

# Chapter 2

# External Examiners

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## INTRODUCTION

Degree-awarding bodies are responsible for the quality of their educational programmes and the standards of the awards to which they lead, and the external examiner system within UK higher education is one of the principal means for assuring both. Once set at programme validation, external examiners judge whether [Sector Recognised Standards](#) (FHEQ) and subject benchmark statements are being demonstrated at module and qualification award level. Beyond threshold (pass) standard, awarding bodies classify degrees according to their own academic regulations and external examiners provide judgements on whether these are applied consistently as well as commenting on the comparability of standards with similar provision elsewhere in the sector.

External examiners are expert assessors whose authority is derived from their knowledge of, and qualifications in, their subject disciplines and their experience of teaching and assessing students at higher education level. The external examiner is also an independent assessor whose judgement will not be compromised by any prior association with the programme team or by some reciprocal arrangement with their home institution.

The University's external examiner system addresses the OfS's Ongoing Conditions of Registration<sup>1</sup> as specified in Figure 1 and is informed by the QAA Advice and Guidance on the use of external expertise in academic quality assurance<sup>2</sup>.

External examiners are engaged by the University and added to its External Examiners Register in accordance with the criteria set out in this chapter (see 'Criteria for Engagement'). External examiners are assigned to all modules / programmes that lead to the award of credit at FHEQ level 5 and above<sup>3</sup>. Except for dissertation, project and 'shell' modules, where a range of subject expertise may be required, no module is normally assigned more than one examiner. Exceptions are permitted where the number of students registered to a module makes sampling too large for a single individual. In such cases, examiners work together to ensure parity and consistency of moderation decisions. A single programme delivered across multiple sites, e.g., by different academic partner organisations is normally assigned the same examiner to enable standards to be compared. Examiners produce an annual report on the programmes/ modules to which they have been assigned and attend the relevant assessment boards<sup>4</sup> where access to complete student profiles enables the confirmation of standards at qualification award level.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/registration-with-the-ofs-a-guide/conditions-of-registration/>

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/external-expertise](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/external-expertise). Further guidance is provided in External Examiners Handbook (Advance HE, 2019) available via [Teaching Resources - external examining](#).

<sup>3</sup> Examiners are also assigned Levels 3 and 4 where prescribed by professional bodies or approved at validation, for example level 3 Fastrack and level 4 Foundation degrees that contribute to classification of the learner's award.

<sup>4</sup> See also 'Roles and Responsibilities', below.

Figure 1: The ongoing conditions for Quality (B1 and B4 ) and Standards (B5) pertinent to the external examiner system.

The provider must:	
<b>B1</b>	The provider must ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high-quality academic experience. A high-quality academic experience includes but is not limited to ensuring that each higher education course: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. is up-to-date;</li> <li>2. provides educational challenge;</li> <li>3. is coherent;</li> <li>4. is effectively delivered; and,</li> <li>5. requires students to develop relevant skills.</li> </ol>
<b>B4</b>	The provider must ensure that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. students are assessed effectively;</li> <li>2. each assessment is valid and reliable;</li> <li>3. academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible;</li> <li>4. academic regulations are designed to ensure effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner that appropriately reflects the level and content of the course; and,</li> <li>5. relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.</li> </ol>
<b>B5</b>	The provider must ensure that, in respect of any relevant awards granted to students who complete a higher education course provided by, or on behalf of, the provider (whether or not the provider is the awarding body): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. any standards set appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards; and</li> <li>2. awards are only granted to students whose knowledge and skills appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards.</li> </ol>

This chapter provides information and guidance on:

- The nomination and engagement of external examiners.
- The external examiner's role and responsibilities.
- The production and consideration of annual reports.
- Access to internal and external concerns procedures.
- Arrangements for ending an external examiner's engagement.

Information on the appointment of University staff as external examiners by other HEIs is provided in Chapter 6 of this Handbook.

All communications with external examiners in relation to their nomination and engagement, including any subsequent changes to it, must be done using the approved templates which are available on the **External Examiners Wiki**<sup>5</sup>. Where requested, the **External Examiners**

<sup>5</sup> <https://wiki.edgehill.ac.uk/display/agqa/External+Examiners>.

Mailbox [externalexaminers@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@edgehill.ac.uk) should be copied into such communications to enable Institutional records to be updated.

## NOMINATION AND ENGAGEMENT

### Criteria for engagement

External examiners are typically academic staff of other UK HEIs and are **academically qualified to at least the level of the qualification in the subject to be examined**. The academic and professional criteria used by the University ensure that examiners are capable of exercising impartial, independent and expert judgement to confirm ongoing alignment with [Sector Recognised Standards](#) and the University's Academic Regulations<sup>6</sup>, as well as confirming the comparability of standards with those of other HEIs. The engagement of external examiners complies with the University's statutory and legislative responsibilities in relation to the employment of casual workers. Individuals seeking to become external examiners of the University are expected to demonstrate appropriate evidence of:

1. **Competence and experience** in the fields covered by the module/ programme of study to which they will be assigned.
2. **Sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience** within their discipline to be able to command the respect of academic and, where appropriate, other professional peers.
3. **Knowledge and understanding of the UK sector agreed reference points** for the setting and maintenance of academic standards (FHEQ, Degree Characteristics Statements and Subject Benchmark Statements) and familiarity with the standard to be expected of students in relation to their award.
4. **Knowledge and understanding of the standards and/or requirements of Professional and Statutory Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)** that govern students' awards (where applicable).
5. **Awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of programmes** in their subject including competence in and experience of designing and managing assessment.
6. Current employment status including **eligibility<sup>7</sup> to work in the United Kingdom** and (where relevant) **PSRB registration**.
7. **Fluency in the English language<sup>8</sup>**.

