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Introduction

The University has, by definition, the power to grant degrees, and as such it is responsible for the standards of awards made in its name. In order to assist it to discharge that responsibility, it appoints external examiners who have professional expertise and experience in designated areas of study which will enable them to offer informed, independent, and impartial judgements about the appropriateness and comparability of the standards of awards.

The purpose of this Handbook is to provide an overview of the purpose, role and duties of external examiners, and outline the expectations on external examiners in the performance of those duties. In doing this, the Handbook draws on a range of University documentation. The most important document is the University's Code of Practice on External Examining/Moderating, a copy of which is included in this handbook at **Appendix 1**, and which is also available on the Durham website at <http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/section/10/>.

This Handbook also draws on:

- the University's core regulations for undergraduate programmes;
- the University's core regulations for taught postgraduate programmes;
- the University's qualification and level descriptors;
- the University's policies and procedures for assessment.

All of these documents, and other useful information for external examiners, can be accessed via the University's online briefing for external examiners at <http://www.dur.ac.uk/academicssupport.office/external.examiners/>

The purposes and role of the external examiner

In its Code of Practice on External Examining/Moderation, the University states that the purpose of its external examiner system is to ensure that:

- Degrees awarded by the University meet or exceed the academic standards specified in external points of reference such as the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications*, subject benchmark statements, the QAA Code of Practice, and (where appropriate) the requirements of professional bodies.
- The academic standards of the University's awards are consistent with those in comparable HEIs.
- The assessment system is fair and is fairly operated in the awarding and classification of degrees. The external examiner may be consulted in the course of any investigation into any suspected irregularity in examination performance of the production of assessed work.

The roles and responsibilities of the external examiner

The roles and responsibilities of external examiners are detailed in full in the University's Code of Practice, and can be found in Appendix 1 and at http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/section_10/5/

(Again in summary) in its Code of Practice, the University defines the main duties of its external examiners as:

- to review and evaluate examinations and all other forms of assessment which contribute to students' degree results;
- to review and evaluate the assessment process;
- to moderate, as appropriate, summatively assessed work at the level of the module and at the level of the degree programme;
- to ensure consistency in the assessment process;
- to comment on draft examination papers as appropriate;
- where possible and practicable, to meet with groups of students in order to obtain feedback on the student learning experience and the programme(s) as a whole;
- to report on the structure, content, academic standards and teaching of the relevant programmes;
- to comment, if invited to do so by the University, on alleged cases of assessment irregularities.

Expectations of the external examiner

In order to perform these duties, the University expects you to:

1 *Be familiar with the key reference points*

The University has approved qualification descriptors that specify the generic outcomes and academic standards that the University has agreed students should meet to be awarded a particular degree (specific outcomes for each degree programme are detailed in programme specifications). The University's qualification descriptors define such outcomes for each of the taught awards the University makes (Certificate of Higher Education, Diploma of Higher Education, Ordinary Degree, Honours Degree, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma and Master's Degree). All external examiners are sent copies of these qualification descriptors on appointment, and they are also available online at:

<http://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/university.calendar/volumeii/2014.2015/corereqsug.pdf>
(pp.18-21)

and

<http://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/university.calendar/volumeii/2014.2015/pgqualdes.pdf>

The University's qualification descriptors are aligned to those contained in the QAA's *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)* (available at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Framework-Higher-Education-Qualifications-08.pdf>). Accordingly if the academic standards of a programme are consistent with Durham's qualification descriptors they are consistent with the *FHEQ*. The alignment of Durham's qualification descriptors with the *FHEQ* is as follows:

Award	FHEQ Level	Durham University Level
Certificate of Higher Education	4	1
Diploma of Higher Education	5	2
Ordinary Degree Honours Degree Graduate Certificate Graduate Diploma	6	3
Postgraduate Certificate Postgraduate Diploma Master's Degree	7	4
Doctoral Degree	8	5

You need to be aware of the qualification descriptor(s) relevant to the award(s) that you are examining, so that you can check that the awards are compatible with the University's qualification descriptors (and thereby those in the *FHEQ*).

Secondly, reference points may include national benchmarks in the subject relating to the threshold and modal standards of awards. Such benchmarks are available for virtually all undergraduate programmes (and can be accessed at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>), and for a smaller number of taught postgraduate programmes (available at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements/masters-degree->

[subjects](#)). If you are examining a programme for which a subject benchmark statement is available you need to be aware of the contents of the relevant statement(s) so that you can check whether programme standards are compatible with those in the statement(s). Whereas compatibility with the University's qualification descriptors and thereby the *FHEQ* is required, the subject benchmarks are advisory and differences are acceptable provided that there is a valid reason.

Finally, external reference points may, for some programmes, include the requirements of accrediting bodies. Again, you need to be familiar with these to advise the University about the compatibility of awards. The department/school in which you are externally examining will be able to advise you if the programmes you are examining need to be aligned with the requirements of accrediting bodies.

2 *Be familiar with the programme(s) they are examining*

You obviously need to be familiar with all aspects of the programme(s) which you are examining. In particular, you need to know:

- the purposes of the programme(s) (aim(s));
- what students are expected to know, or do, or think to complete the programme successfully (the intended learning outcomes);
- what learning opportunities and experiences are provided to enable students to attain those outcomes (the curriculum);
- how those learning opportunities and experiences are provided (the learning and teaching strategy);
- how attainment of the intended learning outcomes is evaluated (the assessment strategy);
- where appropriate, how assessment discriminates between levels of attainment of the intended learning outcomes (assessment criteria/marketing descriptors).

This information will be outlined in the degree programme specification and the assessment criteria, both of which will be sent to you by the academic department in which you are examining. Summaries of programme specifications are also available on the University website at <http://www.dur.ac.uk/programme.specifications/ug.programmes/> [undergraduate] and <http://www.dur.ac.uk/programme.specifications/pg.programmes/> [taught postgraduate].

You should familiarise yourself with both the programme specification and the assessment criteria so that you have a clear overview of the programme(s) that you are examining. Established external examiners will find it useful to review this documentation in advance, particularly in respect of any changes made since the previous year and their implications for assessment and examination.

In addition to knowing about the programme as a whole, you also need to know about its component parts, i.e. the modules which constitute it, as much of your work in moderating will be undertaken at this level. For each module in the programme, then, you need to know:

- the intended learning outcomes;
- how the curriculum is designed to enable students to achieve those outcomes;
- how those outcomes are assessed;
- how assessment of learning outcomes in modules is linked to the assessment of outcomes in the programme as a whole qualitatively (whether the module is compulsory, core, or optional) and quantitatively (the credit value).

This information is set out in the module outlines. Module information is summarised in the programme specification, and the full module outlines are available under the entry for the relevant academic department in the University's Faculty Handbook (for undergraduate

modules – accessible at <http://www.dur.ac.uk/faculty.handbook/>) and Postgraduate Module Handbook (for taught postgraduate modules – accessible at <http://www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.modules/>).

3 *Be familiar with requirements for assessment, examination, and award*

As well as being familiar with the programme(s), you also need to be familiar with the relevant requirements for assessment, examination and award. These include requirements set by the University and requirements relating to specific programmes.

The University's requirements are set out in its core regulations. All external examiners receive a copy of the relevant core regulations when they are appointed, and the core regulations are also available on the University's website:

- Undergraduate programmes (including integrated masters):
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/university.calendar/volumeii/2014.2015/coreregsug.pdf>
- Graduate diplomas and graduate certificates:
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/university.calendar/volumeii/2014.2015/coreregsgrad.dipgradcert.pdf>
- Taught masters degrees, postgraduate diplomas and postgraduate certificates:
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/university.calendar/volumeii/2014.2015/coreregsmtd.pdf>
- Professional Doctorates:
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/university.calendar/volumeii/2014.2015/coreregspd.pdf>
- Integrated PhDs:
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/university.calendar/volumeii/2014.2015/coreregsphd.pdf>

The core regulations cover such issues as:

- the University's preconditions for award of a degree;
- its requirements for progression between levels of study;
- the requirements for the award of each qualification, and for the classification of each qualification.

