



Code of Practice for External Examiners and Assessors of Taught Provision at the University of Sheffield

Introduction

1. This document provides guidance to external examiners and external assessors ('externals') on how these roles fulfil the external quality assurance of undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision¹ at the University of Sheffield ('the University') and its partner institutions offering validated awards. Such provision includes:

- a) All undergraduate programmes leading to the award of a degree.
- b) All taught postgraduate programmes leading to the award of a degree, postgraduate diploma or postgraduate certificate.
- c) All integrated degree apprenticeship programmes.
- d) All taught units of study offered across the University that may contribute to an award, for example language units/skills development units.
- e) Foundation Year material.

2. Collaborative programmes should appoint externals according to the procedures set out in this document. Any alternative arrangements should be approved by the owning faculty and the Committee for Collaborative Provision.

3. The External Examiners team in the Academic Programmes Office (APO) oversees the processes relating to external examination. The team can be contacted at examiners@sheffield.ac.uk.

4. University staff can find guidance on school responsibilities in the [Guidance for Staff on External Quality Assurance Processes](#) document.

5. Externals are external to and independent of the University and are therefore able to provide impartial advice on the standards of the programmes and subjects to which they have been appointed to examine, and how these standards compare with those at other higher education institutions. Externals are recruited from higher education institutes, industries and/or professional practice as appropriate, with the requisite qualifications, experiences and specialisms. As such, externals play a key role in assuring students, apprentices and the public that the degrees being awarded by the University are a reliable and consistent reflection of graduate attainment.

¹ Guidance on external examiners for research provision is available via the Postgraduate Research Hub: [Appointment of examiners](#).

6. For degree apprenticeships, the University uses the external examining system to fulfil aspects of the external assessor role, in order to avoid duplication and to maximise available resources. Typically, therefore, the University will appoint one individual to perform dual roles as both the external examiner for the degree qualification and the external assessor for the End Point Assessment (EPA). Where required, the University may allocate the external examiner role and the external assessor role to separate externals, providing that justification can be supplied as to why the existing external examining arrangements for the programme(s) cannot be adapted to accommodate a specific external assessor role.

7. Both the external examiner and external assessor roles are separate to that of the independent assessor. The external examiner and/or external assessor typically will not also fulfil the role of independent assessor unless explicitly required by the apprenticeship standard. For information and guidance on independent assessors, please refer to the [Code of Practice for Independent Assessors of End Point Assessments](#).

About the roles

External examiners

8. The purpose of the external examiner role is to ensure, with reference to the [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#), [national subject benchmarks](#), professional body requirements, and knowledge of programmes offered elsewhere in the UK, that:

- a) Programmes of study, or parts thereof, are delivered to a high standard in terms of aims, content, delivery and student/apprentice progression.
- b) The methods of assessment used are credible, rigorous, equitable and are fairly and consistently conducted within relevant University and/or school regulations and policies.
- c) Student/apprentice performance and degrees awarded are of an appropriate standard nationally and are comparable to those delivered by other institutions in the UK.
- d) Areas of good practice are identified for dissemination as appropriate.
- e) Examination boards are fairly conducted and recommendations for the award of degrees are confirmed.

In addition, external examiners are strongly encouraged to:

- f) Contribute to and advise on programme/curriculum development.
- g) Mentor inexperienced external examiners.

9. The University appoints two types of external examiners: programme external examiners and subject external examiners. Where a school engages both programme and subject examiners, the school should establish contact between all examiners at the start of each academic session.

Programme external examiners

10. A programme external examiner is appointed to provide an independent overview of one or more whole programmes of study, including all subjects, modules and themes. All taught programmes of study at the University are required to be overseen by a programme external. For some cohorts more than one programme external may be appointed with each external having joint oversight of the programmes, subject to faculty approval.

For external examiners appointed to the School of Law, this type encompasses the LPC and Critical Friend examiners.

Subject external examiners

11. A subject external examiner is optionally appointed to provide independent oversight of particular subjects, modules and/or themes only within or across programmes of study. Subject externals are typically appointed where a programme has specific elements that benefit from additional expertise or scrutiny, such as languages or medicine.