'Standing, credibility and breadth of experience' may be indicated by:

- The individual's present post and place of work (as 6, above);

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<sup>6</sup> Available via [Academic Regulations](#)

<sup>7</sup> Evidenced by a physical inspection of the individual's passport in line with HM Government's requirements – see 'An Employer's Guide to Right to Work Checks' (Home Office, June 2018), [Right to work checks: an employer's guide - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> **Note:** Edge Hill University's Academic Regulations do not permit delivery and assessment in languages other than English (Academic Regulations C1.5).

- The range and scope of their experience across higher education/ other relevant professions;
- Current and recent active involvement in research/ scholarly/ professional activities in the relevant field of study.

While a nominee's standing and credibility may be determined in part by their seniority within their home institution, this does not preclude the nomination of other appropriately qualified individuals. Where they have no previous experience of external examining, candidates' nomination should be supported by evidence of:

- other types of 'externality'<sup>9</sup>; and/ or
- significant experience of internal moderation or verification of assessment within their home institution; and/ or
- other relevant and recent experience likely to support them in their duties, e.g., participation in their home institution's validation, monitoring and review activities.

### Mentoring for External Examiners

Where possible, individuals without previous experience either join an experienced team of examiners and/ or are **mentored** by an experienced examiner in the same or cognate subject area. Where an examiner's engagement is conditional on them being mentored, Faculties identify a current external examiner and outline to both parties the expectations of the mentoring relationship.

The mentor should:

- Discuss relevant University processes and procedures.
- Highlight the approaches to moderation including sampling and consistency of marking.
- Advise on the Assessment and Award Board procedure and the role of the external examiner within this process.
- Support familiarisation and understanding of the UK sector-agreed reference points for the setting and maintenance of academic standards (Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, Qualification Characteristics Statements and subject benchmark statements)
- Provide advice and guidance on writing the annual report and on programme review.
- Discuss current issues in Higher Education and the discipline area which may be relevant to external examining.

Mentoring duties would be specific to the actual examining work. All regulatory and procedural issues would continue to be communicated as currently.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, association with a PSRB.

### Requirements for a mentor:

- Currently be an examiner at the University;
- Have submitted at least one annual report to the University;
- Have recent experience of working in Higher Education in the UK.
- Can mentor up to three mentees

### Mentor arrangements

A mentor should be indicated at the approval stage of the external examiner nomination process and may be referred back to the department if they are not identified. If a nomination form is submitted to the External Examiners Sub-Committee without a named mentor, then it will be a condition of approval and an action will be placed on the Faculty to identify a suitable mentor for a new examiner.

Once an appropriate mentor has been chosen, the department will approach them to establish if they are happy to take on the extra responsibility. **If agreed, the mentee will be provided with the contact information for the mentor and will be expected to initiate contact.**

The types of queries could include dealing with draft examination papers; moderating and commenting on assessment; offering advice to the Progression and Award Boards; completion of the annual report; as well as general discussions about external examining experiences and common scenarios that may arise. If there are any issues that cannot be answered, the relevant academic department or Academic Quality Support Officer should be contacted.

The Academic Quality Support Officer will provide the contact information to the mentee and communication will generally take place via phone, email or videocall.

### Feedback

Feedback will be collected annually to review and enhance the process. Faculties may be asked to provide periodic reports on the mentoring process on request from the University's External Examiners Sub-Committee.

### Fees

If a mentor fulfils the role, they can claim up to 7.5 hours per academic year at the hourly rate of pay.

## **Current or previous associations**

Departments and Faculties supported by the Academic Quality Support Officer (located in the Governance, Quality Assurance and Student Casework unit) are responsible for ensuring that nominations adhere to the University's rules governing external examiners' engagement.

External examiners should not be involved in:

- The delivery of any modules and/ or programmes of the University,
- Advising students about their modules and/ or programmes of study,
- Examination and/or assessment,
- The programme/s development<sup>10</sup> (as an external consultant) within the last three years.
- Other conflicts of interest, including **any** of the following:
  - a professional, contractual or close personal relationship with Edge Hill staff or students.
  - Engagement in substantive collaborative research with a member of Edge Hill staff.
  - Membership of the University’s governing body; or
  - Employment as a member of University staff or at one of its academic partner organisations, including Erasmus or other overseas partner institutions.

**Note:** Previous examination of a PhD viva at Edge Hill does not count as a conflict of interest and therefore does not exclusively, prevent a nominee from becoming an external examiner of our taught provision. Taught degrees and research degrees are governed by separate and equally robust Regulations. Acting as an examiner to a PhD viva does not provide opportunity to influence our taught provision.

## Reciprocity and other restrictions

Reciprocity occurs **only** where staff of two HEIs hold external examiner positions in each other’s home departments. Academic staff are responsible for checking for potential reciprocity when seeking external examiner positions with other providers.

In addition to the ‘current or previous associations’ described above, other restrictions include:

- a) Reciprocal arrangements<sup>11</sup> with other HEIs.
- b) Engagement of multiple or consecutive examiners from the same department of another provider.
- c) Engagement of former Edge Hill staff or students as examiners, until five years have elapsed since their exit or after all students taught by or with them have completed their studies (whichever is the longer).
- d) Ineligibility to work in the United Kingdom.

Restriction (b) may be relaxed in *exceptional* circumstances, e.g., discipline areas that are small and specialist where the pool of potential examiners is extremely restricted and/ or limited to a very small number of HEIs – this should be specified clearly in the nomination

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<sup>10</sup> This applies specifically to individuals who have provided advice to course teams in their preparations for programme approval (validation). Previous external members of Institutional validation panels may seek engagement as external examiners for a limited term of three academic sessions (years).

<sup>11</sup>For additional guidance, please consult the Academic Quality Support Officer (GQASC).



form and the measures already taken to engage a suitable individual described in the previous section.