The requirements detailed in the core regulations apply to all degrees, unless otherwise specified in the programme regulations. Programme regulations include any specific requirements relating to a degree programme. These, of course, reflect the fact that every named degree programme is different in terms of its content and structure and hence there may be specific requirements governing the specific programme. Consequently, the core regulations and programme regulations must be read in conjunction with each other. On their appointment all external examiners receive a copy of the programme regulations for the programmes for which they are responsible. This information is also available on the University's website at www.dur.ac.uk/faculty.handbook/ (for undergraduate programmes) and www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.modules/ (for postgraduate programmes).

Particularly if you are a new external examiner at Durham, you will need to read these through carefully so that you have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the University's requirements for the assessment, examination, and award of undergraduate and/or postgraduate degrees. Even for established examiners, it can be useful to refresh your memory each year before diving into the maelstrom of examining (not least because changes are made to core and programme regulations over time).

If you have any queries about the University's regulations you should contact the Academic Support Office (via the External Examiners' Secretary, email:

external.examiners@dur.ac.uk), while for those relating to programme regulations you should contact the Chair of the Board of Examiners.

4 *Be clear about how they are going to carry out their duties*

While both the core and any additional duties of external examiners are prescribed by the University and Boards of Examiners respectively in the Code of Practice on External Examining/Moderating (available in Appendix 1 of this Handbook, and on the University's website at http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/section_10/5/), they can be carried out in different ways.

External examiners have the right to see all student work which is assessed and which counts towards the award.

You may decide that you would wish to see every piece of work or, bearing in mind student numbers and the volume of assessment in the programme(s), that you wish to see only a sub-set. Where you opt to view a sub-set, the University requires that the principles on which the selection of the sample should take place should be agreed between you and the Chair of the relevant Board of Examiners in advance. The key guiding principle is that where an external examiner looks at a sample, this sample should provide them with sufficient evidence to allow them to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard, and are consistent.

In addition to deciding which scripts you wish to see, you also need to consider whether you wish to know the internal marks before you look at the assessments or whether you would prefer to do this 'blind' and refer to the internal marks later. Examiners vary in their views about these matters. Some take the view that, in order to be completely independent, they should not know the internal marks beforehand and should conduct the whole exercise moderating blind. Others prefer to have a general indication of what internal examiners thought of the assessments to offer at least a starting point, particularly for moderation. Finally, and particularly in subjects where marking is essentially mechanical, examiners may prefer to know precisely what the internal marks are before marking themselves.

5 *Liaise with the Chair of the Board of Examiners*

Once you are clear about the nature of your duties and how you intend to carry them out, you need to liaise with the Chair of the Board of Examiners to make sure that appropriate arrangements will be put into place. So you need to inform the Chair whether you wish to see all assessments and examination papers or a sample, and if the latter agree how the sample should be made up. If you intend to moderate blind, you need to tell the Chair so that the internal marks can be sent under separate cover.

Additionally, you need to sort out the timetable for examination. So, you need to know when you can expect to receive draft examination papers for comment and when they have to be returned by; when assessment materials will be sent to you; when you will be required to attend for the examinations if you are directly involved in examining and/or for the Board of Examiners. This will need to be discussed and agreed with the Chair of the Board of Examiners.

6 *Scrutinise draft assessment and examination questions*

External examiners will be asked to scrutinise draft examination questions, and may be asked to scrutinise draft coursework questions. External examiners will of course develop their own criteria, but some useful pointers are:

- Are the draft topics or questions set at an appropriate level for students on the programme at this stage of their studies?
- Are the topics or questions set in such a way that answers will in principle enable discrimination between levels of attainment as set out in the marking descriptors?
- Are alternative questions of comparable difficulty?

- Are the rubrics and the topics or questions clear and unambiguous?
- Are the marks allocated appropriately between questions?
- Looking at the topic or examination paper overall, does it require students to demonstrate attainment across all of the assessed learning outcomes in the module or can some be avoided by judicious topic or question selection?

Clearly if the answer to any of these questions is 'No', then there is a case for discussing the matter with the Chair of the Board of Examiners and, if appropriate, suggesting that the topic or paper should be revised. If you do have any queries about the draft questions and papers, you should make a note of them for future reference in your report.

7 *Calibrate marking*

Once assessments and examinations have been completed by students and their work marked internally, either all of the scripts or the agreed sample are sent out to the external examiner to calibrate the marking and check the consistency of internal marking.

Essentially, the purpose of calibration is to enable you, as the external examiner, to see whether the marks awarded by internal examiners are in line with the marks that would be awarded for a similar performance in other comparable institutions. So the key question that you have to consider is whether, in relation to subject norms and conventions, the internal marks are about right, too low, or too high.

In many cases, there will be little if any variance between your marks and those of the internal examiners, which suggests that marking is calibrated to the norms and conventions of the subject. But there may be cases where you find a systematic variance between your marks and those of internal examiners, i.e. that the internal marks are consistently lower or high across (or virtually across) the board. This suggests that internal marking is poorly calibrated with subject norms and conventions, and that adjustment may be required.

If you find that on one or more of the modules such variance exists, you should contact the Chair of the Board of Examiners and try to resolve the matter with his or her aid. Proposals can then be developed to address the variance, so that they can be considered by the Board of Examiners before marks are confirmed by the Board. In making such proposals you should be aware that University policy is that, where they feel that marks are poorly calibrated, external examiners may only change the marks for individual pieces of assessment where they have moderated the full run of that assessment task. Where external examiners have moderated a sample of work for an assessment task and are not content with the marks awarded (for example he/she feels that marks are over-harsh, over-generous or inconsistent), they should make recommendations on the systematic steps to be taken to address these concerns. These might include, for example, recommending that work be double marked in full, that work be re-marked, or increasing or reducing the marks awarded to all the candidates concerned in a systematic fashion whose rationale and procedure are recorded).

Again you should keep a record of your views about calibration for purposes of your report.

8 *Check for consistency of marking*

As well as using the sample of assessments and papers for purposes of calibration, you should also use it to check the consistency of marking. What you are looking for here is evidence that internal examiners are using the assessment criteria consistently across the range of assessments and/or scripts. (You will have received the relevant assessment criteria from the department/school in which you are examining at the same time that you received the relevant programme specification(s)).

One way of doing this is by looking at one or two key questions across the range of scripts in your sample, and then reviewing the internal marks. You should find that answers of a similar standard attract similar marks or, conversely, that answers of a different standard

attract different marks. University policy is that, where they do find inconsistencies, external examiners may only change the marks for individual pieces of assessment where they have moderated the full run of that assessment task. Where external examiners have moderated a sample of work for an assessment task and are not content with the marks awarded (for example he/she feels that marks are over-harsh, over-generous or inconsistent), they should make recommendations on the systematic steps to be taken to address these concerns. These might include, for example, recommending that work be double marked in full, that work be re-marked, or increasing or reducing the marks awarded to all the candidates concerned in a systematic fashion whose rationale and procedure are recorded).

You should record whether the marks were consistent and, if not, keep notes of cases where you have altered the marks and your reasons for doing so.

9 *Reconcile Unresolved Differences between Internal Markers*

In programmes where there is more than one internal marker, you may also be asked to reconcile unresolved differences between internal markers. This, of course, arises where internal markers disagree about the mark which should be awarded for a particular piece of work. While such disagreements have been significantly reduced by the introduction of descriptors of attainment which afford a basis for internal resolution, it is not unknown for external examiners to be asked to determine the final mark. However, this should only happen on rare occasions as all departments have established processes and mechanisms for the internal resolution of differences between first and second markers.

You should communicate your decision to the Chair of the Board of Examiners. You should keep a personal record of what you decided and why you felt it was worth a given mark in case this becomes an issue in the Board of Examiners.

10 *Advise on Cases Involving Medical and Mitigating Circumstances*

At Durham, medical and mitigating circumstances (which the University refers to using the term Serious Adverse Circumstances) which may have affected a candidate's performance are dealt with by a Scrutiny Sub-Committee of the Board of Examiners. This must comprise the Chair and Secretary of the Board plus another member of the Board, although departments may include further members if they wish to do so.

