulations or changes to assessments should be introduced at the start of the next academic year; progressing students must be informed and agree to these changes.

Course Directors are responsible for informing module leaders of actions required.

**5.4.** The TCC should monitor the impact of agreed changes.

**5.5.** The Academic Dean is responsible for providing a timely formal response to external examiners. This will summarise comments raised by the Course Directors, TCC and Academic Board and any recommended actions. If the ICR has decided that any recommendations will not be taken on board then reasons must be provided to the External Examiners.

**5.6.** External Examiners may raise a concern at any point during the year if they believe it is too urgent to wait for their reports. In addition if an External Examiner wants to raise a matter of particular importance or sensitivity, they may make a confidential report to the ICR's Chief Executive (or directly to the QAA). Any such report would then be dealt with as the Chief Executive considers appropriate, and a reply will be sent to the External Examiner within one month informing them what decisions have been made and any actions taken.

**5.7.** External Examiners also have an opportunity to provide an oral report at examination boards.

## 6. Annual Monitoring Exercise

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Recommendations made by External Examiners are also considered as part of the annual course monitoring exercise and communicated to module leaders where relevant. Consideration as part of the annual monitoring exercise should not prevent the earlier adoption of urgent or minor recommended changes.

## 7. Consultation of External Examiners

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External examiners should be consulted on relevant draft new policies and regulations. Consultation may take place in the Exam Board meetings or the Assistant Director of Academic Services (Registry) will send them relevant drafts when time permits.

### Early termination of Appointment

The Academic Regulations provide that the appointment may be terminated early by either side, subject to due notice being given. They set out non-exhaustive reasons why the ICR might wish to give notice of termination, and states that an External Examiner is normally expected to resign for non-attendance at Exam Board.

When circumstances arise which are considered as possible grounds for termination of a contract, the Chair of Academic Board will write formally to the examiner to inform them that termination is being considered and to offer the examiner an opportunity to explain the circumstances. The Chair of Academic Board, will take the final decision and will notify the examiner and Academic Board in writing of the circumstances of the case, its outcome and the notice period.

An External Examiner who wishes to terminate the appointment early should normally give six months' notice, and this should be included in the letter of appointment.

### Student contact with External Examiners

The contacting of external examiners by students regarding any aspect of their programmes of study is prohibited. This is made clear in the Student Handbook, along with their names and affiliations.

## External Examiner Nomination Form

Before completing this form, please review the ICR's Taught Course programmes – External Examiners Policy and Procedure, which details the criteria for the appointment of external examiners.

When completing this form you may use extracts from the proposed external examiner's CV but please do not submit a CV in place of this form.

You are reminded that external examiners are appointed normally for a period of four years only (however, an extension of one year may be permitted to ensure continuity). An external examiner who has previously acted as a taught course external examiner for the ICR may be re-appointed in exceptional circumstances but only after a period of five years has lapsed since their last appointment.

External Examiners should be drawn from a relevant variety of institutional or professional contexts and traditions in order that the course benefits from wide-ranging external scrutiny and are of 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.

### Part One: Proposed External Examiner

Full name of proposed external examiner:	
Title of proposed external examiner (Professor of / Dr of .....):	
Degree programme(s) on which the external examiner will serve:	
Current affiliation of external examiner and full address:	
Email address:	
Proposed external examiner's academic and / or professional qualifications:	
GMC registration no (if applicable):	
Are there any potential conflicts of interests associated with this appointment?  <i>Please see the ICR Academic Regulations for further information.</i>	[ YES   NO ]  <i>If Yes please provide further information in section 4 below.</i>
If applicable, name of existing external examiner that will be replaced and their affiliation:	
Signature:	Course Director  Registrar
Date:	

## Part Two: Experience of Proposed External Examiner

Please complete the following section **in full**. This information allows the proposed external examiner's eligibility and suitability to examine at the ICR to be considered.

	<b>Proposed External Examiner's Taught Course Teaching Experience</b>	
2.1.	External Examiners should have relevant academic and/ or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/ or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate.  Please specify:	
	At what level(s) the proposed external examiner's teaching experience was gained, e.g. Undergraduate/ Postgraduate;	
	At which institution(s) this experience was gained;	
	How many years' experience has been gained;	
	When this experience was gained.	

