5.1 Introduction

1. The role of an External Examiner is an integral and essential part of the University’s quality assurance. Section 5 of the Academic Quality Handbook (AQH) has been developed taking into account the QAA’s UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B7, External Examining.

2. In this section of the AQH the term ‘External Examiners’ refers to External Examiners for Taught Degrees; initial degrees, undergraduate and postgraduate diplomas and certificates (including the PGCE), taught postgraduate Master’s schemes (Master’s degrees by examination and dissertation) and integrated undergraduate Master’s schemes. The Senate External Reviewer refers to an External who attends the final Senate Examining Boards at which all taught scheme results are confirmed. Associate External Examiners have responsibility for small numbers of modules in specialist areas and normally report to the main External Examiner for the scheme. All External Examiners are ultimately responsible to the Senate, which is responsible for the conduct of all examinations at Aberystwyth University (AU).

3. Please refer to Section 7: Research Degrees for guidance on the University’s external examining arrangements for Postgraduate Research Degrees.

5.2 Criteria for Appointment

1. The attention of all prospective External Examiners is drawn to the QAA’s UK Quality Code for Higher Education during the appointment process. In particular, prospective External Examiners are asked to report any conflicts of interest in addition to those listed below.

2. External Examiners should normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught schemes at any point in time.

3. Only persons of sufficient seniority and experience to be able to command authority should be appointed as External Examiners. All External Examiners should be familiar with the standard expected of students in the relevant awards and with sector agreed reference points and any appropriate professional body requirements. Academic appointments should have had extensive involvement in the relevant field of study, and in assessment, curriculum design, and the enhancement of the student experience.

4. External Examiners from outside the University system are appropriate where professional expertise is required. Such Examiners must demonstrate familiarity with the required academic standards or must work in tandem with other External Examiners who do work within the University system.

5. Former students or members of staff at Aberystwyth University who have joined the staff of another University may not be invited to become External Examiners before a lapse of at least five years, and sufficient time for students taught by or with that External Examiner to have passed through the system, whichever is the longer. Former members of staff at Aberystwyth University who have retired will not normally be nominated as External Examiners.

6. External Examiners’ appointments will be monitored to ensure that Aberystwyth University External Examiners continue to represent a range of UK institutions and to prevent over-reliance on Examiners from particular universities.
7. An External Examiner shall not be re-appointed to examine a scheme offered within the same department before a lapse of at least five years and shall only be re-appointed in exceptional circumstances.

8. The making of reciprocal arrangements for external examining with staff teaching similar schemes of study at other universities is not permissible.

9. An External Examiner for a particular programme or programmes shall not be succeeded by another from the same department of the same University.

10. Senate External Reviewers will be senior administrative staff from other Universities who have substantial experience of operating examination and assessment practices and procedures. Their role will be to confirm that AU has operated its approved procedures correctly and to identify possible enhancements based on good practice elsewhere.

11. Associate Examiners may be appointed in specialist subject areas which the main External Examiner for the study scheme is unable to cover. As they report to the main External Examiner and do not comment on a study scheme, they will require only specialist knowledge of the relevant subject area of the module(s) they are asked to moderate.

5.3 Period of Appointment

1. External Examiners shall normally be appointed for a period of four years, with the possibility of re-appointment for a fifth year to ensure continuity.

5.4 Appointment Procedures

1. All nominations for new External Examiners or extensions to current appointments should be submitted to the Academic Registry for consideration by the relevant committee no later than the end of February in the session before the appointment is to commence. Departments should approach the proposed Examiners informally to ask whether they are willing to accept the appointment before submitting formal nominations.

2. Once the relevant committee has approved the appointment, a formal offer letter will be sent to the Examiner along with details of the fee and of appropriate University Regulations and procedures.

5.5 Preliminary Arrangements and Right to Work in the UK

1. External Examiners who have accepted appointments shall be provided with a link to the relevant chapter of the Academic Quality Handbook by the Academic Registry to ensure that they understand and can fulfil their responsibilities. The Academic Registry will organise a Briefing Day each session for new Examiners on undergraduate and taught postgraduate schemes.