### Criteria for Chief External Examiners

Where more than one examiner has been appointed to oversee several cognate or related awards, Faculties may engage a chief external examiner to provide an additional layer of oversight and to co-ordinate moderation activities (See 'The Role of Chief External Examiners' below). In addition to the standard nomination criteria described above, nominees should:

- Be an existing member of the external examiner team for the provision.
- Be an experienced external examiner with an academic and/or professional reputation esteemed by other examiners already engaged in the area academic provision.
- Ideally, have Senior or Principal Fellowship of Advance HE and/or have successfully completed the Advance HE Professional Development Course for External Examiners.
- Not exceed the maximum period of engagement as an existing examiner.

### Nomination Process

Faculty Quality Officers alert academic departments when an external examiner is required for new provision<sup>12</sup> and provide sufficient notice of when an existing examiner's period of engagement is about to end<sup>13</sup>. By instruction of the University's Directorate, all nominations must normally have been approved before the start of the academic session in which the individual is due to commence work, typically October for undergraduate programmes or January for some Masters programmes. Where in-year engagement is unavoidable, for example to cover for resignations or terminations, appointments are back-dated to the start of the academic session which counts towards the standard four sessions for which examiners are normally engaged.

Heads of department complete and submit to their Faculty a **Nomination Form for a New External Examiner**<sup>14</sup> accompanied by a **Curriculum Vitae** detailing the nominee's employment history, academic and/ or professional qualifications and any previous and current research and scholarly activity. Heads of department ensure that the proposed workload of the examiner does not exceed normal Institutional expectations<sup>15</sup>. Nominations must contain sufficient information to allow a judgement to be made. Missing or incomplete information may delay the nominee's confirmation. Nominations are authorised in the first instance by the PVC Dean or Associate Dean of the relevant Faculty before being submitted to the Academic Quality Support Officer (GQASC).

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<sup>12</sup> Normally at FHEQ level 5 and above, however certain level 3 and 4 provision including some PSRB-regulated programmes may be assigned a requirement for external examination at Institutional validation.

<sup>13</sup> EESC receives regular reports from Faculties confirming external examiner coverage and highlighting current or imminent vacancies.

<sup>14</sup> Available from [Template Documents - External Examiners](#)

<sup>15</sup> Based on the estimated time for moderation and other activities contained within the University's workload model for external examiners – see 'Edge Hill University External Examiners Workload Model', below.

Where a department believes there is a need for a chief external examiner to provide additional oversight across a number of awards, a short business case should be submitted to the EESC. If approved, the Department should complete a **Changes to Academic Provision Coverage Form**<sup>16</sup> for faculty consideration and approval. Faculties submit approved Coverage Forms to EESC for information only.

## Institutional Approval

All nominees must have received both **Committee Approval** and **Personnel Approval** prior to undertaking any work for the University (see figure 2).

- **During Committee Approval**, EESC considers<sup>17</sup> nominations and confirms suitability. The Academic Quality Enhancement Committee is informed of all confirmations via the EESC Minutes.
- **Personnel Approval** considers all HR-related requirements including pre-engagement checks.

Committee Approval and Personnel Approval run concurrently. On completion, the Academic Quality Support Officer notifies the outcome to the nominee and proposing Faculty (see figure 2).

## Period of engagement

External examiners are typically placed on the External Examiners Register for a period of four academic sessions (years). In certain circumstances an examiner may be retained on the Register for a longer period. For example, where a closed programme is being 'taught out' and there is no more than one academic session remaining; or where efforts to secure a replacement have been exhausted. Departments complete a **Permission to Remain on the External Examiners Register Form**<sup>18</sup> which is considered and approved by EESC.

**If an examiner's period of engagement is interrupted**, e.g., through long-term sickness or maternity leave, they are not be prohibited from resuming and completing the typical four academic sessions. **Where an examiner ceases to be employed**<sup>19</sup> **by a recognised HEI** during their period of engagement, they should notify the University and may remain on the Register for a maximum of two further years if they have not resumed relevant<sup>20</sup> HE employment in the meantime.

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<sup>16</sup> Available at [Template Documents - External Examiners](#)

