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## EXTERNAL EXAMINER SYSTEM FOR TAUGHT PROVISION

### 1. General principles

#### 1.1 The external examiner system is designed to:

- a) Assist the University in monitoring the standards of its awards;
- b) Verify that standards are appropriate for the award or award elements which the external examiner has been appointed to examine, in line with University programme specifications, U.K. subject benchmarks, and qualifications frameworks;
- c) Ensure that awards are comparable in standard with those for similar subjects and awards in U.K. universities and that the performance of students is consistent with those awards;
- d) Ensure that assessment processes are appropriate, rigorous, fair and fairly operated and are in line with both institutional regulations and published programme guidelines;
- e) Provide recommendations for, and informative comment on, good practice identified via the external examining system for taught provision, and the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities provided to students.

#### 1.2 In order to achieve these objectives:

- a) The Chief External Examiner should be appointed to:
  - a. give overall assurance to the University of Liverpool of the quality and standards of the taught programmes delivered at XJTLU, which lead to a University of Liverpool award;
  - b. endorse assessment practice and external examination practice, to attend several Module Boards, School Boards of Examiners and to attend the Degree Evaluation Board and endorse the final awards;
- b) External examiners should be appointed at:
  - a. **Subject level** - to review assessment practice and performance across a suite of modules or programme components within a particular discipline, to endorse module or component marks, and to attend the Module Board of Examiners;  
**Programme level** – to review assessment practice, performance, content and structure across a defined programme(s)
- c) Under normal circumstances, one external examiner appointed at Subject level within one or more programme area, will also be appointed at Programme level.
- d) An individual external examiner would normally not be assigned to more than twenty modules in any given academic year.

- e) External examiners should be external to the University, the University of Liverpool and Xi'an Jiaotong University;
- f) No University degree, diploma or certificate should be awarded without the endorsement of the Chief External Examiner;
- g) This External Examiner System will be monitored by the University Learning and Teaching Committee.

## **2. Selection and appointment of external examiners**

When nominating external examiners, the relevant Departments or Schools should have regard to the selection and appointment criteria set out below.

Where an external examiner is appointed by the University of Liverpool to examine on modules and programmes which lead to a University of Liverpool award, the primary responsibility of the external examiner is to provide assurance to the University of Liverpool that appropriate standards are being set and achieved for University of Liverpool awards made at XJTLU.

These criteria apply to all external examiners.

### **2.1 Key principles**

- 2.1.1 External examiners are nominated by departments/schools at XJTLU for (re)appointment on an annual basis, subject to the initial approval of the Vice-President, Academic Affairs, and are subject to the final approval of the University of Liverpool.
- 2.1.2 The duration of an external examiner's appointment will normally be for a maximum of four years.
- 2.1.3 In all cases, an exceptional extension of one year is possible, subject to the approval of the Vice-President, Academic Affairs and the University of Liverpool.
- 2.1.4 A CV should accompany recommendations for a new external examiner appointment but is not required for recommendations for re-appointment.

### **2.2 Criteria**

- 2.2.1 External examiners must demonstrate:
  - a) knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points<sup>1</sup> for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
  - b) competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof;
  - c) relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate;

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<sup>1</sup> These include QAA Subject Benchmark Statements and the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*.

- d) competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures;
- e) sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers;
- f) familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed;
- g) fluency in English and, where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that external examiners are provided with the information to make their judgements);
- h) the satisfaction of applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies;
- i) awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula;
- j) competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

2.2.2 Appointments cannot be made of any individual in the following categories or circumstances:

- a) a member of a governing body or current employee of XJTLU, University of Liverpool, or Xi'an Jiaotong University, or any other collaborative partners of XJTLU.
- b) anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study;
- c) anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study;
- d) former staff or students of XJTLU, unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s);
- e) a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution;
- f) the succession of an external examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home department, or equivalent, and institution;
- g) the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department, or equivalent, of the same institution;
- h) where an individual would consequently hold more than two external examiner appointments at the same time;

- i) Where an individual had previously been appointed for the maximum four year duration as external examiner, unless a period of five years has elapsed since their last appointment.
- 2.2.3 An external examiner accepting an offer of appointment confirms by doing so that no conflict of interest exists, as outlined above.
- 2.2.4 Any exceptions to 2.2.2 require the explicit approval of the University of Liverpool, on recommendation by the Vice-President, Academic Affairs.