2. Each External Examiner shall be supplied by the relevant academic department with copies of the syllabuses and schedules of assessment for the scheme(s) of study concerned, together with notification of the dates set for the meeting of the relevant Examining Boards.

3. In accordance with the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, External Examiners names, roles and institutions will be published on departmental staff webpages, and against individual modules/schemes on the module/scheme database.
4. In accordance with the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006, the University has an obligation to ensure that all those engaged in work with the University are legally eligible to work in the UK. In order to carry out this check the University requires you to provide a scan of appropriate document(s) from either List A or List B (available here) which should be submitted as part of the nomination process. The University will hold an induction day for new External Examiners in late November/ early December, at which attendance is requested. External Examiners are asked to bring the original right to work documentation to this event where the verification process will be completed. If an External Examiner is unable to attend this event, the process will be completed upon their first visit to the University. A copy of this document will be held by the University in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation. It will not be possible to process expenses or fee claims without successful completion of the right to work check.

5.6 Guidelines on the Role of External Examiners

1. External Examiners are appointed to undertake the tasks listed below. Having completed those tasks, they will report, in relation to the schemes/modules for which they have a responsibility, on whether:

   (i) The standards set are appropriate for the programme’s awards, or award elements, by reference to national subject benchmarks, AU programme specifications and any other relevant points of reference.
   (ii) The standards of student performance in the programme(s), or parts of programme(s), are comparable to the standards of similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions.
   (iii) The processes for assessment, examination and determination of awards are sound and fairly conducted in accordance with AU examination conventions and procedures.

   In order to fulfil these roles, External Examiners should have access to relevant information on the schemes/modules for which they have responsibility, to the work of students following the schemes/modules concerned and on the University’s examination conventions and procedures. External Examiners should also ensure that they are familiar with relevant aspects of the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and in particular the sections on External Examining and Assessment, relevant subject benchmarks and the Qualifications Framework: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code

2. External Examiners are expected to attend meetings of the relevant Departmental Examining Boards. Should they be unable to do so, alternative arrangements will be made to ensure that they are able to undertake the tasks listed below.

3. The primary role of External Examiners is to undertake the following tasks:

   (i) Satisfy themselves that the assessment procedures accord with the programme specification(s).
   (ii) Approve examination question papers and any other forms of assessment which are normally subject to prior approval by an External Examiner.
   (iii) Agree with the relevant departmental staff on an appropriate basis for the sampling of students’ assessed work.
   (iv) Audit evidence to indicate the basis on which marks have been awarded.
   (v) Satisfy themselves that appropriate provision has been made for the second marking and/or internal moderation of assessed work.
   (vi) Monitor, in consultation with the Departmental Examining Board, the consistency of
standards across comparable scheme components/modules and approve, where necessary, adjustments to sets of marks, i.e. having reviewed all marks awarded for a particular module (or modules), make appropriate adjustments across the mark range.
(vii) At the request of the relevant departmental staff, assist in the determination of individual cases which internal Examiners may have been unable to resolve.
(viii) Contribute to the recommendations made by the Departmental Examining Board to the Senate Examining Board as to the degree classifications for single honours students, on whether taught postgraduate students should pass the degree with or without Distinction or Merit, and on exit awards for candidates unable or unwilling to proceed.
(ix) Contribute to recommendations made by the Departmental Examining Board to the Senate Examining Board about undergraduate and postgraduate students whose overall performance falls within the ‘window of opportunity’.
(x) Report to the University on the standards of student performance, on the standards of the awards and on the processes for assessment, examination and determination of awards.
(xi) Comment on any proposal for a new or revised study scheme in a related field.

4. External Examiners on taught postgraduate schemes should in addition carry out the following tasks involving the dissertation element:
(i) Agree with the relevant departmental staff on the basis for sampling dissertations (see Section 3.2 of the AQH). The normal expectation would be that examiners on schemes with large cohorts would sample a number of dissertations rather than see every one.
(ii) Monitor, in consultation with the Departmental Examining Board, the consistency of standards in the assessment of dissertations.