External examiner duties

12. The table below indicates the required and desirable duties of programme and subject externals.

	Programme external		Subject external	
Duties	Required	Desirable	Required	Desirable
Comment and advise on the content, balance, coherence and appropriateness of programmes.	X			
Comment and advise on the standard of student/apprentice performance and the comparability of standards of the programmes with those of other UK universities.	X		X	
Comment and advise on the assessment of all subjects and modules in the programmes, including approving draft assessments and moderating samples of assessed work .	X		X	
Meet informally with groups of students/apprentices to discuss the programmes of study.		X		X

	Programme external		Subject external	
Duties	Required	Desirable	Required	Desirable
Meet with any subject externals for the programmes and take into account their views when providing feedback to schools.	X			
Attend the final examination boards at which award recommendations are made (see Examination boards).	X			X
Submit a written annual report to the University (see Annual reports).	X		X	
Where applicable, visit practice placement areas of professionally accredited programmes.		X		
Contribute to programme/curriculum development.		X		X
Mentor externals new to the role.		X		X

External assessors

13. For integrated higher and degree apprenticeship programmes, the University also appoints external assessors to oversee the EPAs for each cohort. For the purposes of the external assessor role a cohort of apprentices refers to all apprentices undertaking an EPA within the same academic year, where those apprentices are all assessed using the same assessment plan.

14. The purpose of the external assessor role is to ensure that:

- a) Apprentices are assessed effectively.
- b) Each EPA is valid and reliable.
- c) The completion, achievement and certification of apprenticeships is credible and reliable.
- d) The University is upholding the relevant national standards.

15. The role of an external assessor includes but is not limited to:

- a) Commenting on assessment practice and procedures for the EPA against the requirements of the specific apprenticeship standard, through the review and documentation and visits to the University.
- b) Reviewing documentation relating to the EPA, including the EPA assessment instruments/materials and internal quality assurance documentation.
- c) Reviewing a sample of EPA assessed work, including observing live assessments.
- d) Observing assessor standardisation or moderation meetings.

- e) Meeting with independent assessors and other University staff.
- f) Meeting with apprentices and, where possible, employers.
- g) Observing the examination board at which the final decision on the EPA is confirmed.
- h) Conducting at least one visit to the University for each cohort of apprentices completing an EPA.

The specific requirements for an external assessor will be set out in the EPA plan for the relevant school.

Criteria for appointment

External examiner criteria

16. To be suitable for the role of external examiner, a candidate will demonstrate that they possess the following:

- a) Knowledge and understanding of the UK sector-agreed reference points 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.
- 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/apprentices 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) Meeting 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.

External assessor criteria

17. To be suitable for the role of external assessor, a candidate will demonstrate that they:

- a) Are independent from the apprentices, employer, assessors and training provider(s) involved, and from the delivery of EPA, with no conflicts of interest.

- b) Are impartial in judgement and wholly independent of the EPAO and its staff (including the governing body), and any relevant employers and/or partners.
- c) Are knowledgeable about, and competent in, assessing apprentice achievement in higher education at levels relevant to the subjects and awards to which their appointments relate.
- d) Have broad and current knowledge, relevant experience and occupational competence in the area of work related to their appointment.
- e) Have a high degree of competence and experience in the fields covered by the EPA, and have a good understanding of degree apprenticeships.
- f) Are appropriately experienced in apprentice assessment design and delivery at the level of the award.
- g) Can assess standards in an effective manner, identify good practice and recommend enhancements to enable informed EPA development.
- h) Have experience in acting as an external quality assurer or are supported by the University in undertaking their duties, for example, through training and mentoring.
- i) Have had sufficient experience in quality assurance to enable them to discharge their role effectively.
- j) Can engage in open and transparent dialogue with key stakeholders within the University to build relationships and provide guidance and support.
- k) Are prepared to undertake relevant training and continuing professional development.
- l) Comply with all relevant employment legislation, including safeguarding, as appropriate.

18. Additionally, in the interests of promoting sufficient quality and breadth of scrutiny within the sector, a candidate for the role of external examiner and/or external assessor:

- k) Should not hold more than one other external examiner and/or external assessor appointment for taught programmes at any other UK institution.
- l) Should not be from the same home institution as an external examiner and/or external assessor already in post for the recruiting school, unless an exceptional case can be made to the faculty.
- m) Must have no actual or potential conflict of interest which could compromise the independence of the external examiner and/or external assessor role.