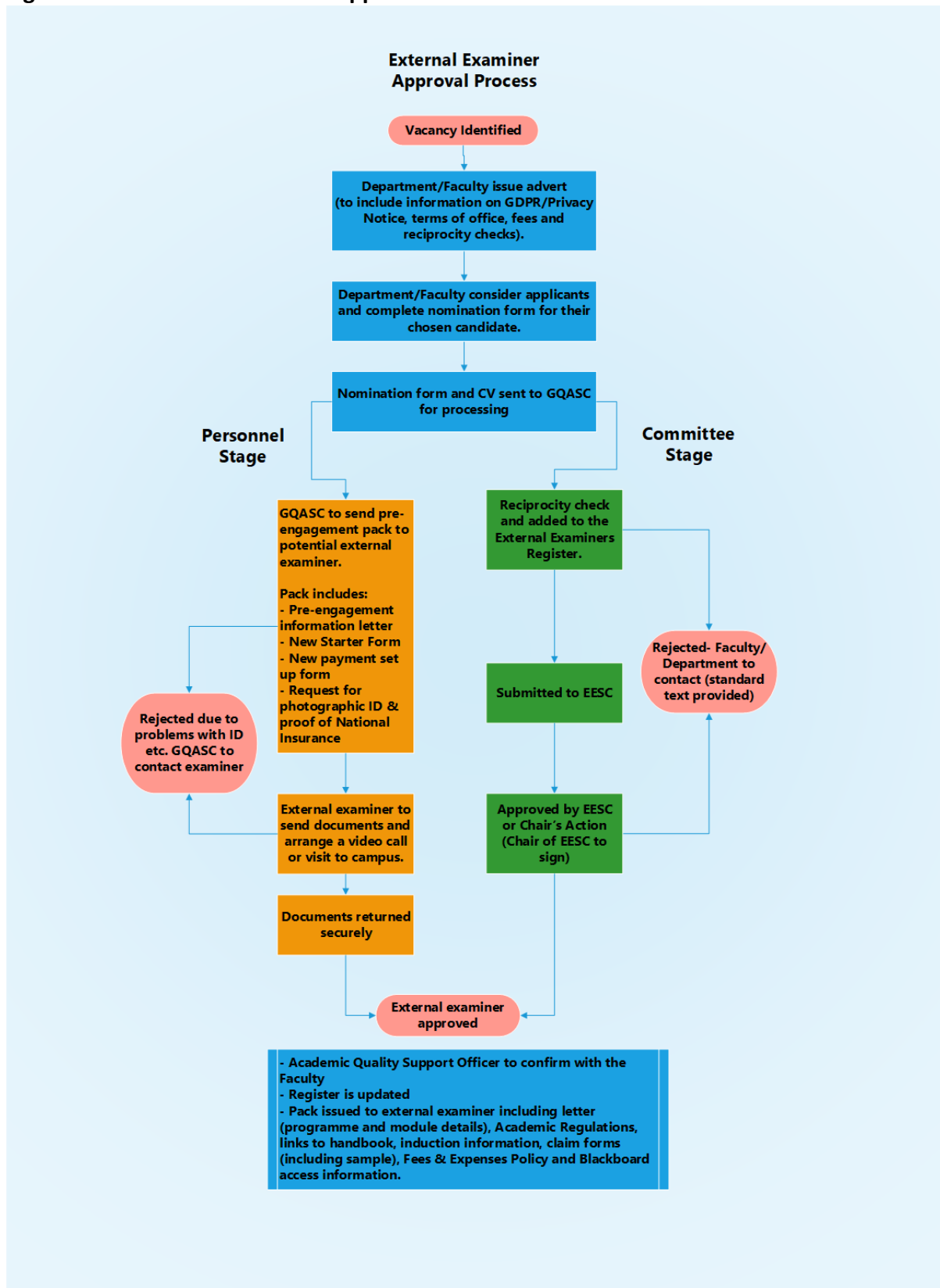
<sup>17</sup> Nominations may exceptionally be approved by EESC Chair's Action outside the cycle of scheduled meetings, e.g., to fill current or imminent vacancies. Where the nomination is from the same Faculty as the Chair of EESC, Chair's Action will be taken by the Deputy Chair of EESC.

<sup>18</sup> Available at [Template Documents - External Examiners](#)

<sup>19</sup> This would include retirement and redundancy.

<sup>20</sup> Relevant employment in this case would constitute appointment to another academic position in the same discipline area.

Figure2: The External Examiner Approval Process



**Where a serving external examiner is offered employment by Edge Hill University**, the head of the appointing department notifies the Faculty and Academic Quality Support Officer at the earliest opportunity and takes immediate steps to nominate a suitable replacement examiner or arrange cover by another examiner in the same or cognate subject area (see ‘Changes to assigned modules or programmes’, below).

## Induction

The University ensures that all examiners are informed about its organisational procedures and practices with specific relation to assessment and the regulations that govern it. New examiners receive written confirmation of the programmes/ modules to which they have been assigned, in addition to:

- A copy of the University’s Academic Regulations.
- A hyperlink to the External Examiners Handbook<sup>21</sup> incorporating the guidance contained in this chapter with accompanying information on fees, operation of assessment boards and key institutional contacts.
- A copy of the Privacy Notice for External Examiners<sup>22</sup> which advises how their data is used and handled in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

New external examiners are advised to inform their employer of their engagement with the University and are encouraged to visit the campus in advance of taking up their duties. An annual Induction event is held in January and provides an opportunity to meet with host departments and to network with other examiners. Induction sessions cover the role of the external examiner in UK higher education, use of national reference points (FHEQ and QAA subject benchmarks) and practical workshop-style activities.

External examiners familiarise themselves with and observe the University’s policies on data protection<sup>23</sup> and information security<sup>24</sup>. Any information passed between the University and its external examiners, e.g., students’ names and grades, is kept strictly confidential.

## Changes of assigned modules or programmes

Where an external examiner has been assigned to modules that combine to form a programme or ‘portfolio’ of cognate subject modules, the **replacement or addition of modules** within the programme/ portfolio does not require further Institution-level approval. Faculties describe their own process for approving such changes in their Faculty Academic Quality Statements<sup>25</sup>, ensuring that:

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<sup>21</sup> Available at <https://wiki.edgehill.ac.uk/display/agqa/Key+Guidance+Documents>.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/document/privacy-notice-for-externals-for-validation-and-periodic-review/>

<sup>23</sup> [www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/data-protection-policy/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/data-protection-policy/).

<sup>24</sup> [www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/information-security-policy/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/information-security-policy/).

<sup>25</sup> Available at <https://wiki.edgehill.ac.uk/display/agqa/Faculty+Quality+Processes+and+Responsibilities>.

- Any substituted or additional modules are within the external examiner's subject expertise (where they are not, the Faculty will nominate an additional examiner for approval by EESC in the normal manner);
- The examiner's workload remains sustainable such that the totality of provision assigned to them will receive sufficient academic scrutiny and does not exceed normal Institutional expectations<sup>26</sup>. Moderation activity resulting from changes of assigned modules should not exceed an additional 3.75 hours per year and Faculties will consider this when evaluating the totality of an examiner's workload.

Changes of assigned modules are confirmed with the external examiner via the appropriate template email and copied to the External Examiners Mailbox [externalexaminers@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@edgehill.ac.uk) to enable updating of the External Examiners Register.