Students are informed annually of the procedure and timetable for submitting evidence to the Scrutiny Sub-Committee. While such evidence cannot alter the marks, it may influence the way in which the Board of Examiners chooses to treat those marks in determining the final award and classification of the degree. The task of the Sub-Committee is to consider any evidence presented in full, to make a judgment on the impact of the Serious Adverse Circumstances on the student's academic performance, and to report this to the Board of Examiners.

In determining an appropriate judgment, the Scrutiny Sub-Committee may well decide to consult with the external examiner. If this happens, you need then to form an opinion about the impact of the Serious Adverse Circumstances on the student's academic performance (not on the severity of the Serious Adverse Circumstances per se). While advice from an external examiner is always taken seriously, the Scrutiny Sub-Committee is not obliged to follow it.

11 *Be a Member of the Board of Examiners*

The formal position as set out in the University's Code of Practice is that you are a member by right of the Board of Examiners(s) for the programme(s) that you are examining, and you are expected to attend in person for meetings (see Appendix 1 of this Handbook; the information is also available at

http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/section_10/5/#role). If you cannot be present the department in which you are examining must seek permission from the relevant

faculty for you to be absent from the Board of Examiners' meeting, and ensure that you have been consulted on the marks and qualifications awarded.

At the Board of Examiners you have the right to speak on any matter, irrespective of whether your opinion has been invited. The Board is required to take your views into account but need not defer to them in reaching a final decision. In practice, you have four main functions in the Board, namely: to assist the Board to arrive at a *prima facie* classification of awards; to advise the Board in the exercise of discretion; to give feedback on the standards of the award, the processes of assessment and examination and, where appropriate, the programme(s); and to certify the outcomes of the Board in terms of progression and recommendations to award degrees.

(i) *Assist the Board to Arrive at a Prima Facie Classification*

The Board will convene and be presented with the array of marks for each candidate. The Board will be asked to confirm these marks. Once they are confirmed they cannot alter these marks other than because of errors of transcription.

The Board will apply the University's core regulations (taking into account any approved variation from these, as detailed in the programme regulations) with a view to arriving at a *prima facie* classification. Usually the Board will, with guidance from the Chair, decide on those cases which seem straightforward in terms of the classification criteria and those which require further consideration.

You should have seen assessments and papers for all cases which require further consideration and, using your notes, you should be able to comment on the marks and explain why they have been given.

By the end of this stage, the Board should have arrived at a *prima facie* class of degree for each candidate on the basis of application of the core and programme regulations.

(ii) *Advise the Board in the Exercise of Discretion*

While the *prima facie* class of degree constitutes a threshold (i.e. students cannot be awarded a lower class of degree) the Board of Examiners may, at its discretion, award a higher class of degree. In doing so, the Board must operate within the University's policy on discretion, which is available in Appendix 2 of this Handbook and at <http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/6/3/7/>.

In considering such cases, the Board will seek the opinion of the external examiner about whether this is an acceptable exercise of its powers. These cases should have been drawn to your attention earlier so that you have formed an opinion and can advise the Board whether, in your view, the evidence indicates that the candidate would have met the requirements for the higher class or should be permitted to progress notwithstanding a failure to meet all the requirements for progression. The University's position is that the views of an external examiner should be particularly influential in the case of disagreement and that if agreement cannot be reached by the usual means (which includes a vote) the decision of the external examiner shall be final.

Once cases involving the exercise or non-exercise of discretion have been considered and resolved, the final recommendations for progression or award should be agreed and checked by the Board. You should pay particular attention as you will later be asked to certify that you have approved these recommendations.

(iii) *Feedback to the Board*

While it is not a constitutional part of their proceedings many Boards of Examiners ask external examiners to give oral feedback at the end of the Board's proceedings.

It can be helpful here to comment briefly on: the extent to which methods of assessment were appropriate to evaluating achievement of the intended learning outcomes of the programme(s); the standards of assignments and examination questions set; marking

standards; the effectiveness and fairness of procedures for examination and assessment; the attainments of students compared to those on similar programmes elsewhere in the sector and, where appropriate, over time. In the light of the above, you may wish to suggest changes for consideration and discuss these with members of the Board.

(iv) Certify the Processes of Examination and Assessment and the Recommendations of the Board of Examiners

The outcomes of the Board of Examiners are embodied in a final list of degree results and progression decisions, which must be signed by the external examiner. Your signature certifies that, in your opinion, the processes of assessment and examination have been conducted in a fair and proper way and in accordance with the University's regulations, and that the standards of awards are comparable with those in similar subjects in similar Universities and consistent with the University's qualification descriptors (and thereby the *FHEQ*). If you consider that there have been irregularities in the processes of assessment and examination and/or that the standards of awards are not comparable, you should not sign the list(s). In this situation, the matter will be referred to the relevant Pro-Vice-Chancellor for resolution.

12 Report to the University on the Standards of the Award

After the Board of Examiners, external examiners must make a written report to the University on the form provided. The report should:

- comment on the appropriateness of the standards set for the programme(s) relative to norms within the subject(s) and key reference points such as the University's qualification descriptors (and thereby the *FHEQ*) and subject benchmarks;
- comment on the appropriateness of methods of assessing student achievement in relation to those standards;
- comment on the effectiveness of assessment criteria in describing levels of student attainment in relation to the standards of the programme;
- where appropriate, comment on the effectiveness of assessment and examination questions in assessing student achievement of the designated standards and enabling discrimination between levels of achievement;
- comment on the extent to which internal marks were calibrated to standards in the subject(s);
- comment on the consistency of internal marking;
- comment on the effectiveness and fairness of the processes of examination and assessment;
- comment on whether the standards set were achieved by students;
- in the light of the above, summarise the degree of confidence which can be placed in the standards of the award;
- make any recommendations for consideration by the Board of Studies.

The report should be sent to the Academic Support Office. The report will then be considered by the Chair and Secretary of the relevant Faculty Education Committee, who will note its contents and forward it to the Board(s) of Studies responsible for the programme(s). The latter will discuss the report (including discussion with students through its Staff Student Consultative Committee) and respond to you with details of actions to be taken in response to the report if appropriate. The latter, plus the Board's response and, if appropriate, the action plan is considered by the Faculty Education Committee which will consider the Board's response and monitor actions. These reports and responses are then published internally within the University.

If an external examiner is not content with the response received from the Board of Studies they may raise this with the chair of Education Committee (via the Head of the Academic Support Office), who will respond in writing to the external examiner. External examiners may also make an additional and separate confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor, or make use of the QAA's Concerns Procedure

Conclusion

The University relies heavily on external examiners to maintain and enhance the standards of its awards. It recognises that external examining requires a considerable commitment of time and effort, and it is grateful to those who are prepared to undertake it. Hopefully, this document will have helped you in:

- understanding the purpose and role of external examiners;
- understanding your duties;
- understanding expectations in the performance of those duties.

Appendix 1 Durham University Code of Practice on External Examining/Moderating – first degree certificate, diploma and taught postgraduate programmes

Note: This Code of Practice is also available in the University's online Learning and Teaching Handbook at <http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/section/10/1/>.

10.1: Purpose of External Examiners

1. The purposes of the University's external examiner system are to ensure that:
 - a. Degrees awarded by the University meet or exceed the academic standards specified in external points of reference such as the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications*, subject benchmark statements, the QAA Code of Practice, and (where appropriate) the requirements of professional bodies.
 - b. The academic standards of the University's awards are consistent with those in comparable HEIs.
 - c. The assessment system is fair and is fairly operated in the awarding and classification of degrees. The external examiner may be consulted in the course of any investigation into any suspected irregularity in examination performance of the production of assessed work.

10.2: Selection and Nomination of External Examiners

Nomination

1. One or more external examiners are appointed in respect of all provision that leads to an award of the University. Where the University delivers a programme both in its entirety, and through a collaborative partnership, wherever possible the same external examiner is appointed for delivery in both modes in order to ensure consistency of academic standards across these modes.
2. Responsibility for nominating the external examiners for taught programmes lies with the relevant department.
3. Nominees for the role of external examiner should:
 - a. Normally be individuals from within the university system but, in particular circumstances, it may be appropriate for individuals from outside the university system to be appointed.
 - b. Have experience of designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject, and operating assessment procedures
 - c. Have sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of colleagues.
 - d. Normally be of, at least, Senior Lecturer standing or equivalent (e.g. Principal Lecturer in the 'new university' sector), and should have academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined.
 - e. Be fluent in the English language.
 - f. Be aware of current developments in the design and delivery of curricula in the area for which they will be responsible.
 - g. Be competent, and have experience, in relation to the enhancement of the student learning experience.
 - h. Be research active, as judged by recent publications, and have recent expertise of teaching/examining broadly similar students.
 - i. Where relevant, meet any criteria set by the Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body accrediting the programme for which they will be external examiner.