5. External Examiners may also, by agreement with the relevant departmental staff, undertake these additional tasks:
(i) Undertake oral examinations (modern language students).
(ii) Meet with a representative sample of students as an aid to the audit of standards.
(iii) Meet a representative group of students to obtain a student viewpoint on matters within the External Examiner’s remit.
(iv) Advise on course structures, and on proposals for new schemes, and new and restructured modules.

6. It is NOT the practice at Aberystwyth University for External Examiners to:
(i) Act as second markers of course assignments or examination scripts.
(ii) Make selective adjustments to the marks of individual students whose work was included in the review sample.
(iii) Use vivas for the purpose of grading the performance of an individual student or group of students, unless they have been approved as a formal part of the assessment process for a particular module.

7. External Examiners who, either in the course of the marking period or subsequently, consider that a candidate has engaged in an unfair assessment practice shall immediately report the circumstances in writing to the Chair of the Examining Board concerned.

8. The Senate External Reviewers shall oversee the operation of the Senate Examining Boards at which all results for taught schemes are confirmed. Their role is to ensure that the common systems governing undergraduate and taught postgraduate awards are operated fairly and consistently across the institution. They are asked in particular to carry out the following tasks:
(i) to attend the final Senate Undergraduate Examination Boards in June/July each session, and to attend the final Senate Postgraduate Exam Board in December. In addition, to be available for consultation at the time of the semester one and supplementary examination boards.
(ii) to sign the Notification of Results Forms confirming that the degree classes and postgraduate results awarded to students have been awarded in a fair and consistent manner and according to AU’s rules, regulations and examination conventions.

(iii) to offer comments and advice to the Senate Examination Boards on the handling of decisions affecting the degree classifications or postgraduate results of individual students.

(iv) to write a report on the operation of the Board, commenting on whether it was operated fairly and consistently and in line with AU procedures, whether the standards of awards made were in line with other institutions with which the examiners are familiar, and to offer any comments on how the system might be improved.

9. Associate Examiners will normally be asked only to confirm that the standards on the module(s) they have moderated are appropriate. Where they are working with a main External Examiner, they need not attend Examining Boards though they may choose to do so.

5.7 The Role of External Examiners at Examination Boards

1. Each academic department shall establish a final Examining Board or Boards to consider results and make recommendations on candidates pursuing schemes leading to the award of undergraduate and taught postgraduate qualifications.

2. For each Departmental Examining Board there shall be:
(i) A Chair who will be a senior member of staff of the relevant department, nominated by the Head of Department.
(ii) An External Examiner (or Examiners) appointed as prescribed.
(iii) Internal Examiners and/or representative(s) of relevant modules.
(iv) Appropriate persons who may attend at the Chair’s invitation in an advisory capacity. Such persons shall possess no voting rights.

3. All results on taught schemes will be confirmed by the relevant Senate Examining Board comprising:
(i) A Chair who will be Pro Vice-Chancellor responsible for academic standards unless the PVC delegates this responsibility to another Pro Vice-Chancellor.
(ii) A Senate External Reviewer who will be a senior administrator from another university with substantial experience of operating examination and assessment practices and procedures. Their role would be to confirm that AU had operated its approved procedures correctly and to identify possible enhancements based on good practice elsewhere. The appointee would be required to attend Senate Examining Boards to oversee the proceedings.
(iii) Internal Examiners who will be representatives of all departments teaching modules for which results are being considered.
(iv) Appropriate persons who may attend at the Chair’s invitation in an advisory capacity. Such persons shall possess no voting rights.

4. External Examiners are regarded as members of Examining Boards, giving an external perspective and offering advice and guidance. They do not have a right of veto on the decisions taken by the Board. On completion of a cycle of examining, an External Examiner’s signature on the relevant pass list(s) is taken to indicate that the decisions recorded were those taken by the Examining Board. It is not to be interpreted as necessarily implying an endorsement of the standards of the examination or of the conduct of the assessment; these are matters for consideration in External Examiners’ reports to the University.