Where, by mutual agreement, an external examiner is asked to assume responsibility for an **additional programme** - typically following the re-validation or replacement of an existing programme, or to fill a programme vacancy in the same subject area - the Faculty ensures that:

- The programme is within the external examiner's subject expertise (where it is not, the Faculty will nominate another examiner for approval by EESC in the normal manner); and,
- The GQASC unit are notified through receipt of a Faculty-approved **Changes to Academic Provision Coverage Form**<sup>27</sup>. Coverage Forms are received by EESC for noting only (in agenda Section C).

Depending on its relationship to the examiner's originally assigned programme (typically characterised by any module sharing or simultaneous phasing in/ out of modules), the additional programme may be either:

- absorbed within the examiner's existing remit, in which case the totality should be sustainable within their contracted hours and any additional moderation activity does not exceed +3.75 hours per year; or
- treated separately from their existing remit with a full annual allowance of hours and fees for the programme that has been added.

**Note:** Faculties confirm the terms of adding a programme to an examiner's remit with the Academic Quality Support Officer before commencing any formal discussions with them.

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<sup>26</sup> For further details see below section on 'Edge Hill University External Examiners Workload Model', below.

<sup>27</sup> Available at [Template Documents - External Examiners](#).

## Changes of examiners' circumstances

Examiners are requested to indicate any changes to their current employment status or PSRB registration during their period of engagement to the Academic Quality Support Officer at [externalexaminers@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@edgehill.ac.uk). Examiners will carefully consider the impact of taking on additional external examiner appointments during their term of engagement with Edge Hill.

## Published Information for Students

Students are informed<sup>28</sup> of the name, position and home institution of their external examiners and advised that entering into direct correspondence with them is prohibited<sup>29</sup>. Examiners are requested to forward any direct communications from students to their departmental contact and/ or the Academic Quality Support Officer at [externalexaminers@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@edgehill.ac.uk). External examiners' reports and department responses are shared with student representatives at the next available Programme Board and made available to all students via the programme area of the Learning Edge Virtual Learning Environment and/ or Student Information Hub Wiki.

## Research Degrees

Research degrees including PhD, professional doctorates and Masters by Research (MRes) awards are assessed by dissertation viva panels. Panels include at least one independent external examiner. Such examiners are nominated by the academic department and approved by the Graduate School Board of Studies. Arrangements for the external examination of research degrees are described in chapter 9 of this Handbook.

## ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The GQASC unit, Faculties, academic departments and programme teams are jointly accountable in ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place to support examiners in discharging their responsibilities. Programme teams provide their examiners with the specific information they need to perform their duties.

Examiners normally visit<sup>30</sup> the University at least once a year to moderate assessed coursework and examination scripts although further mid-year visits may be required for programmes with a performance, practical or professional element, or for cohorts with variable/ multiple intakes or non-standard completion times. External examiners attend Module Assessment Boards where the detailed discussion of academic standards takes place. In the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the Faculty of Education, Progression and Award Board examiners ensure the rigour of the process underpinning the conferment of awards through the Board's application of the Academic Regulations. In the Faculty of Health, Social Care and

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<sup>28</sup> Via module or programme handbooks and/ or the Learning Edge Virtual Learning Environment.

<sup>29</sup> Students who wish to raise an academic issue or concern are directed to the relevant University systems and procedures, e.g. personal tutors, programme boards and Institutional processes for complaints and academic appeals <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/departments/support/gqasc/student-casework/>

<sup>30</sup> Subject to government advice. For example, travel restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, in which case alternative arrangements are made.

Medicine, where Module and Progression and Award Boards are conflated, all examiners are in attendance and access complete student profiles to confirm standards at award level.

In producing their annual reports (see below) external examiners comment on the fairness and consistency of assessment boards' decisions and their adherence to the University's regulations. If in highly exceptional circumstances, examiners are unable to attend any of the assessment boards they are requested to be available using a video conferencing solution.

In specific relation to **re-assessment**, external moderation of students' work is normally unnecessary and internal moderation provides the necessary confirmation of standards. However, an external examiner presence is required at Progression and Award Boards to oversee the application of the Academic Regulations (which may be the Award Board Examiner, Chief Examiner or a representative programme examiner).

### Primary role of External Examiners

External Examiners' main responsibility is to confirm that academic standards are appropriately set and maintained. This is carried out by:

- Reviewing and approving examination papers that contribute to a student's final award, and any other assessment material as agreed between themselves and the programme team for which an annual time allowance is provided<sup>31</sup>.
- Moderating samples<sup>32</sup> of student work that have been marked and internally moderated<sup>33</sup> in order to be satisfied that students have been graded fairly in accordance with Intended Learning Outcomes, marking criteria and the University's Academic Regulations.
- Reviewing and approving the content, learning outcomes and assessment of negotiated learning modules leading to the award of Student Initiated Credit<sup>34</sup>.
- Sampling the assessment of portfolios that accompany claims for Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)<sup>35</sup>.
- In their annual reports (also see 'Reports' below):
  - Confirming that sector recognised standards (FHEQ) are being met or exceeded, content is in broad alignment with other external reference points (e.g., Subject Benchmark Statements) and that students have achieved the Intended Learning Outcomes for the award of credit and qualifications.

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<sup>31</sup> For further details see below section on 'Edge Hill University's External Examiner Workload Model'.

<sup>32</sup> For moderation sample sizes see '*Marking and Moderating Assessed Work*' ([Assessment Policy](#), 2019). Where a programme/module is delivered across multiple partners, samples for external moderation must include all partners for a programme and this should be clearly labelled to allow comparability between cohorts. However, the overall sample should not exceed the sample size as defined in the policy.

<sup>33</sup> See '*Marking and Moderating Assessed Work*' ([Assessment Policy](#), 2019).

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 7.

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 7.



- Beyond threshold attainment, providing advisory comment on the comparability of standards (grades and degree classifications) with other programmes of the same subject/ level.
- Providing advisory comment on the standard of marking and moderation and quality of written feedback for programme teams, departments and Faculties to act upon.
- Providing advisory comment on assessment processes including the operation of assessment boards for the University to act upon.