Retirees 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.

4. It is normally expected that external examiners should concurrently hold not more than two external examinerships at first degree or taught postgraduate level.

Appointment

5. An external examiner should not be appointed from a department in an institution where a member of the Durham department is serving as an examiner; exceptions may occasionally be unavoidable in the case of subjects taught in only a very small number of institutions. If a

member of Durham University is appointed as an external examiner by a university which is at that time providing an external to Durham so that a reciprocal arrangement will exist, responsibility for that decision rests with the second university to appoint in line with its adherence to the UK Quality Code.

6. Former members of staff should not be invited to become external examiners before at least five years have elapsed since they left the employment of the University. Former students of the University should not be nominated as external examiners until five years have elapsed since they completed their programme of study at the University. Former students of the University should also not be nominated as external examiners if other students who studied at the University at the same time as them remained on the programme which they would examine.

7. To avoid potential conflicts of interest, external examiners will not be appointed if they:

- a. are a member of University Council, a member of a governing body or committee of one of the University's collaborative partners, or a current employee of the University, a spin-off company of the University, or one of its collaborative partners;
- b. are a near relative of a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study;
- c. have already been appointed by the University as an external examiner (note: acting examiners may have their remit extended to encompass additional, related programmes, but they will not have their appointment period extended);
- d. are closely associated with sponsorship of students, or provision of placement learning opportunities, for students on the programme;
- e. are required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study, or are 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. acted as external subject specialist for the programme approval of any or all of the provision for which they will be responsible, or as external subject specialist at the last periodic review of the department responsible for the provision.

8. Where a nominee has no previous experience as an external examiner, they may be nominated provided that:

- a. they meet the criteria outlined in this statement;
- b. the nominating department has identified an existing external examiner responsible for a programme reporting to the same board of examiners who is willing to act as mentor to the first-time external examiner.

9. A programme should not have more than one external examiner from the same department in the same institution. An external examiner should, similarly, not be appointed from the same institution as their predecessor.

10. The chair of the relevant Faculty Education Committee should be notified of any conflict of interest at the earliest possible stage so that a decision can be made on an external examiner's suitability to continue as an examiner.

11. If an external examiner moves to a new post (other than an internal promotion) while they are acting as external examiner, they should notify the University of this. The chair of the relevant Faculty Education Committee will review the position to ensure that no conflict of interest arises and take action as necessary should such a conflict occur.

12. Where an external examiner is appointed to a post at the University, it is the responsibility of the department to notify the Academic Support Office of this as soon as possible once the appointment has been made and to nominate a replacement external examiner. Once this information has been received the Academic Support Office will write to the current external examiner to inform that their appointment as an external examiner has been ended, and will ensure that the nomination of a replacement is considered in line with normal procedures.

13. Annually in October recommendations for the appointment of new external examiners should be forwarded by departments to the Academic Support Office. Recommendations should be forwarded on the appropriate external examiners nomination form (together with a CV), available in Appendix [A10.1](#).

14. The primary responsibility for ensuring that nominees are suitably qualified for the duties of external examiners rests with the relevant chair of the Faculty Education Committee (Undergraduate) (for undergraduate programmes) or relevant chair of the Faculty Education Committee (Postgraduate) (for postgraduate programmes). The relevant FEC chair should discuss any issues of concern with the chair of Education Committee.

15. Where it is clear that a nominee meets the University's criteria for appointment, the relevant FEC may approve that nominee. If the nominee does not meet with the University's normal criteria for approval, and the relevant FEC chair is supportive of the nomination, a case for exceptional approval should be made to the chair of Education Committee, as indicated on the nomination form.

16. All appointments are reported to Senate. This report will include a summary by faculty and department of the number of external examiners where appointment required the approval of the chair of Education Committee as well as the chair of the relevant FEC.

Confirmation of appointment

17. Following their appointment all external examiners will receive from ASO a letter of appointment that constitutes the University's formal contractual relationship with the external

examiner. A copy of the letter of appointment is also sent to the chair of the relevant board of examiners and the relevant head of department.

Period of appointment

18. External examiners are normally appointed in successive years for a maximum of four years. The appointment may be extended for a further year where an exceptional case can be made that satisfies the relevant FEC chair. No further extension is permitted. Once their term has been completed, external examiners may not be considered for reappointment until five years have elapsed since the end of their previous appointment. Reappointment should only occur in exceptional circumstances.

Termination of appointment

19. Where an external examiner does not fulfil the responsibilities of the role as set out in the University's Code of practice, the University may take action to terminate prematurely the external examiner's appointment. Grounds for premature termination include (but are not limited to):

- a. failure to attend (without having sought permission in line with Section 6.2.2 of the Learning and Teaching Handbook) a meeting of the board of examiners;
- b. failure to submit an external examiner report;
- c. provision of incomplete reports.

20. Where such grounds are thought to exist:

- a. the chair of the board of examiners should discuss the matter with the external examiner if possible to resolve the situation;
- b. if such discussion is impossible or fails to resolve the issue(s), the details must be documented by the chair of the board of examiners, with other members of the department as appropriate and with advice and assistance if appropriate from the chair of the relevant FEC;
- c. the matter must be discussed fully between the chair of the board of examiners, other relevant members of the department as appropriate and the chair of the relevant FEC;
- d. the chair of the relevant FEC will:
 - i. discuss the matter with the chair of Education Committee;
 - ii. correspond with the external examiner to discuss the concerns raised and attempt to reach a solution;

if no solution can be found, write to the external examiner stating the decision to terminate the contract and giving reasons.

10.3: Number of External Examiners for a Programme

1. The University's standard practice is to appoint external examiners for taught programmes on the following basis:

- a. For undergraduate programmes, one external examiner per 50 final year students of programmes taught in the department.
- b. For taught postgraduate programmes, one external examiner per 25 students on a programme.

2. Cases for the appointment of additional external examiners can be made on the following grounds:

- a. The number of external reference points (for example PSRB requirements) are such that more external examiners are required in a subject than would be the case under the criteria in paragraph 1 above.
- b. The need to ensure an appropriate match between the number of external examiners and the quantity and complexity of assessed material being examined.
- c. The number of specialisms is such that more external examiners are required than would be the case under the criteria in paragraph 1 above.

3. Any cases for the appointment of additional external examiners over and above the number resulting from the application of the criteria in paragraph 1 above should be made by the nominating department for consideration by the chair of the relevant FEC. The decision of the chair of FEC in such cases will be final.

10.4: Appointment of External Examiners

Induction - University

1. At the time of their appointment all external examiners will be directed to an online briefing, which will be maintained by the Academic Support Office. This online briefing will provide external examiners with information on:

1. The role and responsibilities of the external examiner.
2. The University's regulatory framework for its taught programmes, and the way that this links to the national quality assurance system.
3. The University's assessment policies, and the way that these link to the national quality assurance system.
4. The operation of the University's boards of examiners for taught programmes.
5. The way in which the University considers and responds to concerns raised by external examiners.
6. The Academic Support Office will also provide external examiners with a hard copy information pack, including the following documentation:

2. a. The University's Handbook for External Examiners.

b. The relevant University core regulations.

c. The relevant programme regulations.

d. A copy of the Annual Report Form.

e. The relevant expenses and fees claim forms

f. a copy of the previous year's University overview of external examiner reports.

Induction - departmental

3. The chair of the board of examiners is responsible for ensuring that the external examiner is sent the following information, originating from the department, about the module/programme for which the external examiner is responsible:

1. The programme specification(s) (thereby incorporating the learning, teaching and assessment strategy for the programme).
2. The module outlines and/or handbooks for the modules offered in the programme (thereby incorporating the learning, teaching and assessment strategy for each module).
3. The relevant programme and student handbooks.
4. The syllabus to be examined.
5. An explanation of the status of the examination.
6. Assessment criteria, marking scheme(s) and methods of assessment involved including the role of the external examiner(s).