### **3. Roles and responsibilities**

#### **3.1 External Examiners – Subject Level**

- 3.1.1 External examiners appointed at subject level will review, advise upon and endorse the marks of modules and the constituent components of programmes
- 3.1.2 Draft examination papers and, where appropriate according to the balance of assessments, continuous assessment exercises, should be reviewed and endorsed by subject-level external examiners.
- 3.1.3 All assessed work which contributes to credit achieved for the award, at module or component level, should be available to external examiners. In practice, external examiners should receive a sample of assessed work for each component of the modules to which they have been assigned. The sample should cover each of the mark ranges and at the pass/fail boundary, in order to be satisfied that marking has been carried out consistently and to an appropriate standard.
- 3.1.4 Where an external examiner requests access to additional assessed work, the Department or School, as appropriate, should make a selection of the work to be seen so long as the principles guiding that selection have been agreed in advance and subject to what is realistic in the timeframes for Examination Boards.
- 3.1.6 External examiners may wish to meet groups of students to gain information to inform their report on the assessed modules and/or components. This will be subject to constraints related to time of year and the availability of the examiner to attend onsite on campus.
- 3.1.7 External examiners are required to attend, in person or by videoconference, the Module Board of Examiners, to provide advice upon, and to endorse, the marks of components and/or modules to which they have been assigned. It is expected that Subject-level external examiners would visit the campus, in person, at least once during their four-year appointment period. Module marks determined at meetings of the Module Board for semester one where the external examiner may not be present will remain provisional until the summer Module Board at which the external examiner must be present.
- 3.1.8 Exceptional Chair's actions taken prior to or after Module Boards must be endorsed by the external examiner subsequently.
- 3.1.9 External examiners are not required to attend Module Boards of Examiners held after the re-sit period.

3.1.10 External examiners are required to provide essential feedback to the University by completing the relevant sections of the External Examiner Report pro-forma annually. Reports must be submitted as soon as possible after the meeting of the Module Board of Examiners and no later than three weeks after the meeting.

### **3.2 External Examiners – Programme Level**

3.2.1 Programme Level external examiners are appointed to each degree programme, or group of cognate programmes, with specific responsibility for the whole programme.

3.2.2 Programme level external examiners are expected to advise on programme content, balance and structure, award schemes, assessment processes and learning outcomes, and to review the performance of students across the programme or programmes to which they have been assigned.

3.2.3 Programme level external examiners will attend the School Boards at the end of each academic year, either in person or remotely, to confirm that the overall standards of each year of study of the programme are being met.

3.2.4 Programme level external examiners are required to provide essential feedback to the University.

### **3.3 Chief External Examiner**

The Chief External examiner is appointed with specific responsibility;

3.3.1 To give overall assurance to the University of Liverpool of the quality and standards of the taught programmes delivered at XJTLU, which lead to a University of Liverpool award;

3.3.2 To assist the University that the process of student assessment is conducted with rigour and due regard for good practice across all the University's programmes, liaising where appropriate with the programme external examiners appointed under Section 3.1 above;

3.3.3 To attend, in person or by videoconference, as many as possible Module Boards and School Boards, and to attend the University Board of Examiners and the Degree Evaluation Board, to provide advice upon, and to endorse final award lists;

3.3.4 To review the operation of the University's boards of examiners and to determine the extent to which the conduct of these boards is consistent with the University's regulations, policies and procedures;

3.3.5 To provide advice and consultancy to the University on these regulations, policies and procedures, with the aim of ensuring that they are fit for purpose in the context of this University.

3.3.6 In the event that the Chief External examiner withholds endorsement of the outcomes of the assessment process, the Vice-President, Academic Affairs, will intervene either to adjudicate and/or ratify the award lists, or to arrange for another external examiner to adjudicate and/or ratify the award lists.

3.3.7 Chief External Examiner must submit a report as soon as possible after the meeting of the University Board of Examiners.

### **3.4 Responsibilities of XJTLU**

3.4.1 XJTLU will provide an appropriate induction to all new external examiners which will include the provision of information related to the regulatory framework of the University and the relevant sections of the Code of Practice on Assessment (see

Appendix 3 below). The induction will be led by the Department or School and would normally involve a campus visit, where possible.