In addition to samples of assessed student work and written feedback, programme teams supply their examiners with the relevant programme and module handbooks, coursework specifications, examination papers, marking criteria and a record of marks for each assessment item. **External moderation should not replicate internal marking and moderation but rather verify that the latter are operating fairly and consistently.** Programme teams arrange for external examiners to receive or view students' work in good time before assessment boards. External examiners are provided with, or given access to<sup>36</sup>, all the internally moderated work<sup>37</sup> from each module as the basis for conducting their own sampling sufficient to establish that, in their judgement:

- **Internal moderation, and by extension first marking, have been broadly effective and resulted in fair assessment decisions in line with the published marking criteria** – other than at the boundaries of grade classifications, a difference of opinion between internal markers and moderators of +/-2 marks will not normally warrant specific comment.
- **Assessment feedback is of high quality and developmental, and aligned with Intended Learning Outcomes, marking criteria and the grades awarded to students.**

**Any work likely to be the subject of discussion at a Module Assessment Board** should be made available to the examiner in advance of the board having already been assessed by no fewer than two internal markers. Where there is a significant difference of judgement between first and second markers it is expected that programme teams should have taken steps to resolve this internally, although examiners may request additional samples where any inconsistency persists.

External examiners of practice-based programmes, typically in Initial Teacher Education are requested to visit placement settings (schools) to meet with students and mentors for which additional time is allocated. Otherwise, there is no general expectation that examiners meet with students, although they may do so on specific request to the Programme Leader. Faculties determine, and ensure examiners are aware of, the arrangements by which they may engage directly with students. Such arrangements are formally documented in Faculty Academic Quality Statements<sup>38</sup> and communicated formally to the EESC.

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<sup>36</sup> Including via the Learning Edge Virtual Learning Environment.

<sup>37</sup> While only internally moderated work is provided to external examiners as standard, other assessed work may be accessed on request to the Programme Leader.

<sup>38</sup> Available at <https://wiki.edgehill.ac.uk/display/agqa/Faculty+Quality+Processes+and+Responsibilities>.



## Secondary role of External Examiners

In addition to their principal duties, external examiners are also requested to assist programme teams and the University by being available to:

- Comment on the continuing currency of programmes and modules and any proposed modifications to them<sup>39</sup>.
- Be consulted about any proposed changes to assessment strategies, programme structures (e.g., the addition of new modules and other programme modifications<sup>40</sup>) or the regulations for the provision to which they are assigned.
- Review curriculum mapping for any proposed external articulation route<sup>41</sup> delivering advanced entry to the programme/s within their remit.

## The Role of Chief External Examiners

The Chief External Examiner is responsible for maintaining oversight of the operation of a group of cognate or related awards, and alerting the University to any themes, risks, or concerns across the suite of academic provision. For example, the University currently utilises a chief external examiner to coordinate the moderation activities of profession and field-specific examiners for its Integrated Masters in Nursing and Social Work, as agreed with the relevant professional bodies.

In addition to their role and standard responsibilities as an external examiner, the Chief External will:

- Liaise with all other external examiners responsible for an aspect of the designated provision.
- Comment on the conduct of progression and award boards and institutional procedures, the extent to which the Academic Regulations have been applied fairly and consistently across the provision they are responsible for and whether discretion was used appropriately.
- Comment on the above in their annual report; in addition to making comments and confirming academic standards for programme/modules/themes or years of study that they may ordinarily be responsible.<sup>42</sup>
- Where appropriate, attend re-assessment boards to oversee the application of the Academic Regulations on behalf of the subject-based externals.

## End Point Assessment Organisation External Examiner

The External Examiner for End Point Assessment Organisations (EPAO) for integrated higher/degree apprenticeship is required to review and ensure that the EPAO has a robust approach to maintaining and improving the validity and quality of End Point Assessments for

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<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>41</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>42</sup> Chief external examiners are not required to produce a separate and additional annual report.

Higher/degree apprenticeships. This is part of External Quality Assurance (EQA) in line with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFATE) standard assessment plan, while also ensuring compliance with the Education and Skills Funding Agency rules and the QAA quality code, degree characteristics and benchmarking and the Designated Quality Body monitoring requirements. IFATE has set out the EQA principles that underpin policies, practices, behaviours and actions.

The external examiners for EPAO are required to attend Gateways boards, quality assure internal processes, and complete external examiner reports. They are also required to take the role of 'external assessor' as required by the DQB which involves visiting the EPAO at least once per year per apprenticeship, reviewing evidence, action plans and submitting a report based on IFATE lines of enquiry.

The EPAO is responsible for recruiting the external examiner, and there may be more than one external examiner depending on the size and complexity of the provision. It is permitted for the external examiner to be the external examiner for both the programme and the EPAO, as long as they are up to date with industry experience in order to EQA the EPAO. All EEs must have up to date occupational competence and assessment skills, CPD, credible industry experience and EEs must have processes in order to declare conflict of interest with apprentices, employers and providers.

### **Edge Hill University External Examiners Workload Model**

Except for annual reports, which are paid separately, all duties are paid at an hourly rate<sup>43</sup> in accordance with the time allocations defined below. Claims that exceed the time allocated for a specific activity, without the prior consent of the Director of Governance and Assurance (or nominee), will usually not be accepted.

Fees and expenses should normally be claimed within 30 days of any external examiner duties undertaken.

#### **Annual Reports:**

- Writing and submission of the annual report is allocated 7.5 hours. This includes all preparatory activity including the production of any interim or module reports completed during the academic session/ year. Where an examiner is responsible for collaborative provision, they should complete a single report which compares the provision across each partner.