This information may be provided in hard or electronic copy.

4. The chair of the board of examiners shall also provide the external examiner(s) with a briefing prior to the meeting of the board of examiners. This briefing should cover both the provision for which the external examiner is responsible, and the way in which the assessment process (including meetings of the board of examiners) is being administered by the department.

5. The chair of the board of examiners should also discuss with the external examiner whether they wish to meet with staff and/or students prior to undertaking their assessment duties to become familiar with the department as part of the examiner's induction to the department.

6. The chair of the board of examiners should notify the external examiner(s) of the date(s) of the meeting(s) of the Board(s) of Examiners by the end of December of the academic year in question and agree with them the timing of receipt of student work and examination scripts.

10.5: Role and Responsibilities of External Examiners

1. All external examiners are responsible to Senate, and no University qualification at Level 2 or above is awarded without participation in the examining process by at least one examiner external to the University. The award of a Certificate of Higher Education as an exit qualification at Level 1 may be made without the direct involvement of the external examiner as the confirmation of the academic standards of the final award by the relevant external examiner is regarded as confirming the academic standards of the Level 1 modules that contribute to the final award.

Approval of assessment questions

2. All draft examination papers for all final honours undergraduate and taught postgraduate examinations should be sent to the external examiner(s) for comment and scrutiny prior to their submission to the board of examiners for final approval. Where external examiners have proposed amendments to draft papers, departments should ensure that external examiners receive feedback on the action taken in response to these proposals.

3. The external examiner(s) has the right, if they wish to do so, to request that they are consulted as part of the process for setting summatively assessed coursework assignments. Where a module is entirely assessed by summative coursework, the external examiner should be consulted in setting the assignments for at least a sample of the summative assessment tasks.

Assessment of examination scripts, summatively assessed coursework and other assessed work

4. An external examiner has the right to see all examination scripts, projects and other assessed work.

5. In those cases where it is agreed with the external examiner that the inviting department that a sample of scripts/assessed work should be sent to the external examiner, rather than the external examiner seeing all summatively assessed work, the principles for such selection should be agreed by the chair of the board of examiners with the external examiner in advance. The range of, and rationale for, the sample moderated by the external examiner should be recorded in the minutes of the board of examiners. Where an external examiner has asked to see a sample of assessed work rather than all assessed work, they retain the right to see any assessed work contributing to the marks for final degree classification should they wish to see work not included in the original sample.

6. The guiding principle for any selection of scripts/assessed work is that external examiners should have enough evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and are consistent.

7. It is the normal principle that external examiners should not act as second markers of scripts/assessed work but as moderators. All departments are required to have in place clear mechanisms to resolve cases of disagreement between internal markers, and these should be

followed. It will only be in the exceptional cases where these mechanisms have not led to a resolution of the disagreement that an external examiner will be asked to adjudicate on the disagreement, in their capacity as a moderator. Exceptions to this principle must be presented in writing, in advance, for approval by the Education Committee.

8. The external examiner shall have the right to request additional marking of student assessments in the case of dispute between the original markers.

9. External examiners may only change the marks for individual pieces of assessment where they have moderated the full run of that assessment task. Where external examiners have moderated a sample of work for an assessment task and are not content with the marks awarded (for example they feel that marks are over-harsh, over-generous or inconsistent), they should make recommendations on the systematic steps to be taken to address their concerns (this might include for example recommending that work be double marked in full, that work be re-marked, or increasing or reducing the marks awarded to all the candidates concerned in a systematic fashion whose rationale and procedure are recorded).

10. Where a module taken by a student is delivered and assessed by a different department the external examiner(s) for that subject area will oversee the assessment of that module and the determination of the mark. Marks so obtained will be provided to the board of examiners responsible for determining the student's progression or degree classification. This means that the external examiner associated with the student's degree programme will have oversight of the decision regarding progression or degree classification, but may not have been involved in the assessment of all the constituent modules. However, this will have been overseen by an appropriately-qualified external examiner, in each subject area involved.

Viva voce examinations

11. The University does not permit viva voce examinations to be held within taught programmes (although departments are permitted to undertake oral assessments as part of specific modules).

Meetings with students

12. External examiners are encouraged where possible and practicable to meet with groups of students in order to obtain feedback on the student learning experience and the programme(s) as a whole. While there is no University requirement for external examiners to conduct such meetings, the University recognises the added value such meetings can provide for external examiners and students. Where such meetings take place, the discussions at such meetings should not inform the consideration of the individual students at a board of examiners and this must be made clear to students when they are invited to such meetings.

Role as member of board of examiners

13. An external examiner is a full member of the board of examiners and is required to attend final examiners' meetings in accordance with the expectations in sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3 of the

Learning and Teaching Handbook. If an external examiner cannot attend a meeting where his/her presence is required:

- a. permission for the external examiner to be absent must be obtained from the chair of the relevant FEC, and if granted the reason for absence should be documented;
- b. there must be clear evidence for the views of the external examiner on the marks awarded;
- c. the external examiner should be available for consultation;
- d. the external examiner should receive a copy of the minutes of the meeting and related documentation.

14. The following are typically regarded as good reasons for absence:

- a. illness or bereavement or similar personal difficulties;
- b. an unavoidable clash of commitments;
- c. a very small number of students on a programme where the external examiner has seen all the assessed work and no complications have arisen.

15. The views of an external examiner must be particularly influential in the case of disagreement on the mark to be awarded for a particular unit of assessment, or on the final classification to be derived from the array of marks of a particular student at the examiners' meeting. In such circumstances the final decision rests with the board of examiners as a whole, with the views of the respective examiners being made known to the board.

16. The signature of an external examiner must be appended to the final list of degree results as evidence that he or she:

- a. accepts the classification/award decisions;
- b. accepts that University procedures have been followed, to the best of his/her knowledge.

However, this does not prejudice any future review of the marks in the context of an appeal.

17. Where permission has been granted for an external examiner not to attend a meeting of a board of examiners, mark sheets will be accepted without the signature of the external examiner provided that the minutes of the meeting record fully how the external examiners have been consulted and what their views were.

18. If an external examiner is unwilling to sign the final list of degree results the matter should be referred to the chair of the relevant FEC and subsequently if necessary to the chair of Education Committee for resolution.

Assessment irregularities

19. The external examiner may be consulted in the course of any investigation into any suspected irregularity in examination performance or the production of assessed work.

Comments and advice

Assesment process and curriculum design

20. External examiners should be encouraged to comment on the assessment process and the assessment criteria. In some subjects participation in the devising of assessment criteria is essential.

21. External examiners may often be able to give valuable advice to internal examiners, especially the inexperienced, either direct or through the head of department. 22. External examiners should use the opportunity afforded by their visits to discuss the design, structure and content of modules and the degree programme(s); the modes of learning, teaching and assessment employed; and the assessment procedures. They may be invited to comment on proposals for new programmes (although an independent external subject specialist will also be required to comment on new programme proposals), and should be invited to comment on proposals for new modules.

23. Any comments or suggestions made by the external examiner should be discussed by the department and an explicit decision made about whether or not to introduce changes. This discussion and its outcome should be minuted.

24. In the event of serious problems in the assessment process with respect to Preliminary Honours work, the external examiner may be consulted.

External examiners' reports

25. External examiners are required to make written reports annually on the University's standard Annual Report Form. At the end of their term of office they are also asked to provide an overview report covering the full period of their appointment. These reports are submitted electronically, and the University clearly indicates that the Report Form will normally be made available for discussion widely within the University. Reports should be submitted as soon as possible after the meeting of the board of examiners and certainly within 8 weeks. Payment of the external examiner's fee is dependent on the University receiving a report from the external examiner.

26. When completing the Annual Report Form, external examiners should not refer to specific members of staff or students.

27. A newly appointed external examiner is entitled, if he or she so desires, to see the final report of the previous external examiner.

28. Following the receipt of an external examiner's report regarding a taught programme the Academic Support Office, on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, is responsible for acknowledging receipt of and circulating a copy of the Report to the chair of the relevant FEC, and to the relevant head(s) of department(s).