Conflicts of interest

19. In order to maintain the integrity and independence of the external examiner and external assessor roles, to avoid conflicts of interest the University would not normally appoint a candidate where any of the following circumstances apply:

20. External examiner:

- a) The candidate is a member of a governing body or committee of the University of Sheffield, or one of the University's collaborative partners.

- b) The candidate has a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student/apprentice involved with the programme(s) of study.
- c) The candidate is a former member of staff or student/apprentice at the University, unless a period of five years or more has elapsed and all students/apprentices taught by or with the candidate have completed their programme(s).
- d) The appointment of the candidate would result in a reciprocal arrangement between cognate programme(s) at the University of Sheffield and the candidate's home institution.
- e) Any other circumstances that could constitute a conflict of interest with the candidate's position as an external examiner for the University of Sheffield.

21. External assessor:

- a) The candidate has performed full or part time work, consultancy work or engaged in any other paid work in the last 36 months, or is about to perform the same, other than that which has been detailed on their application form.
- b) The candidate has outside activities that involve University of Sheffield apprentices, employers or other apprenticeship providers, or has done over the past 36 months.
- c) The candidate or any member of the candidate's immediate family has a significant or influential relationship with any of the following:
 - A University, provider or awarding organisation which develops qualifications or apprenticeship delivery or assessment materials which could be deemed to be a competitor to the University.
 - A third party dealing with the University, whose actions the candidate is in a position to influence.
 - Any other business in which there could be a conflict of interest.
- d) The candidate holds a position or appointment as a Director (Executive or Non-executive) or Company Secretary in any company, whether or not this company does business with the University.
- e) Any other circumstances that could constitute a conflict of interest with the candidate's position as an external assessor at the University.

22. All candidates are required to complete a conflicts of interest declaration ('the declaration') as part of their application to the role(s). The University may also periodically ask external examiners and external assessors to resubmit the declaration throughout their appointment if required.

23. All externals must notify the school and the External Examiners team immediately of any change in their circumstances that could lead to a conflict of interest.

24. Upon receipt of the declaration, where any conflicts of interest have been identified the University may determine appropriate mitigation for the conflict(s). If no mitigation is possible or

suitable, the candidate will not be appointed or, in the case of current appointments, will be required to resign ([Resignation](#)).

25. Failure to disclose a conflict of interest may result in the termination of an appointment ([Termination of appointment](#)).

How to apply

26. The recruiting school will advertise for externals as required to be in place for the start of the next academic session in September.

27. Candidates will provide the recruiting school a summary CV of their qualifications, expertise and experience, as well as the completed conflicts of interest declaration and any other materials to support their application.

28. The school will identify the suitable candidates, and submit a nomination form for consideration by the faculty. The deadline for nomination forms to be received for the next academic session is typically June.

29. All appointments are subject to [Right to Work in the UK verification](#), conducted by the recruiting school.

Appointment

30. If faculty approval is granted, the External Examiners team will issue an appointment letter and acceptance of the role form ('acceptance form'). Where a candidate is to fulfil both external examiner and assessor roles, separate appointment letters and acceptance forms will be issued for each.

31. Prior to accepting the appointment, the candidate should familiarise themselves with the following:

- a) This Code of Practice.
- b) The [External Examiner web pages](#).
- c) The General and Programme Regulations, as available via the [University Calendar](#).

Confidentiality

32. By accepting the appointment, externals expressly acknowledge that any information or materials provided to them in the course of their role may be subject to confidentiality requirements and/or is the intellectual property of third parties. As such each external agrees to and acknowledges the following provisions:

- a) Any information or materials provided as part of the appointment shall not be used for any purpose other than to carry out their responsibilities as an external under the appointment and on the terms of the appointment letter.
- b) They shall keep all information and materials provided to them strictly confidential and not directly or indirectly disclose or make available any information or materials in whole or in part to any person, except as expressly permitted by, and in accordance with their appointment.
- c) They shall comply with any instructions provided to them by the University with regards to information and/or materials provided to them as part of their appointment including any specific confidentiality requirements of the employer partners of the University.
- d) They expressly acknowledge that they shall obtain no rights of ownership of any intellectual property within information and/or materials provided to them under their appointment.