#### **Moderation:**

- External examiners are allocated 15 hours for moderation of assessed work per academic year. This allowance is based on the typical volume of moderation per

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<sup>43</sup> For current rates see 'External Examiners' Fees and Expenses Policy' at <https://wiki.edgehill.ac.uk/display/agqa/Fees%2C+Workload+and+Expenses>.

external examiner which is confirmed by the External Examiners Sub-Committee at the point of engagement.

- If an external examiner accepts additional moderation responsibilities during their engagement which significantly increases their workload, then additional hours can be claimed for. If this is queried by the Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance, the department will need to provide evidence of this.
- External examiners may claim hourly for “real-time” moderation activities e.g. live performances, Observed Structural Clinical Examinations and observed teaching practice in schools.

Where a programme is non-modular, the programme team will review the moderation and assessment workload to ensure that it remains within the workload model.

#### **Attendance at Assessment Boards and Induction activities:**

- Attendance at assessment and award boards may be claimed in hours dependent on the precise length of the activity.
- Up to 7.5 hours may be claimed per academic session/ year for attendance at the External Examiners’ Induction event.

#### **Other duties:**

- Up to 7.5 hours per academic session/ year may be claimed for mentoring a new external examiner at the formal request of the University.
- Up to 3.75 hours per academic session/ year may be claimed for external verification of draft coursework briefs and examination papers contributing to a student’s final award, typically at FHEQ level 5 and above.
- Up to 3.75 hours per academic session/ year may be claimed for providing written comments on proposals for new modules, or for module or programme modifications.

## **REPORTS**

External examiners’ reports are an important source of direct evidence of academic standards, as well as indirect evidence of the quality of teaching, and the University gives full and serious consideration to them. External examiners complete an online annual report<sup>44</sup> on the provision for which they are responsible. Faculties must ensure that new examiners receive their predecessor’s final report accompanied by the relevant departmental response when commencing their term of office.

In their reports, examiners provide informative comment and recommendations on:

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<sup>44</sup> The link to the online external examiner report form is at [External Examiner Annual Reports - Edge Hill University](#)

- Whether the University is maintaining the academic standards it has set<sup>45</sup> for its awards in relation to national threshold standards defined by the FHEQ level descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements, and the University's Academic Regulations<sup>46</sup>.
- Beyond threshold, the comparability of the University's academic standards and student achievement with other UK higher education institutions (HEIs).
- The rigour, equity and fairness of assessment of Intended Learning Outcomes.
- The quality of summative written feedback to students.
- The conduct and transparency of assessment processes including marking, internal moderation and the operation of assessment boards.
- Evidence of good practice and innovation in learning, teaching and assessment, and opportunities to enhance the quality of learning opportunities provided to Edge Hill students.
- Any modules that in their judgement would benefit from early review and modification/ re-validation.

Where programmes are delivered at more than one site, e.g., at different Edge Hill campuses or by multiple academic partners, examiners differentiate these explicitly to identify any standards-related issues or good practice pertaining to the specific instance of delivery. Where an examiner's duties are spread across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, separate annual reports are submitted for which additional payments are made.

Examiners confirm that sufficient information and evidence was made available to them to fulfil their role and that issues raised by them in previous reports, including those of their immediate predecessors, have been responded to.

**Examiners refrain from identifying individual students and staff in their reports**, however references to staff roles e.g., 'the Programme Leader' are acceptable. Barring mitigating circumstances which should be discussed in advance with the Academic Quality Support Officer (GQASC), examiners submit their reports within four weeks of the relevant assessment board. Where following appropriate reminders an external examiner's report has not been received within 12 weeks of the relevant assessment board, alternative arrangements for (repeat) moderation will be made<sup>47</sup>.

Where an external examiner has not submitted their annual report, and the Annual Report Escalation Process has been exhausted, the Faculty is required to reassure the university that academic standards have been safeguarded. This is typically undertaken through the production of a written report from the Associate Dean to EESC. As a minimum, this report must confirm:

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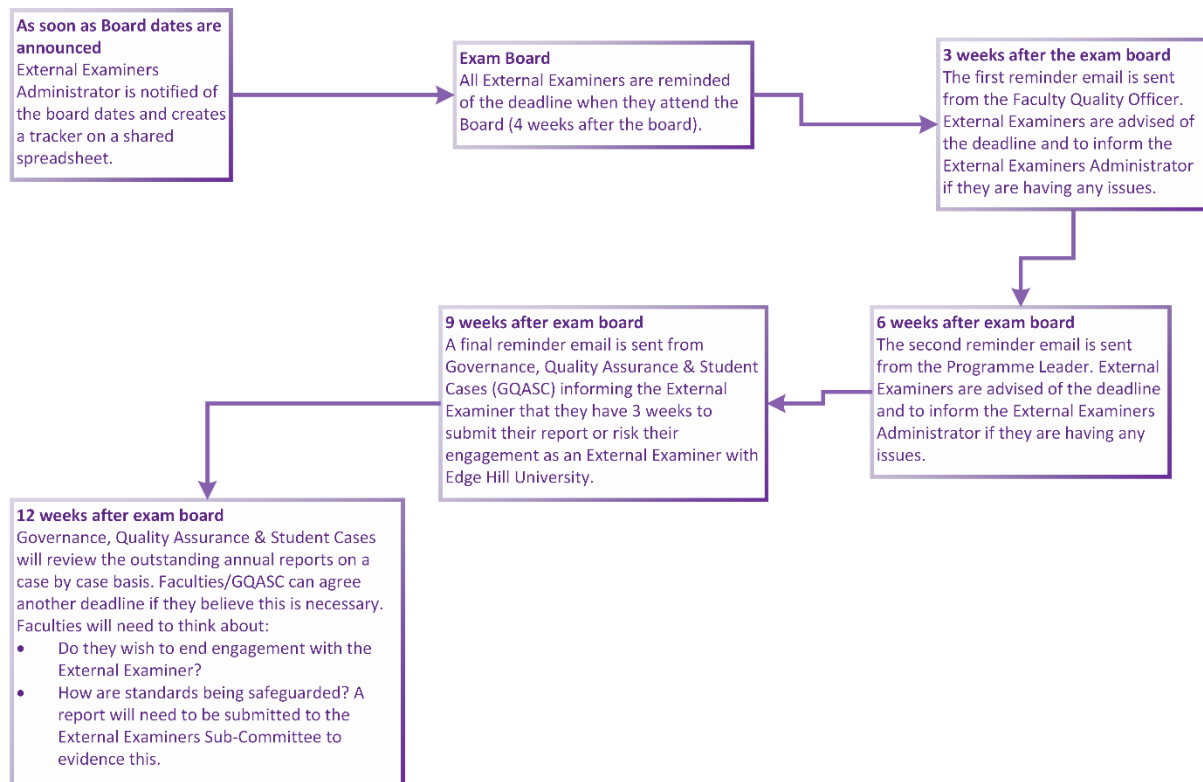
<sup>45</sup> I.e., at Institutional validation through the approval of Intended Learning Outcomes at module and programme level – see Chapter 4.