29. If matters of concern are raised it is the responsibility of the chair of the relevant FEC to ensure that appropriate action is taken by the department, and to provide an annual report to the

relevant FEC and Quality and Standards Sub-Committee of the main matters of concern and action taken (see A6.10 to this section).

30. Education Committee is responsible for assuring itself, through Quality and Standards Sub-Committee, that points arising from the reports of external examiners for taught programmes have been fully considered. To support this, the Head of the Academic Support Office is responsible for reading all external examiners and providing University overviews on these reports to Quality and Standards Sub-Committee for consideration.

31. Reports from external examiners should be discussed in an appropriate forum within the department, and the discussion should be fully minuted. This forum may be the board of studies, or the board of examiners or another appropriate committee. If the forum is not the board of studies itself, a report should be made from the relevant committee to the board of studies indicating the issues raised, the actions taken and/or the reasons for taking no action. In addition all external examiner reports should be considered by the relevant Staff Student Consultative Committee, together with a draft of the departmental response to the report.

32. The head of department is responsible for informing the external examiner in writing of the actions to be taken in response to their report. If action is not to be taken, an explanation should be given of the reason for this. Departmental Responses to external examiners should be sent to external examiners after the response has been approved by the relevant FEC chair. If an external examiner is not content with the response received they may raise this with the chair of Education Committee (via the Head of the Academic Support Office), who will respond in writing to the external examiner. External examiners may also make an additional and separate confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor.

33. Where matters of University policy are raised in an external examiner's report, the chair of the relevant FEC will respond to the external examiner in consultation with the chair of Education Committee.

34. If an external examiner has serious concerns related to academic standards and has exhausted the University's internal procedures without these serious concerns being addressed to their satisfaction, they may raise these issues with the QAA through its Concerns scheme, details of which are available at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Complaints/concerns/Pages/default.aspx>.

External moderators for combined honours degrees, natural sciences degree, joint honours degrees and the MA Research Methods

35. The duties of the external moderators for these programmes are different in nature from those of external examiners. In essence the duties are to moderate the fairness of procedures and decisions when final degree results are considered and do not include the normal responsibilities for examination papers and marks in particular academic subjects. External moderators also have oversight of the academic standards of any module within these programmes that does not belong to a board of studies.

36. The structure of these degrees enables students to choose a combination of modules from different departments. The external examiners for the subjects concerned carry the "subject responsibility" - i.e. in broad terms, responsibility for the content of examination papers and for marking standards in the same way as for all other students in their subject. Subject boards of examiners are required to submit lists of marks for students in the subject for these degrees, agreed with their external examiners, and to nominate one or two of their members (in accordance with the relevant terms of reference) to attend the relevant faculty level board of examiners' meeting fully briefed on each student's performance in their subject.

37. The principal concern of the external moderator for each of the three degrees is to ensure that each student's results are fully and fairly considered in a consistent manner. The views of the external moderator concerned will be particularly sought in the case of disagreement on the final classification to be derived from the array of marks of a particular student at the Examiners' meeting or where work has been affected by serious adverse circumstances.

38. More specifically each external moderator is expected:

- a. To attend as a full member, all meetings of the faculty-level board of examiners for the relevant degree at which marks counting towards a final degree result are considered.
- b. To sign the final list of degree results as evidence that he or she accepts the classifications adopted and progression decisions made.
- c. To provide such comments and advice on degree programme structures and classification schemes as the external moderator deems necessary or as may be requested by the chair of the relevant FEC or the chair of Education Committee.
- d. To report annually to the Vice-Chancellor (through the Academic Support Office) and at the end of the period of office. Whilst covering only the matters referred to in paragraphs 36 and 37 above, the report will be considered and responded to in the same way as those of external examiners. An additional and separate confidential report may also be sent to the Vice-Chancellor, and like external examiners external moderators may raise issues of concern through the QAA Concerns' scheme where internal processes have been exhausted and the external moderator does not believe their concerns have been satisfactorily addressed.
- e. The appointment will be for four years.

10.6: Monitoring of General Information on the Assessment Process

1. Departments are responsible for ensuring that general issues arising from the assessment process are considered and appropriate action taken. This may be done by the Board of Examiners, departmental education committee or other appropriate body. It may be addressed as part of the annual review of taught programmes.

2. Such issues should include general points arising from:

- a. reports of external examiners;
- b. the assessment process as a whole;
- c. appeals.

3. They should also include:

- a. monitoring patterns and trends in the distribution of marks at module level and overall;
- b. monitoring the overall load of assessment with reference to:
 - i. the need for assessment to cover the intended learning outcomes of the programme;
 - ii. consultation with the external examiner.

10.7: Consideration of External Examiners Reports by Staff Student Consultative Committees

1. The University is committed to involving its students in the quality management of its provision. External examining is a cornerstone of Durham's quality management framework, and the University therefore shares the reports of its external examiners, and departmental responses to these reports, with students.

2. The University implements this commitment through a two stage process:

a. Departments should share all external examiner reports with students through SSCCs. When sharing external examiners reports with SSCCs, departments should give SSCCs simultaneously the reports and the draft departmental response to the reports.

b. Once the departmental response has been submitted to the Academic Support Office and approved by the chair of the relevant Faculty Education Committee, ASO will publish both the report and the departmental response online. This online resource will be accessible to all members of the University.

3. All departments should ensure that they provide their students with links (either through a duo site, and/or in the relevant programme handbook) to both the University's list of current external examiners and the last year's reports and responses. ASO will provide departments with generic text that they can use to provide this information. This text will include a clear statement that under no circumstances should students contact external examiners directly.

4. The University requests that external examiners do not mention any students or staff by name in their report. There are, however, situations where the name of a member of staff or student might be inferred from a report that does not name them directly. In light of this view, the University has resolved:

a. that where the name of a student may be inferred from an external examiners' report this should be anonymised, noting that if a request was received under Freedom of Information Act to disclose this information this would need to be considered on a case by case basis (in consultation with appropriate staff; the first point of contact will be the Records Manager, Governance Support Unit) under the terms of the Act;

b. that where the name of a member of staff may be inferred from an external examiners' report this should not be anonymised, noting that if a request was received from a member of staff that such information should not be disclosed as it constituted personal data this would need to be considered on a case by case basis (in consultation with appropriate staff; the first point of contact will be the Records Manager, Governance Support Unit) with the University needing to balance its duty to disclose under the Freedom of Information Act with its duty to protect an individual's rights under the Data Protection Act;

Appendix 2 Section 6.2 of the University's Learning and Teaching Handbook – the operation of boards of examiners

6.3.4: Attendance and Quorum

Attendance

1. Membership of Boards of Examiners is set out in [Section 6.3.2](#) .
2. All 'core' members of Boards of Examiners (as defined in paragraph 7 of section 6.3.2) are expected to attend meetings of the Board, particularly those held to finalise awards. Other members of the board are encouraged to attend, but do not have to do so. Staff in the categories set out in paragraphs 7a, 7b and 7c of section 6.3.2 may send appropriate nominees (drawn only from among other members of the board) to board meetings in the event that they are unable to attend the board for good reason or in the event of a conflict of interest. This must be approved by the Chair of the Board in advance.
3. All absences of 'core' members should be recorded in the minutes of the Board.
4. Under no circumstances is it permitted to hold meetings of Boards of Examiners by email.

Absence of internal members

5. If a 'core' member of the board of examiners is unable to attend a meeting of the Board of Examiners for good cause (e.g. research leave, illness or bereavement) this must be made known to, and accepted by, the Chair of the Board of Examiners in advance of the meeting.
6. A brief note of the reasons for any absence must be minuted ([see Section 6.3.9](#)). If the Chair is in any doubt about the acceptability of any reasons for absence, he/she may consult with the Chair of the relevant Faculty Education Committee.

Absence of external examiners

5. External examiners are full members of Boards of Examiners and are required to attend final examiners' meetings.
6. If an external examiner is unable to attend a meeting of the Board of Examiners at which his/her presence is required:
 - a. the reason for the absence must be documented and reported to the Chair of the relevant Faculty Education Committee;
 - b. there must be clear evidence for the views of the external examiner on the marks awarded;
 - c. the external examiner should be available for consultation;
 - d. the external examiner should receive a copy of the minutes of the meeting and related documentation.