The obligations with regards to confidentiality and intellectual property rights under the appointment letter shall continue beyond the expiration of the appointment with the University.

Acceptance of appointment

33. To accept the appointment, the external completes and signs the acceptance form(s) issued with the appointment letter.

34. The completed acceptance form should be returned to the External Examiners team at examiners@sheffield.ac.uk. Following acceptance, the appointment letter becomes a legally binding contract for the provision of services between the individual and the University of Sheffield, subject to the fulfilment of the role as outlined in the Code of Practice and the appointment letter.

Duration of appointment

35. Externals are usually appointed for a term of four consecutive years. The appointment is renewed annually for the duration of the term.

36. Exceptionally, a school may request an extension to an appointment of one year only. Circumstances that may lead to an extension may include:

- a) Where significant programme changes are being put in place and it would be useful to have the input of an external experienced in the particular provision being revised.
- b) Where there is insufficient overlap in the appointment period of a group of externals, to ensure collective knowledge is not lost.
- c) A reappointment (in exceptional circumstances), only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since the last appointment.
- d) Programme externals may be appointed for more than the maximum number of years to part-time programmes or programmes of more than four years duration where this would

provide an overview of the development of a programme, ensure continuity and consistency of standards and allow for the mentoring of inexperienced externals.

- e) Where the discipline area is particularly small across the UK and no other suitable externals can be nominated.

Where an extension is approved, the External Examiners team will issue the external with the necessary appointment letter(s) for the exceptional additional year.

Induction, briefing and IT access

Induction

37. The detailed role of each external will vary according to the school to which they are appointed, and therefore each school should provide a local induction to any new externals once their appointment is confirmed. This induction should welcome the external to the University, provide an overview of key institutional and school level procedures, practices and expectations, and include details of any training and/or mentoring sessions for inexperienced externals. The induction may take place in person or online as appropriate, and externals should make every effort to participate.

Briefing

38. Separate to the induction for new externals, the school should contact all externals at the start of each academic session to provide a briefing appropriate to each role. This briefing should include information such as:

- Confirmation that IT access has been set up for the academic session.
- Confirmation that the external's name and home institution have been published to the students/apprentices via the relevant handbooks, webpages, etc.
- Guidance on navigating school files/folders/systems (e.g. Google Drive, Blackboard).
- Copies of or links to reports from the past 4 years.
- Examination board schedules.
- Details of any training and/or mentoring sessions.
- Details of any accrediting body requirements for the programmes.
- The arrangements for approving draft assessments and moderating samples of assessed work.
- Copies of or links to school resources relating to programme structure, assessment, etc.
- Invitations to visit the school.
- Invitations to meetings with student groups.
- Other key dates or information necessary to allow externals to fulfil their responsibilities.

Arrangements for attendance at key events should be made well in advance, with in-person or online accommodations made as appropriate.

IT access

40. The school will request a University of Sheffield IT account for each external, to facilitate access to the relevant University services, to be renewed annually throughout the duration of the appointment. Externals will be required to set up [multi-factor authentication \(MFA\)](#) for the University IT account.

41. Externals will use their University of Sheffield account to access online assessment material, including Google Workspace applications and Blackboard. Guidance is available via the Elevate pages: [Accessing online assessments as an external examiner](#).

42. Externals should ensure they regularly check for and respond to communications from the University, and it is recommended that they add the '@sheffield.ac.uk' domain name to their 'safe senders list' in their email provider to ensure messages are not diverted to spam.

43. If an external experiences issues with accessing the University's online resources they should [contact their school](#) in the first instance, who can ensure that the relevant permissions and access have been granted. If issues persist, the school can escalate the issue to the University's IT Service desk.

Visits to the University

44. To facilitate strong working relationships, the school should invite each external to visit the University in person at least once per academic session. These visits should typically take place in addition to the external attending the examination boards, and may include training or mentoring sessions, meetings with programme staff, meetings with groups of students/apprentices, and in-person moderation meetings.

45. Externals may claim reimbursement for expenses incurred in attending these visits. Please see [Expenses](#) below for more information on how to claim expenses.