5. During semester one, External Examiners shall perform all the tasks normally associated with examining such as the approval of assessments. External Examiners will not be required to attend Examining Board meetings but may do so if they wish. Consultation shall take place by
correspondence or other appropriate means.

6. External Examiners on undergraduate schemes are formally required by the University to be present at the main, semester two meeting of the Examining Boards in June at which the examination results in the subjects in which they have been involved are determined.

7. External Examiners on taught postgraduate schemes are formally required by the University to be present at the semester two meeting of the Examining Boards in June. There should be at least one External Examiner present at the final degree awarding board in November/December; this will be determined by the department on a pro-rata basis. Departments may invite other External Examiners to attend the final degree awarding Examining Board in November/December, in addition to the nominated External.

8. If External Examiners exceptionally cannot attend a meeting where their presence is formally required, they should be available for consultation with the Chair of the Board by telephone, video network or other suitable means and shall despatch all documents necessary for the due performance of the business of the meeting.

5.8 Reports

1. External Examiners are required by AU to submit written reports both annually and at the end of their period of office. External Examiners’ comments on the examining process are invited, including observations on the structure and content of the scheme of study and its teaching.
   (i) External Examiners on undergraduate schemes are required to complete an annual report which should be submitted by email within 4 weeks of the meeting of the final Examining Board in June.
   (ii) External Examiners on taught postgraduate schemes are required to complete two reports; an annual report which should be submitted by email within 4 weeks of the meeting of the semester two Examining Board in June, and a short report submitted at the end of the dissertation component of the degree scheme (November/December).
   (iii) Where an External Examiner is appointed to both undergraduate and postgraduate schemes, the University will require separate reports to be completed following the relevant Examining Boards.

2. The content of the annual report should include full and constructive comments which will help to maintain and enhance provision. Where content is considered incomplete or insufficient the department may ask External Examiners to add further commentary.

3. Annual Reports should be sent to the Academic Registry at Aberystwyth University, which will forward them to the relevant department. The University attaches considerable importance to the External Examiner’s report and payment of the fee and expenses is conditional upon its receipt. In the event of an Examiner not submitting a report, the Vice-Chancellor shall be empowered to take such steps as appropriate to the circumstances to obtain it, and/or may choose to issue a letter of premature termination as a result.

4. The Academic Registry will acknowledge receipt of the report and arrange payment unless the report has not been satisfactorily completed, in which case the External Examiner will be invited to revise it. Departments are asked to respond to their Examiners after they have given the report due consideration and to address any concerns about departmental systems and processes.

5. Annual reports, with departmental responses, will be published on the University’s AberLearn
Blackboard site and will be available to registered students at the University. It is therefore important that reference is not made to individual candidates and individual members of staff by name.

6. Faculties will compile summary reports listing all issues raised by their External Examiners, and confirming the action taken in response. The faculty will ensure that each Examiner receives a response to the issues raised. The summary reports will be considered at faculty level and forwarded to the Academic Board which will address concerns at University level. Each Examiner shall receive a copy of the relevant minute of the committee, which may ask the Pro Vice-Chancellor to respond directly to Examiners on specific concerns.

7. The University will give careful consideration to issues raised by its External Examiners and will inform the Examiners of steps taken in response to comments, or explain why recommended action has not been taken. It will not always be possible or desirable for the University to undertake action recommended by individual Examiners. This must be considered along with the comments of all other Examiners and other relevant performance indicators.

8. An External Examiner who considers it appropriate may send a separate, confidential report directly to the Vice-Chancellor to draw attention to any matters of acute concern. External Examiners should also note that if they have exhausted internal procedures and still have significant concerns, they may contact the QAA. Information is available at: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/

9. The process and timeline for receiving and responding to undergraduate and taught postgraduate External Examiner reports can be found here.

5.9 Collaborative Provision

1. External Examiners are appointed by the University and collaborative partner organisations and are required to follow external examining procedures, which are the same as those in operation for the University.