7. Before any such permission will be granted, the Chair of the relevant Faculty Education Committee will need to be satisfied that the absence of the external examiner is unavoidable, that steps have been taken (as far as possible depending on the nature of the problem causing the absence) to ensure that the external examiner has been consulted and that the external examiner is satisfied with the arrangements for the meeting of the Board.

8. The following are typically regarded as good reasons for the absence of an external examiner:

- a. illness or bereavement or similar personal difficulties;
- b. an unavoidable clash of commitments;
- c. a very small number of students on a programme where the external examiner has seen all the assessed work and no complications have arisen.

Conflicts of interest

9 All members of the Board of Examiners must declare any personal interest, involvement or relationship with a student being assessed to the Chair of the Board of Examiners in advance of the meeting. The Chair has the right to ask the examiner to withdraw from the meeting when the student in question is discussed. He/she may consult with the Chair of the relevant Faculty Education Committee for advice. If the conflict of interest involves the Chair of the Board of Examiners, the Chair of the relevant Faculty Education Committee should be consulted

Quoracy of Subject Boards of Examiners

10. In order to be quorate a meeting of a subject Board of Examiners must have present:

- a. the Chair of the Board of Examiners;
- b. the Secretary of the Board of Examiners;
- c. all the external examiners;
- d. **where the Secretary to the Board of Examiners is a member of academic staff:** internal members of the Board of Examiners equal to number of appointed external examiners, plus one;
where the Secretary to the Board of Examiners is not a member of academic staff: internal members of the Board of Examiners equal to number of appointed external examiners, plus **two**.

11. External examiners are required to be present at meetings held:

- a. to confirm the marks of undergraduates at levels 2, 3 and 4 for the May/June assessment period;
- b. to classify an undergraduate degree following the May/June assessment period;
- c. to award a postgraduate taught qualification at the end of a programme of study.

12. In addition, the attendance of one external examiner is required (normally the most senior examiner, where seniority is determined by the length of appointment served) for mid-year meetings of postgraduate boards of examiners where classifications are routinely considered.

13. For other meetings of boards of examiners the quoracy requirement is the same except that external examiners are not required to be present. They must, however, be consulted in respect of approval of examination papers, appeal cases, marks from postgraduate taught modules and for Level 2, 3 and 4 resit candidates, particularly those whose performance is such that they may be required to leave the University.

14. Consultation may be by post, email, or telephone. The views of external examiners must be reported to the board of examiners and be fully minuted. Minutes will be considered by the Chairs of the relevant Faculty Undergraduate or Postgraduate Education Committee. Chairs may require that external examiners attend any future meetings of the board, if they are not satisfied with the assessment process, or the involvement of external examiners in that process. See also paragraphs 5 to 8 above with regard to the permitted absence of external examiner(s).

15. Examples of these meetings are:

- a. meetings to discuss Level 1 marks;
- b. meetings to confirm the marks of postgraduate students in respect of taught modules;
- c. meetings of resit boards;
- d. meetings held to finalise examination papers;
- e. meetings held to review a decision as a result of an appeal.

6.3.8: Reporting requirements for boards of examiners

Marksheets and concessions

1. Annotated mark sheets recording the decisions of a board of examiners must be returned to Student Planning and Assessment within 48 hours of a meeting of the board being held. If minutes are required to explain any outcomes on mark sheets these should be sent to Student Registry with the mark sheets, within 48 hours of the meeting of the Board. Delays in sending mark sheet reports to the Student Registry will cause delays in the publication of results.
2. Details of all concessions considered and their outcomes must be entered in Banner **within 14 days** of the examiners meeting and the student notified as detailed in Section 2.4.5

Submission of reports from boards of examiners

2. All meetings of boards of examiners must be formally minuted, and the minutes must be approved by the chair of the board of examiners and subsequently confirmed by the next meeting of the board. Guidance on writing minutes of boards of examiners meetings is available in Section 6.3.9.
3. All meetings of boards of examiners where module marks and/or student progression/award/classification are considered must submit a formal written report to Student Registry. This report should include. A completed report form proforma ([Appendix A6.08](#)) showing the details of the Board of Examiners, the date and time the meeting was held and the titles and faculties of the programmes considered at the meeting.
 - b. The minutes of the meeting, clearly indicating the attendees and absentees, and noting the date on which the minutes were approved by the Chair of the Board of Examiners.
 - c. The minutes/notes of the meeting(s) of the scrutiny sub-committee of the board of examiners held prior to the meeting of the board of examiners being reported on.
 - d. A copy of the passport of the external examiner(s) (including the front cover, picture page, back page and any page with current valid visa/biometric residence permit.
4. The report form and minutes should be sent to Student Registry, accompanied by a declaration by the Secretary to the Board confirming the date that the Chair approved the minutes (see the guidance in [Appendix A6.08](#)).
5. The Chair of each Board of Examiners is responsible for ensuring that the report from a meeting of a Board of Examiners is forwarded to Student Registry **within 14 days** of the meeting.
6. Chairs of Boards of Examiners should ensure that a copy of the minutes of each meeting of the Board is sent to all members of the Board (including the external examiner), and that a copy is retained in departmental files.

Monitoring of Reports

7. Student Registry is responsible for monitoring the return of all reports of Boards of Examiners, and for forwarding these to the Academic Support Office for consideration by the Chairs of the Faculty Education Committees and the University's Chief External Examiner.

8. The Chairs of the relevant Faculty Education Committees are responsible for:

- a. scrutinising the reports of boards of examiners within their faculty;
- b. requesting a response from departments/schools where required;
- c. providing an annual report to Quality and Standards Sub-Committee on any issues of concern raised by the reports, using the form in Appendix [A6.09](#).

9. The University Chief Examiner shall submit two annual reports for consideration by Quality and Standards Sub-Committee: one relating to undergraduate and integrated master's Boards of Examiners and one to taught postgraduate Boards of Examiners.

6.3.7: Discretion of Boards of Examiners

1. Marking conventions and schemes are for the guidance of the Board of Examiners which retains the right to exercise discretion if it considers it right to do so in the proper discharge of its duties, (for example, in taking account of significant adverse circumstances in respect of an individual student's performance and/or academic factors).
2. Any guidelines detailing the procedures for the disclosure of marks should not impair the ability of the Boards of Examiners, up to the point where confirmed marks are disclosed, to exercise discretion in the case of individual students where the performance of a student is affected by illness or other good cause.
3. Once confirmed by the Board of Examiners marks on assessments contributing towards degree classification should not be altered to reflect the degree class awarded (this includes the award of a merit or distinction for taught postgraduate programmes) or progression decisions. This includes cases where Examiners have used discretion concerning serious adverse circumstances that may have affected a student's performance.
4. Boards of Examiners should not attempt to define rules for the operation of discretion, since discretion is particular to the circumstances of the student concerned. Boards of Examiners should, however, ensure an equitable approach to the operation of discretion and minute the reasons why discretion has (or has not) been exercised in any given case.
5. Where a Board of Examiners is considering exercising discretion in the light of academic factors alone (i.e. not in relation to serious adverse circumstances) to award a different degree classification to that indicated by the standard application of the relevant core regulations, it may only do so for one or more of the following reasons:

Predominance: considering the balance of higher marks for those modules that: are core to a programme; between them demonstrate a breadth of the programme learning outcomes; and take into account student achievement (for example offering specific consideration, for instance, where a high proportion of a module mark may be weighted to group work, and/or the positioning of students module mark(s) relative to each module's standard deviation).

Dissertation/major project/fieldwork: considering a mark within the higher classification for those modules that are synoptic of the programme learning outcomes and may involve the student in independent thought and the personal management of the work's direction. Boards may take into account student achievement making specific consideration to the positioning of the student's module mark relative to the module's standard deviation.

Trajectory: it is important to take into consideration that for undergraduate programmes this factor has already been taken into account by higher weightings in later years for calculation of the AWM. However, consistent with Durham's approach Boards of Examiners may consider trajectory by taking into account student achievement where lesser performance related to a

specific program learning outcome is demonstrated by a student through a higher performance at a later level or stage of study.