- 3.4.2 Academic departments will provide an overview of the quality assurance framework in place at XJTLU and will ensure that external examiners are aware of the role.
- 3.4.3 XJTLU will establish sufficient numbers of external examiner posts to programmes or suites of programmes to ensure sufficient and adequate coverage of external scrutiny at subject/module level. Whilst the thresholds of the expected number of modules assigned to individual external examiners may change from time to time, the normal expectation is that an individual external examiner would be assigned between 15 to 20 modules. Where there are high numbers of student module registrations in specific modules, Academic departments should balance this by assigning fewer modules.
- 3.4.4 XJTLU will provide external examiners with electronic copies of Departments' responses to external examiners (see Section 4 below) and feedback on students' final outcomes.

#### **4. External examiner reports and feedback**

Departments, schools and teaching centres, as appropriate, should use the opportunity afforded by visits of external examiners to receive and take account of any comments and suggestions about all aspects associated with the delivery of the programme and its components and assessments. In addition, external examiners are required to submit annual written reports accompanied by completed checklists to provide essential feedback.

- 4.1 The University expects external examiners to provide informative comment and recommendations, as appropriate and depending upon role and responsibilities, addressing the following areas:
  - a) Whether or not the University is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its modules in accordance with the framework for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements;
  - b) Whether or not the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the module(s) and the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the University's Code of Practice on Assessment and other academic regulations;
  - c) The comparability of the academic standards and the achievements of students with those in other UK higher education institutions of which the external examiner has experience;
  - d) Good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment;
  - e) Opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students;
  - f) Whether or not sufficient evidence was received to enable the role to be fulfilled (and, where evidence was insufficient, details in relation to this);
  - g) Whether or not issues raised in previous reports have been, or are being, satisfactorily addressed;

- h) Issues as specifically required by any relevant professional body;
  - i) Provision of an overview of the term of office (when concluded).
- 4.2 External examiners, when providing feedback, will therefore need to judge – by reference to the module and programme literature supplied, the variety of modes of assessment, and the quality and standards of student answers to those assessments – that both the intended learning outcomes of the component or module have been achieved and that the national benchmark criteria have been satisfied.
- 4.3 Reports should not refer to students by name or in any other way provide a means of identifying individuals.
- 4.4 External examiners in the final year of their term of office are required to include an overview of their term in post as part of their final report.
- 4.5 All reports must be submitted for the attention of the Registry.
- 4.6 External examiners have a right to raise any matter of serious concern with the Chief External Examiner or the Vice-President, Academic Affairs, if necessary by means of a separate confidential written report.
- 4.7 Departments, schools and teaching centres, as appropriate, must respond directly to the respective external examiner, using the template provided in Appendix 2, which offers a detailed response to comments received, a reflective commentary on how the external examiner's report will be used to improve and enhance the assessment processes in the future and any actions that will be taken.
- 4.8 Where an external examiner examines on more than one programme, a single response may be sent. However, where an external examiner examines on more than one programme of a different level (e.g. UG and PG), separate responses should be sent for all UG programmes and all PG programmes.
- 4.9 Action points identified by departments or schools and listed in the response to the external examiner should be consistent with those listed in the Annual Programme Review (APR) reports.
- 4.10 The response to external examiner should be appended to a formal cover letter with the University crest and the department/school/centre address and co-signed by the Head of Department and the relevant programme director(s) thanking the external examiner for his/her services and feedback.
- 4.11 The cover letter and response should be sent to the Registry Office as digital attachments by the end of Semester 1. Registry Office should upload them on e-Bridge before the beginning of Semester 2 and inform the external examiners accordingly.

## **5. Termination of appointment**

It is expected that the annual reappointment process will deal adequately with the need to replace an existing external examiner; however it may be necessary formally to terminate the appointment of an external examiner mid-session.

- 5.1 On those occasions where a Department or School, as appropriate, wishes to express concern in relation to the performance of an external examiner, or an external examiner's ability or capacity to undertake external examining duties in line with the role and responsibilities, and/or the selection and appointment criteria described in this document, these concerns must be raised with the Vice-President, Academic Affairs, who holds responsibility for the decision to terminate any appointment, in consultation with the University of Liverpool.
- 5.2 The following non-exhaustive list provides examples or reasons which may justify the termination of an appointment:
- a) Non-submission of reports by the prescribed deadlines;
  - b) Non-attendance at advertised Boards of Examiners, whether in person or remotely;
  - c) Any conflict of interest which cannot be resolved satisfactorily;
  - d) Any change in circumstance which may result in a failure to continue to satisfy the appointment and selection criteria, listed in Section 3 of this document;
  - e) Any conduct deemed unprofessional;
  - f) Any other matter which may reasonably result in the appointment of the external examiner becoming untenable.
- 5.3 The termination of an appointment is made with immediate effect and there is no right of appeal.