Approval of draft assessments

46. The external should be sent draft summative assessment papers, including coursework, examinations and plans for any practical assessments, for comment and approval **prior** to students/apprentices undertaking the assessments. The external should provide feedback on the suitability of the draft assessments, for example with reference to the FHEQ level, subject benchmarks, professional body requirements and sector knowledge. Schools are not required to take action in response to the recommendations; however, a rationale should be provided to the external if the school declines to make the recommended changes.

Moderation of assessed work

47. Once students/apprentices have completed the assessments and the University's [internal marking and moderation](#) processes have taken place, and before the examination boards, the

external should moderate the assessed work. This external moderation provides EQA of the school's marking, moderation and scaling practices.

48. External moderation will typically be of a sample of the assessed work, and the sample should contain both work that was selected for internal moderation and work that was not. Material from across the range of achievement, including failed assessments and work at the borderlines in particular should be included. Externals can also request to view other pieces of assessed work not included in the sample. Programme externals may delegate the moderation responsibilities to the appropriate subject externals where in post.

49. Externals may request to view all assessed work, rather than a sample, if they wish. In cases where the original assessment method makes it impracticable for the external to see all assessed material - for example, practical examinations - externals have the right to see all criteria and mark sheets, and any samples of the assessment materials where available.

50. As part of external moderation processes and in line with the University's [scaling of marks policy](#), externals should be consulted about any scaling of marks that the school proposes to undertake. Externals may also recommend scaling at a module or component level to ensure consistency of standards between modules. Externals may not recommend the adjustment of marks for individual students/apprentices.

Examination boards and the award of degrees

51. Examination boards are convened to ensure that decisions about marks, progression and award recommendations are made fairly and consistently in accordance with the University's General Regulations and sector standards. Externals should familiarise themselves with the University's [Examination board guidance](#) for full details of the operation of the examination boards (externals must be signed in to their University of Sheffield account to view this page).

Examination board schedule

52. The details of all examination boards are held at a local school level. For details of the full examination board schedule for each academic session, please [contact the school](#).

Anonymity of board recommendations

53. It is a requirement of the University Senate that all recommendations for undergraduate and taught postgraduate awards shall be made anonymously, with candidates identified by registration number only during the meeting and in the board records. No schools are exempt from this requirement. Externals are asked to confirm in their annual report that anonymity was upheld in the recommendation of awards.

Attendance at examination boards

54. To comply with EQA requirements with respect to the award of degrees, **external examiner attendance is required in any examination board at which final award recommendations are**

made (the ‘award board’) for the relevant programmes and subject areas. Attendance may be in-person or online, and schools should facilitate attendance as far as is reasonable.

- a) **Programme external examiner/external assessor:** The attendance of the programme external examiners and external assessors for the relevant programmes is required for quoracy of the award board, to allow the University to fulfil its EQA responsibilities with respect to the award of degrees. Where the external examiner is also the external assessor, attendance is required to observe the confirmation of the final decisions on the EPA results.

Programme externals responsible for postgraduate or non-standard taught provision are required to attend and report upon the final award board even where it falls in the next academic session (typically October). This attendance requirement includes where an external is in their final year of appointment and the final award board falls in the next academic session.

Where the programme external/external assessor is unable to attend the award board, they should [contact their school](#) as a matter of urgency. The school, in consultation with the External Examiners team, will determine alternative arrangements to ensure appropriate external quality scrutiny for the programmes in question.

- b) **Subject externals:** The attendance of subject externals at the award board is strongly encouraged, and subject externals should prioritise attendance where possible. However, subject external attendance is not required for quoracy provided that the programme external will be in attendance.

Where it is agreed with the school that a subject external will not attend the award board, the external is expected to participate by correspondence: they should provide written feedback to the school in advance of the board in lieu of their verbal report. This feedback should be shared with the programme team and the programme external, and comprise the points outlined in [‘Verbal report to the examination board’](#), below. The feedback should be considered in the board meeting and appended to the minutes.

Role in the examination board

55. The role of the external in the examination boards is to provide external oversight and scrutiny of the board processes as a whole. Exceptionally, the external may be asked by the school to confirm the appropriateness of anonymised progression or award recommendations in specific cases where questions have arisen, with respect to adherence to the relevant regulations and policy.

Extenuating circumstances

56. The anonymised recommendations from the extenuating circumstances panel will form part of the results data presented to the examination board. The external’s role with respect to

extenuating circumstances is to have oversight of whether due consideration of extenuating circumstances has taken place in line with the University's policy and procedures. The external is not responsible for making decisions regarding extenuating circumstances for individual students/apprentices.