<sup>46</sup> [www.edgehill.ac.uk/corporate-information/strategies-policies/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/corporate-information/strategies-policies/).

<sup>47</sup> See also 'Ending an External Examiner's Engagement', below.

- that all modules have received appropriate external moderation prior to the relevant boards;
- any alternative arrangements made by the Faculty to ensure that moderation has been satisfactorily undertaken.
- whether the Department intends to end its engagement with the external examiner for the effected provision.

Figure 3 'Edge Hill University Annual Report Escalation Process'



Programme teams are required to provide formal and timely responses to external examiners' reports outlining any action to be taken as a result of their recommendations (or the reasons for not taking action). Faculties ensure that responses are accurate and of appropriate quality and reflect current University policy on assessment.

Responses to external examiner reports are considered for approval at the next available Faculty Board (or delegated committee). Approved responses are dispatched to examiners within seven business days or, in the event of referral back to the host department, seven days following Faculty Chair's Action. Where significant time is expected between receipt of an examiner's report and the response via the Faculty Board or relevant committee, Faculties contact examiners to advise them of the estimated wait-time.

## Institutional Overviews of External Examiner reports

The Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance (GQASC) produces an initial 'risk-based' overview of key issues from external examiner reports for the early consideration of Faculties and EESC<sup>48</sup>; Faculty Associate Deans subsequently produce more detailed evaluations<sup>49</sup> which also describe the good practice surfaced by examiners. Overview reports bring to the attention of EESC and, through its minutes, AQEC any recurring or potentially systemic issues around assessment practice or regulation that may require consideration at University level, e.g., through the Regulations Review Sub-Committee (RRSC)<sup>50</sup>.

## 'CAUSES FOR CONCERN' PROCEDURES

External examiners are asked to refer any standards-related concerns to the Programme Leader and/ or Head of Department in the first instance with the aim of finding a resolution. However, examiners also have the right to escalate any continued serious concerns to the Vice-Chancellor, via a confidential written report to which a considered and timely response is provided. In the unlikely event that internal University procedures have been exhausted and examiners remain concerned about an actual or potential failure in standards, they may notify the OfS<sup>51</sup>. In the case of PSRB-regulated programmes, examiners use their knowledge and understanding of professional codes and standards to inform any decision on escalation to the relevant professional body.

## ENDING AN EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S ENGAGEMENT

The University is committed to the maintenance of academic quality and standards and therefore reserves the right to make alternative arrangements for the external examination of its awards if necessary. A Faculty may seek to end its engagement with an external examiner through a formal written recommendation to the Chair of EESC. Where the external examiner is responsible for provision in the same Faculty as the Chair of EESC, this should be directed to the Deputy Chair of EESC. While neither exhaustive nor prescriptive the following are indicative of reasons for ending an external examiner's engagement:

- Failure to disclose a relationship, contractual or otherwise, which may impair the integrity of the examination process and their own independence as external examiner.
- Persistent failure to attend meetings, respond to communications and/ or present the required reports by the stated deadline without prior agreement, and/ or the submission of identical reports and/ or failure to return students' work following moderation.

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<sup>48</sup> At its November meeting

<sup>49</sup> Using Form EE1 'Faculty Summary of External Examiner Reports and Department Responses', available at <https://wiki.edgehill.ac.uk/display/agqa/Template+Documents>. Faculty summaries are typically received by EESC in February or March.

<sup>50</sup> See Chapter 8.

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-students/ofs-and-students/notifications/>.

- Persistent and deliberate failure to use the relevant national academic and/ or professional benchmarks to support judgements on academic standards and Edge Hill students' attainment of them.
- For clinical and other professional programmes, failure to maintain professional body membership or professional registration where this is a requirement of being an external examiner, or disbarment from professional practice which may impair the integrity of the examination process or the individual's standing as an external examiner.

Such matters will normally be dealt with in accordance with the University's Human Resources (HR) policies and procedures, details of which may be found on the HR wiki<sup>52</sup>. Where the proposal to end engagement is approved, the examiner is notified in writing of the University's decision and their name removed from the External Examiners Register. The outcome is noted by AQEC via receipt of the EESC minutes.

Occasionally, a programme may be closed before the end of the external examiner's period of engagement and in such cases the individual will be formally notified<sup>53</sup> and AQEC informed as part of the process for Programme Closure<sup>54</sup>. Any external examiner may choose to end their engagement with the University by writing to the Chair of EESC to advise of their intention.

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<sup>52</sup> [Forms, Policies and Documents - Human Resources - GO Spaces \(edgehill.ac.uk\)](#)

<sup>53</sup> By the Academic Quality Support Officer acting on advice from the relevant Faculty.

<sup>54</sup> See Chapter 4.