2.2.	The ICR's Taught Course programmes – External Examiners Policy and procedure states that an external examiner should normally have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competence and experience in the fields covered by the course of study;</li> <li>• A good understanding of the UK higher education sector;</li> <li>• Appropriate experience in course design and student assessment at the level of the award;</li> <li>• Academic experience and subject knowledge to assess standards in an effective manner, identify good practice and recommend enhancements to enable informed course development;</li> <li>• Sufficient experience in quality assurance to enable them to discharge their role effectively.</li> </ul>	
	Please provide evidence below:	
	External examiners should also where applicable meet criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies and comply with all relevant employment legislation, including safeguarding, as appropriate.	
	Please confirm the proposed examiner meets these criteria. [YES   NO ]	

<b>2.3.</b>	<b>Prior Experience as an External Examiner</b>
a)	<p>Please give details of any previous or current experience as an external examiner.</p> <p>Please specify the level(s) at which external examining experience has been gained, e.g. Undergraduate / Master's / Research, the number of years' experience gained and at which institution(s) this experience was gained.</p> <p><i>Please note that external examiners appointed by the ICR should not normally hold more than 2 taught course external examiner appointments at any one time.</i></p>
b)	<p>If the proposed external examiner has no prior external examining experience, please give details of the training and mentorship that will be provided.</p> <p><i>Mentors would normally be an existing external examiner. If a mentor is being appointed, please confirm the name of this person and state whether or not they have agreed to act in this capacity.</i></p>

<b>2.4.</b>	<b>If the proposed External Examiner has no teaching / examining experience at the appropriate level, on what grounds is this nomination being proposed?</b>

### Part Three: Publications

<b>3.</b>	<b>Please supply details of up to 5 recent full publications in peer-reviewed journals with full titles.</b>

### Part Four: Further Information

<b>4.</b>	<p><b>Please supply any further information you consider relevant to the proposed external examiner's suitability for appointment.</b></p> <p>E.g. current or previous relevant administrative post(s) held, evidence of training in teaching / educational development, research interests.</p> <p>If potential conflicts of interests associated with this appointment have been indicated in Part One please also provide details of these here.</p> <p>For example external examiners</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should be impartial in judgement and wholly independent of the provider and its staff (including the governing body), and any relevant partners;</li> <li>• Should not personally benefit from any student outcomes, nor have any connection to any student being assessed.</li> </ul>

Please return completed form to The Academic Governance and Quality Manager, via **Registry, 2nd Floor SRDB, Sutton**. If you have any questions about the form, please contact the Academic Governance and Quality Manager.

## Registry Procedure for the consideration of External Examiner Reports for Taught Courses

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*Responsibility:* Overall responsibility for this procedure is with the Academic Dean but is delegated on a day to day basis to the Academic Governance and Quality Manager (AGQM), the Course Directors and the MSc Course Manager.

- i. A standard form is sent by e-mail by the Academic Governance and Quality Manager to External Examiners for each exam board.

Examiners are asked to comment on the Examination Board, Conduct of Examinations, and Academic Standards as well as providing general comments and suggestions for the development of academic practice.

- ii. External Examiners are asked to submit their report to the AGQM as soon as possible following the Exam Board or such other deadline as may be from time to time agreed.
- iii. On receipt of a copy of the External Examiner reports, the AGQM will contact the finance department and request that the examiner payment is made. The Course Management Team will provide support for claiming travel expenses etc.
- iv. The AGQM will make a copy of the report for the file, and send a copy to the the MSc Course Manager who forwards to the Chair of Exam Board and Course Directors and. They will check no individuals are named inappropriately in the reports, and will redact them as necessary before copying, in consultation with the Assistant Director of Academic Services (Registry) as necessary.

The report is considered by the Course Directors and the Chair of Exam Board.

If the Chair of Exam Board or Course Directors consider that a serious concern has been raised requiring immediate action they will raise it as a matter of urgency with both Academic Board and TCC members.

- v. The AGQM prepares a summary report for TCC on the external examiner comments and where required provide details of the actions which will be taken.



Where it is considered that no action should be taken detailed reasons must be provided. This should be sent to TCC members along with a copy of the External Examiner reports.

*External Examiner reports should be listed as an agenda item at least once a year. Recommended actions should be clearly documented in TCC minutes.*

**vi.** The Summary is submitted by TCC (including TCC recommendations) to Academic Board along with the External Examiner reports. Academic Board considers the reports and recommendations and agrees the actions which should be taken.

*External Examiner reports should be listed as an agenda item for spring Academic Board. Recommended actions should be clearly documented in Academic Board minutes.*

**vii.** The relevant extract from Academic Board minutes is sent to any Course Directors who are not members, and to the Course Manager, by the AGQM.

**viii.** The Chair of Academic Board sends a formal response to the External Examiners which will detail any actions taken as a result of external examiner comments or provide a detailed reason why a proposed action has not been implemented.

**ix.** The Course Manager maintains a log of actions following Exam Board/ TCC in response to External Examiner reports.

**x.** Details of all correspondence will be held in the Registry.

**xi.** Comments made by the External Examiners also feed into the annual monitoring process for a Taught Course. External Examiner comments should be included in the Course Director's Annual Monitoring report.

**xii.** Course Directors should be asked to report back to TCC on the impact of the actions taken, as part of their report on the following set of External Examiner Reports.

**xiii.** Both the Annual Monitoring report and the External Examiner's reports (redacted if necessary) should be uploaded to the virtual learning environment.