Verbal report to the examination board

57. Externals should be invited to make a brief verbal report to the examination board, including their views on:

- a) The assessment process, including its fairness, accuracy and efficiency;
- b) The academic quality of the cohorts examined;
- c) The effectiveness of the teaching as evidenced by the performance of the students
- d) Recommendations to the board for improvements in the teaching and/or examination process;
- e) Examples of good practice;
- f) Whether recommendations made in previous years have been acted on.

A record of this verbal report will be recorded in the formal minutes of the examination board and approved by the board. The verbal report is not a substitute for the written [annual report](#), which should be submitted within 4 weeks of the final examination board.

58. In the interests of confidentiality, externals should not raise confidential matters at the examination board. Externals wishing to raise confidential matters should submit their concerns via email to examiners@sheffield.ac.uk.

Endorsing award outcomes

59. Programme externals are to endorse the outcomes for the programmes of study they have been appointed to scrutinise by signing off the list of final awards.² This sign-off serves as confirmation that the awards have undergone appropriate external scrutiny. In the event that the external is not able to attend the board, sign-off must be sought by correspondence.

Resit boards

60. Externals are not required to attend resit boards; however, they may be invited to attend, and attendance should be facilitated (either in person or online) if the external chooses to attend. Should an external choose to attend a resit board, such attendance does not incur any additional fee. Externals may claim reimbursement for expenses incurred in attending resit boards via the standard process (see [Fees and expenses](#), below).

61. Where a resit board includes the recommendation of award outcomes, the external should digitally sign the list of final awards. As externals are not required to attend resit boards, this sign-off may be obtained by circulation.

² Sign-off can be electronic; there is no requirement for externals to physically sign a hard copy of results.

Annual reports

Submission

62. All externals are required to submit a written annual report following the final award board via the relevant [online form](#).³ The annual report asks externals to comment on the standard of the final marks and degrees awarded, as well as the operations of the award board, and therefore reports submitted prior to the award board taking place will not be accepted. Even where the external is not able to attend the final award board, they should have sight of and endorse the final award recommendations and therefore the annual report should only be submitted after the award board processes have completed.

63. The University relies on these written reports to contribute to institutional oversight of the assessment process and the standards and quality of its programmes. It is therefore important that written reports are received that are timely and reflect all of the observations and recommendations within the remit of the external.

64. Externals are not expected to produce a report following attendance at any resit boards. Should the external wish to provide further feedback following a resit board, a written commentary may be emailed to examiners@sheffield.ac.uk and will be appended to their original report.

Deadlines

65. Annual reports are to be submitted within **four weeks of the final award board** for the academic session. For standard undergraduate programmes, this means that reports are expected by the end of July. For standard postgraduate programmes, reports are expected by the end of November.

External assessor reports are to be submitted within **four weeks of the final EPA** for the academic session.

66. Any external who requires an extension to the report deadline should contact examiners@sheffield.ac.uk as soon as possible.

67. Externals who do not submit their reports by the deadline without a previously arranged extension and/or mitigating circumstances have not fulfilled their contractual obligations and therefore forfeit their [fee](#). Similarly, said externals may be replaced for the next academic session (see [Termination of appointment](#), below).

Staff and student confidentiality

68. In the interests of confidentiality, externals are requested to not include personal details of any staff, students or apprentices in their reports, including names or other identifying features such as specific dissertation titles, prize names or similar.

³ This requirement does not apply to 'Thesis only' externals.

69. Externals wishing to raise confidential matters should submit their concerns via email to examiners@sheffield.ac.uk.

Response from the school

70. Externals should receive acknowledgement of receipt of their written report from the school, usually within four weeks of submission. Such acknowledgement should outline how the school plans to respond to the external's recommendations. Where appropriate, a school may contact the external to acknowledge receipt of their report, and defer the full response until such time as relevant boards and committees have been convened.

71. The school is not required to implement the recommendations of an external; however, where the school declines to act upon the recommendations a rationale should be provided.

Raising concerns

72. Any programme or subject/module level recommendations raised in the written report will be automatically shared with and monitored by the faculty and APO via the response form and annual reflection processes.