**Appendices:**

1. External examiner annual report guidance and template (separate document)
  2. Template for departmental response to external examiners (separate document)
  3. Guidelines for external examiner induction and training (below)
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### **Appendix 3**

#### **Guidelines for external examiner induction and training**

Because of the unique nature of XJTLU within both the Chinese and UK education systems, it is vital that training of the external examiner takes place, even if they are experienced external examiners within the UK system. It is proposed that this training be at School level and be at a number of stages, relating to both the role of the XJTLU external examiner, and also the technical issues around use of e-bridge. This training would be in addition to any training that the external examiner may receive through UoL.

<b>Training</b>	<b>Attendees</b>	<b>Timing</b>
Skype meeting to cover the role of the external examiner, and go through the academic calendar and key dates/responsibilities	External Examiner, HoD (Chair), Exam Officer(s), Departmental Secretary, AVP-E and/or Registry rep.	When appointed
Skype meeting to cover the technical aspects of the external examiner role, including e-bridge	External Examiner, Exam Officer, Departmental Secretary	When appointed
Skype meeting to go over any changes in moderation / assessment that may affect the external examiner role	External Examiner, HoD (Chair), Exam Officer(s), Departmental Secretary	Beginning of each academic year
On-going Skype / e-mail discussions	External Examiner, Exam Officer(s)	continual

The key components are that each external examiner should have a meeting at the beginning of each academic year to complement the training received when appointed, as is already the case in a few schools; that these meetings should be documented as good practice; and that responsibility for organizing the training is at the school level, with guidance from Registry Office and/or the Associate Vice President of Education, when necessary.

#### **List of documentation provided to external examiners by Registry Office:**

##### **Assessment Regulations**

- Assessment Guidelines for Essay Questions
- Code of Practice on Assessment
- External Examiner System for Taught Provision
- Framework for Undergraduate Programmes
- Framework for Postgraduate Programmes
- Marking Descriptors for Undergraduate Programmes
- Marking Descriptors for Master Programmes
- Mitigating Circumstances Policy
- Policy for Dealing with Plagiarism, Collusion and Data Fabrication
- Policy on MCQ Usage in Module Assessments
- Regulations for Conduct of Examinations

Other Useful Information

- Assessment Key Dates [Academic Year]
  - External Moderation – Manual for Assessment Preparation
  - XJTLU External Examiner Annual Report Form [Academic Year]
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### Revision and Approval Log

Date	Approved by	Description
19 September 2012	Approved by University Learning and Teaching Committee	This document is in harmony with new regulations for External Examiner system in force at University of Liverpool.
12 November 2014	Approved by University Learning and Teaching Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes to incorporate the role of the Chief External Examiner and the responsibilities to University of Liverpool of all external examiners examining on programmes which lead to a University of Liverpool award.</li> <li>• Responsibilities of XJTLU for providing external examiners with an appropriate induction and information on the academic regulations</li> <li>• Changes to incorporate the requirement of departments and schools, where appropriate, to respond directly to the relevant external examiner, and the inclusion of a new appendix setting out guidelines on drafting such a letter.</li> </ul>
7 January 2015	ULTC	'Guidelines for External Examiner Training' were approved and added as Appendix 2.
18 November 2015	ULTC	<p>To take immediate effect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisions to differentiate subject and programme-level external examiners with responsibilities assigned for programme-level examiners</li> <li>• Constraints added to the number of modules to be assigned to individual examiners</li> <li>• New requirement for externals to make at least one on-site visit to XJTLU campus in the 4-year appointment period</li> </ul>
10 <sup>th</sup> May 2017	Learning and Teaching Committee	<p>Following revisions approved to take effect in 2017/18:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Departments, schools and teaching centres to use the new template in "Appendix 2" for responses to EEs and send to EEs with a cover letter.</li> <li>• The external examiner annual report guidance and template added as Appendix 1.</li> <li>• External examiner induction and training guidelines renumbered as Appendix 3.</li> </ul>
18 Aug 2023	CAA Director	Administrative updates on BoE terminology.