Document Q7

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS POLICY

Approved by Academic Board – February 2020

Last Amends: March 2020

Next Review: January 2023
1 The University of Law’s ('the University') External Examiners Policy has been informed by the Quality Assurance Agency’s (QAA) UK Quality Code for Higher Education, specifically the Advice and Guidance on External Expertise. The QAA’s Quality Code is the definitive reference point for all UK higher education institutions and sets out how academic standards are established and maintained and how the quality of learning opportunities are assured and enhanced. Additionally guidance is used from the Higher Education Academy (HEA) resource, A Handbook for External Examining (2012) and research jointly commissioned by the HEA and QAA, External Examiners’ Understanding and Use of Academic Standards (2013). This policy sits within the University of Law’s Quality and Standards Code which provides a suite of policies designed to safeguard the academic standards of the University and to assure the quality of learning opportunities offered; this policy should therefore be read in conjunction with other relevant policies within the Code.

Introduction

2 The University recognises that central to this policy is the University’s responsibility for the academic standards of all awards granted in its name and the quality of learning opportunities for students. This policy sets out the expectations and practices, key aims and principles, and procedural approach of the External Examiners Policy of the University.

Responsibility for this policy

3 Ultimate responsibility for the development of clear and effective processes and procedures associated with the maintenance of standards and quality assurance of academic provision and overseeing their application lies with the Academic Board.

Expectations and Practices

4 The University seeks external, impartial and independent academic and/or professional expertise to effectively manage its responsibilities for the academic standards of awards and the quality of learning opportunities provided to students.

5 The University aims to employ robust procedures for ensuring that its standards and quality processes meet the requirements of the Code and, in particular, the expectations and practices outlined in the supporting advice and guidance on External Expertise, namely that:
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- The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.
- The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.
- Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student’s achievement to be reliably assessed.

Key Aims and Principles

6 The University ensures that its external examiners play an integral part in its quality assurance and standards processes for all award-bearing programmes and supports them fully through, induction, training and feedback in their role.

Procedural Approach

Role of the External Examiner

7 The University expects its external examiners to provide informative comment and recommendations upon whether or not:

7.1 the University is maintaining the threshold standards set for its awards in accordance with the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Framework) the Professional Statutory and Regulatory Standards and applicable subject benchmark statements;

7.2 the assessment processes ensure integrity, rigour and fairness in line with the University’s policies and regulations;

7.3 the academic standards and achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions;

7.4 there are areas of good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment;

7.5 there are opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities;

7.6 the professional programmes are fit for purpose.

External Examiner Appointments

8 The selection of nominees for appointment as external examiners to all award-bearing University programmes is set out in the University’s “Criteria for the Appointment of External Examiners” (Q7.1.2 Appendix 1) and follows QAA set criteria
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for appointing external examiners. External examiners must have appropriate standing, expertise and experience and be competent to undertake the role of an external examiner. The University makes every effort to ensure that any potential conflicts of interest are identified and resolved prior to appointment.

Duties of the External Examiner

9 The University ensures that external examiners are fully and clearly briefed and are provided with sufficient evidence in order that they may properly fulfil their role. This is communicated to external examiners in a letter of appointment from the University. External examiners are informed of their duties, powers and responsibilities, including the extent of their authority in examination boards.

10 External examiners are informed in their letter of appointment that they have the right to raise any matter of serious concern with the Chief Executive/Academic Registrar of the University, if necessary by means of a separate confidential written report, which will be considered and responded to in a timely fashion.

11 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 Chief Executive, he/she may invoke QAA's Concerns Scheme or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.

Details of External Examiners

12 The University makes available to students details of all external examiners for University programmes.

External Examiner Reports

13 The reports produced by the University's external examiners play a vital part both in the University's quality assurance mechanisms and in the continuous enhancement of programmes.

14 External examiners must produce an annual report, which the University expects to receive within one month of the main Examination and Awards Board. The report provides informative comment and recommendations on:

14.1 whether sufficient evidence was received to enable the role to be fulfilled (where evidence was insufficient, they give details);

14.2 whether issues raised in the previous report(s) have been, or are being,
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addressed to their satisfaction;

14.3 any issues as specifically required by any relevant professional body;

14.4 their term of office (when concluded);

14.5 the standards and appropriateness of the assessments;

14.6 the design of the assessments;

14.7 the overall standards achieved by the students;

14.8 the process of setting assessments;

14.9 the administration of assessments;

14.10 the marking and moderation process;

14.11 the conduct of the Examination Board;

14.12 procedures relating to candidates with reasonable adjustments or concessions;

14.13 any quality assurance issues;

14.14 any areas of good practice in relation to standards and assessment processes;

14.15 any areas of concern relating to working with others arrangements; and

14.16 any other matter which the examiner wishes to bring to the attention of the University.

Consideration of the Reports by the University

15 The reports produced by the University’s external examiners are considered by the relevant programme team and the University’s quality assurance mechanisms, including consideration by the University’s Academic Board on an annual basis.

16 External examiners receive a considered and timely response to comments and recommendations set out in their external examiner reports. External examiners are advised of any actions to be taken to address issues raised in reports or, where relevant, the reasons for not taking actions.
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Examination Boards

17 External examiners are approved by the University’s Academic Board through the Academic Standards & Quality Committee. Once approved, external examiners become full members of the examination board for the programme to which they have been appointed. Each examination board is a sub-committee of the University’s Academic Board. No University award is made without participation in the assessment process by at least one external examiner.

Availability of Reports to Students

18 The University makes available to students external examiner reports which have been prepared by external examiners to report to the University (other than any confidential report made directly to the programme team or to the Chief Executive or Academic Registrar of the University).

Contribution of External Examiners to periodic review and programme approval

19 The University supports and values the involvement and feedback of external examiners in all aspects of programme review and approval in order to enhance the student learning experience.

Responsibility for the provision

20 Responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy lies with the Academic Registrar.

Monitoring and evaluation of the provision

21 Responsibility for reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of External Examiners Policy lies initially with the Academic Registrar. Formal responsibility for monitoring and evaluation of this provision lies with the Academic Board.
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Date for next review

January 2023

Version history

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