73. If the external wishes to raise an urgent or serious matter for the attention of the University, they should complete the 'University-wide issues' section of the report. Such matters would typically pertain to serious concerns with the academic standards or quality of specific programmes or subjects, where the external judges that escalation is required beyond the 'Recommendations' sections of the report; or else with central University regulations, policies or procedures across the institution.

74. Where the external raises urgent and/or serious matters for the attention of the University, these matters will be brought to the attention of the relevant committee for further consideration. Where appropriate, APO will respond to the concerns of the external, or delegate the response to a relevant University body. Alternatively, APO may refer the issue back to the school or faculty where appropriate.⁴

75. If an external has raised urgent and/or serious matters and is not satisfied with the response from the University, they may request that their report and any supplementary documentation be referred to the Vice-Chancellor for a final decision.

76. If all internal procedures for dealing with serious external concerns have been used and result in continuing disagreement, the external may also raise a concern of sufficient gravity with the [Office for Students](#).

⁴ For example, if the University-wide issue solely reiterates programme or subject level recommendations, APO will consider that the standard response form and annual reflection processes are sufficient to answer the matter.

Circulation

77. The University will share reports or summaries of reports with students/apprentices via the internal school web pages and Staff-Student Committees.

78. Reports for programmes with professional body accreditation may be shared with the relevant bodies as part of accreditation reporting.

79. A copy of the external assessor report will be shared with the relevant DQB as part of its ongoing monitoring engagements and as part of the evidence for any scheduled Monitoring Check.

80. Reports will not be published on any publicly accessible web pages.

Expenses

81. In line with the University's financial regulations for [travel and related expenses](#), the University will reimburse reasonable, allowable costs incurred by externals in the fulfilment of the role, including standard class travel, suitable accommodation, limited subsistence costs and postage costs. A summary of allowable expenses is available on the [External Examiners website](#). Please be aware that in line with the financial regulations, alcohol is not an allowable expense for subsistence and the University will not reimburse claims for alcoholic beverages.

82. Payment of expenses for travelling and subsistence which are incurred wholly, necessarily and exclusively in the performance of examining duties are currently paid without deduction of income tax.

How to claim expenses

83. Expenses should be claimed within three months of being incurred, by submission of a [claim form](#), along with the applicable itemised receipts, to examiners@sheffield.ac.uk. The University reserves the right to not reimburse expenses where the claim exceeds this timeframe and/or where itemised receipts are not provided. Externals should therefore submit requests for reimbursement throughout the year, before submitting their final claim form at the end of the session (see Fees, below).

Fees

84. Fees are payable once the external has completed their duties for the session, which includes submission of all relevant annual reports.

- **External examiner fee**

The external examiner fee is calculated based on student numbers (FTEs) per programme code, divided accordingly between the number of externals allocated to each programme. For full details of the latest pay rates and how fees are calculated, please see the [External Examiner Fee Calculations document](#).

- **External assessor fee**

The external assessor fee is a fixed fee, paid in addition to the external examiner fee. External assessors should refer to the [External Assessor Pay Rate](#) document and their appointment letter for full details of their fee.

- **Independent assessor fee**

In the event that an individual is appointed to fulfil the role of independent assessor alongside the external examiner and external assessor posts, the total fee will be agreed by the Academic Programmes Office.

85. Upon completing their duties for the session, externals claim their fee and any outstanding [expenses](#) via submission of a final [claim form](#).

Payment of fee for undergraduate programmes

86. Under HMRC regulations, externals for undergraduate programmes are classed as ‘casual staff’ for the purpose of fees and expenses payments. The University is required to deduct tax at the basic rate when paying fees to its externals for undergraduate programmes. To allow the University to accurately report payments and tax deductions, it will be necessary for externals to provide their National Insurance number.

87. Any external who has no other employment and where income from all sources does not exceed the threshold for taxation should notify the External Examiners team at examiners@sheffield.ac.uk as soon as possible, as it will be necessary to complete a statement to this effect (which will be forwarded on request). It is only under these exceptional circumstances that the University may be permitted to pay an external for an undergraduate taught programme of study without deduction of basic rate income tax.

88. Externals should retain all payslips issued by the University for identification of the fees and expenses paid which may be subject to further enquiry by the Inland Revenue.