Additional Placement Year: considering student performance on an additional year (e.g. an industrial placement, a year abroad at an international University) where this year forms part of the degree programme, and is therefore assessed, but which does not contribute to the marks for the classification of the degree. Boards of Examiners should not seek to define rules on the basis of these factors. Instead they should consider each individual student case in relation to these factors.

6. The relevant core regulations define the parameters within which a Board of Examiners should consider whether to exercise discretion in the light of academic factors to award a different degree classification to that indicated by the standard application of the core regulations. There is no requirement that discretion be exercised in respect of such students, only that Boards of Examiners consider whether discretion should be exercised. Where students fall outside these parameters discretion may only be exercised where a Board of Examiners believe that either serious adverse circumstances, or a combination of serious adverse circumstances and academic factors, justify the use of discretion.

7. Boards of Examiners should consider whether to exercise discretion for any student who falls within the parameters defined in the relevant core regulations. There is no requirement, however, that consideration should or must lead to the award of discretion. Reasons why a Board of Examiners might not choose to exercise discretion might include the following (this list is intended to be illustrative, not prescriptive or comprehensive):

a. *Predominance:* When in the view of the Board of Examiners the student's poor performance in one or more modules significantly impacts on the student's ability to demonstrate one or more of the programmes learning outcomes at a level appropriate to the proposed classification, and that this outcome(s) has not been demonstrated by higher performance later in the programme.

b. *Dissertation/major project/fieldwork:* When the considered module's mean is higher than other modules within the programme so significantly contributing towards the better performance. So for example, the BoE may decide not to apply discretion despite the mark being in a higher classification where the student's rank in the cohort is not significantly higher for the dissertation (or other considered) module than their overall cohort rank based on their arithmetic mean.

c. *Trajectory:* When a single or small number of modules disproportionately contribute to a higher level 3 (or 4) AWM and in the view of the Board of Examiners these modules do not provide significant coverage of the overall programmes learning outcomes.

d. *Additional Placement Year:* When a student's performance on their year abroad is markedly better than their AWM.

6.3.6: Guidance for Boards of Examiners on Serious Adverse Circumstances (including the Scrutiny Sub-Committee of the Board of Examiners)

1. Serious adverse circumstances are defined as exceptional personal circumstances, outside the control of the student, that have prevented them from either acquiring or demonstrating the skills, knowledge or competencies required to meet the learning outcomes associated with an assessment that contributes to the qualification for which they are studying notwithstanding their best efforts, in consultation with their department and College, to mitigate those circumstances.

2. Where a student feels that there have been serious adverse circumstances that have affected his/her assessment it is their responsibility to inform the appropriate department as soon as possible.

3. University policy on serious adverse circumstances is laid out in Section 6.2.6 of the Learning and Teaching Handbook. This includes guidance for students and Boards of Examiners on the procedure for the submission of Serious Adverse Circumstances forms, and the evidence to be supplied in support of such submissions.

4. All serious adverse circumstances submissions to the board of examiners should be considered by a scrutiny sub-committee of the board of examiners. The membership of this sub-committee must include as a minimum:

- a. the chair of the board of examiners (*chair to the sub-committee*)
- b. the secretary of the board of examiners (*secretary to the sub-committee*)
- c. **where the secretary to the board of examiners is a member of academic staff:** one other member of the board of examiners; **where the secretary to the board of examiners is not a member of academic staff:** two other members of the board of examiners;

Where possible the scrutiny sub-committee should include at least one male and one female member of staff.

5. The scrutiny sub-committee shall consider all serious adverse circumstances evidence submitted by students, and for each submission grade the impact of the serious adverse circumstances reported on the assessment of the student concerned in accordance with the following scale:

Impact	
0	The evidence submitted does not indicate that the alleged serious adverse circumstances had any adverse effect on the performance of the student in his/her assessment(s) OR the circumstances described have already been sufficiently mitigated through the granting of a concession or other adjustment OR the alleged circumstances were experienced outside of the examination period but were not notified to the University at the time of the occurrence and no explanation has been given by the

	student as to why the University was not informed
1	The evidence submitted indicates that the serious adverse circumstances are likely to have had a small adverse effect on the performance of the student in his/her assessment(s)
2	The evidence submitted indicates that the serious adverse circumstances are likely to have had a significant adverse effect on the performance of the student in his/her assessment(s)
3	The evidence submitted indicates that the serious adverse circumstances are likely to have had a very significant adverse effect on the performance of the student in his/her assessment(s)

6. In addition to being graded for impact, the rating agreed by the sub-committee should also include information on the duration of the impact indicating, as appropriate [Specified day(s), Specified week(s), Specified term(s), Specified assessment/exam period(s), Specified Academic year(s)]. Consequently, all serious adverse circumstances submissions should receive a number grading followed by description of the duration of the impact.

7. The secretary of the scrutiny sub-committee is responsible for ensuring that a written record is kept of meetings of the sub-committee.

8. The gradings agreed by the scrutiny sub-committee, and the specific modules to which the gradings apply, shall be reported to the board of examiners, and the receipt and consideration of this information by the board of examiners must be recorded in the minutes of the board of examiners.

9. Where progression, award and classification are considered by a faculty level board of examiners (for example Combined Honours, Natural Sciences, joint honours programmes and the MA Research Methods programmes in social sciences), SACs shall be graded by the scrutiny sub-committee of the relevant subject board of examiners. Once all SACs have been graded at subject level, those relating to students to be considered at faculty-level boards of examiners should be submitted in a timely way to the chairs and secretaries of the relevant faculty-level board. This allows any variations in the grading of an individual SAC to be identified and, if deemed necessary by the Chair of the faculty-level Board, the relevant subjects to be asked to provide a structured response to support the generic grading definition they had allocated. A scrutiny sub-committee of the faculty-level board should consider any differences in individual SAC gradings which it deems to be significant (for instance, when differences in gradings are greater than 1), and if necessary reclassify the gradings in consultation with the departments concerned.

10. Members of scrutiny sub-committees should be aware that, in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, students may choose to disclose a condition that constitutes a disability via the SAC

Form. Should this occur, staff must make this known to Disability Support. It is the University's responsibility to understand whether a particular condition constitutes a disability. Should staff be unsure as to this, they must consult Disability Support.

Consideration of serious adverse circumstances at meetings of boards of examiners

11. Consideration of serious adverse circumstances must be in accordance with the following requirements:

- a. Relevant serious adverse circumstances evidence in respect of modules taken in the second year (and third year for integrated master's programmes) should be considered by the board of examiners for the purposes of progression only. This information should then be brought to the final board of examiners meeting for consideration for the purpose of award and classification.
- b. At no point should marks be changed in the light of serious adverse circumstances.

12. Where progression, award and classification are considered by a board of examiners other than that of the subject to which the SAC relates (for example Combined Honours and joint honours programmes, but also any programme where modules are taken outside of the student's home department), the Chair of the board examiners must ensure that the subject member is fully briefed on SAC matters, and is able to represent their department's views on any mitigating action (in relation to awards or to progression – for instance, whether a student should be offered resit opportunities as a first attempt). Any recommendations made at the initial departmental board (for example to permit a student, in light of SACs, to resit an examination as a first attempt) should be forwarded to the secretary of the second board at the earliest opportunity.

Appendix 3 Key University policies relating to assessment

The University's policies in relation to assessment are available in full in the University's online *Learning and Teaching Handbook* at <http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/6/>. The chair of the board of examiners will be able to provide their external examiner(s) with advice on University assessment policy, but external examiners might wish to note in particular the following policies that can be accessed online:

- **University policy on the quality assurance of examinations and assessment:**
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/6/1/1/>
- **Assessment of skills in group working:**
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/6/1/2/>
- **Assessment of skills in oral communication:**
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/6/1/3/>
- **Postgraduates as markers:**
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/6/2/1/>
- **University guidance on procedures in respect of assessment irregularities:**
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/6/2/4/>
- **Penalties for the late submission of work:**
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/6/2/5/>
- **Student absence and illness:**
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/6/2/6/>
- **The approval and monitoring of examination papers:**
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/6/3/5/>
- **Disclosure of marks and feedback to students:**
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/6/4/3/>