Payment of fee for postgraduate programmes

89. Under HMRC regulations, a postgraduate external is engaged as an independent, self-employed service provider and not as an employee. The University will pay the agreed fee, including out of pocket expenses, as a single sum to the external’s bank account with no deduction for income tax or National Insurance Contributions (NICs).

90. It is the personal responsibility of each postgraduate external to disclose the fee income to HMRC under self-assessment and to pay associated income tax and NICs liabilities.

Resignation

91. Owing to personal or professional circumstances, it may be necessary for an external to resign before the end of their current session of appointment. To resign, externals should email their resignation to the External Examiners team at examiners@sheffield.ac.uk, ideally giving a minimum of three months' notice to allow the University sufficient time to appoint a replacement. In exceptional circumstances, this notice period may be waived with the agreement of both parties. The team will inform the recruiting school and the faculty, and the processes to appoint a replacement will be initiated.

92. Where an individual holds both the external examiner and the external assessor role, the resignation will typically apply to both roles, unless otherwise agreed between all parties.

93. It is not possible for an external to temporarily resign. If an external has tendered their resignation and is to be reappointed, the school must submit a new nomination form, along with all supporting information including new Conflicts of Interest declaration(s), to be considered by the faculty. If the reappointment is approved, the External Examiners team will issue a new appointment letter and acceptance form. Reappointments are only valid once the new appointment letter has been issued and the acceptance form returned, as this process forms the contractual agreement between the University and the external.

Termination of appointment

94. In exceptional circumstances, a school may request termination of an appointment of an external. Such circumstances may include but are not limited to:

- a) Failure to undertake duties to the satisfaction of the University, such as inadequate scrutiny of proposed assessment tools and/or assessment outcomes, and/or an unacceptable delay in corresponding with programme/subject teams on matters concerning examination and assessment.
- b) Failure to attend examination boards or University visits without good cause and/or no prior agreement having been made.
- c) Failure to submit the annual report by the published deadlines, without an agreed extension.
- d) Failure to disclose a conflict of interest or submit a resignation after a conflict of interest has been identified.
- e) Cessation of or non-recruitment to a programme.
- f) Unprofessional conduct or negligence.

Such circumstances pose a risk to the University's ability to fulfil its obligations regarding external quality assurance and therefore the school is required to take action to address the issues.

95. Before a request to terminate an appointment is made, sincere attempts should be made by the school and programme team to identify and resolve any underlying issues. Should these

attempts be unsuccessful, the school may escalate the issue to the appropriate faculty officer for further discussion. Where required, the faculty officer will write to the external in a further attempt to resolve the issues. If these attempts are unsuccessful, the faculty officer will request that the external resigns.

96. Should no response be received to the resignation request, or if the external does not agree to resign from post, the matter will be escalated to APO for further investigation. If a decision to terminate is reached, APO will write to the external to terminate the appointment.

97. Any recommendation to terminate an appointment will be given full and careful consideration and may be referred back to the school and faculty for further action at any stage.

98. Where an individual holds both the external examiner and the external assessor role (and/or the independent assessor role), the termination of appointment will typically apply to all roles, unless otherwise agreed between all parties.

99. Neither the raising of well-founded concerns about academic standards nor the submission of a confidential report to the University are valid grounds for termination.

Key links and resources for externals

100. A list of key links and resources for externals is available below. Please be aware that you may need to be signed in to your University of Sheffield account to access some resources.

- External Examiners team: examiners@sheffield.ac.uk
- [University of Sheffield External Examiners website](#)
- [University Calendar](#) (for General Regulations, Programme Regulations)
- [Examination board guidance](#)
- [Degree classification methods](#)
- [Accessing online assessments as an external examiner](#)
- [Multi-factor authentication](#)
- [Frequently asked questions](#)

Version control

Version	Author	Release Date	Notes
1.0	External Examiners Team, Academic Programmes Office	10 April 2025	Rewrite of the former Code of Practice (April 2019) to incorporate the new University branding, schools structure, and accessibility principles, as well as external assessor information and updated QAA guidance on conflicts of interest.

			Reference to internal processes moved to internal guidance for staff.
1.1	External Examiners Team, Academic Programmes Office	3 July 2025	Updated hyperlink to Travel and Related Expenses Policy