2. For franchise arrangements, where possible, the same External Examiner who examines the programme at Aberystwyth University should be appointed to examine the franchise programme.

3. External Examiners should ensure that they complete any additional parts of the annual report for collaborative provision.

4. The collaborative partner will be sent the relevant sections of the report to comment on before returning it to the department. The annual report, with departmental and collaborative partner responses, will be made available to the collaborative provision students via the Partner Blackboard site.

5. External Examiners would be expected to consider and advise on the comparability of standards where schemes and modules are delivered at more than one location, including those delivered in collaboration with a university-approved partner organisation.

5.10 Fees and Expenses

1. Annual fees are detailed in the appointment letter; the Academic Registry will calculate the per
capita fee as it will change annually based upon the number of FTEs per session.

2. Fees are settled by bank transfer and subject to PAYE.

3. Expenses will be paid (subject to submission of original supporting receipts) by bank transfer.

4. Payment of the fee, and expenses, is dependent upon receipt of the annual report and a completed Expenses Claim Form; External Examiners should submit an Expenses Claim Form with the annual report.

5. External Examiners on taught postgraduate schemes should maintain a record of the names of the dissertation candidates examined; a claim form may be submitted at the time a dissertation is examined, or a complete list submitted on the annual claim form.

6. It will not be possible to process expenses or fee claims if the right to work verification process has not been completed.

5.11 Termination of Appointment

1. Whilst it is hoped that such a situation will not arise, an External Examiner whose performance or general conduct is unsatisfactory or for whom a conflict of interest arises may be warned informally in the first instance and, if necessary, be advised on appropriate remedial action(s), which must be taken. In exceptional circumstances, the Pro Vice-Chancellor may recommend that a letter of premature termination be sent to the External Examiner concerned without prior warning. This will have the effect of terminating the appointment immediately. A letter of premature termination may also be sent in respect of a less serious incident where an External Examiner has received previously an informal warning.

2. The appointment of an External Examiner may be terminated in the following instances:
   (i) Non-fulfilment of external examiner duties including non-submission or submission of an incomplete/inadequate annual report and/or failure to attend an Examination Board (where attendance is required) without reason or explanation from the External Examiner
   (ii) Changes in scheme provision which render the appointment no longer applicable
   (iii) Unprofessional conduct
   (iv) Conflict of interest that arises during the appointment

   In any of the instances above, you will be notified, in writing, of the termination of appointment.

3. External Examiners are required to give the University 3 months’ notice, in writing, of resignation from the appointment should they feel that they are unable to continue their duties as an External Examiner.

5.12 Examination Conventions

1. Aberystwyth University Examination Conventions are published as 4. Examination Conventions.

5.13 FAQs for External Examiners

1. External Examiner Reports and Attendance at Exam Boards – what is the expectation?
External Examiners are required to attend an Examining Board at least once a year and submit written reports both annually and at the end of their period of office.

Undergraduate schemes
External Examiners on undergraduate schemes are required to complete an annual report which should be submitted by email within 4 weeks of the meeting of the final Examining Board in June; attendance at the final degree awarding board in June is expected.

Taught Postgraduate schemes
External Examiners on taught postgraduate schemes are required to complete two reports; an annual report which should be submitted by email within 4 weeks of the meeting of the semester two Examining Board in June, and a short report submitted at the end of the dissertation component of the degree scheme (November/December).

External Examiners on taught postgraduate schemes are formally required by the University to be present at the semester two meeting of the Examining Boards in June. There should be at least one External Examiner present at the final degree awarding board in November/December; this will be determined by the department on a pro-rata basis. Departments may invite other External Examiners to attend the final degree awarding Examining Board in November/December, in addition to the nominated External.

Where an External Examiner on taught postgraduate schemes is required to attend (on a rota basis) the final Examining Board in November/December, in addition to the semester two Examining Board at which attendance is expected, they are required to submit the appropriate sections in the annual report pertaining to the Examining Board.

2. Content of annual report

The content of the annual report should include sufficient commentary to enable departments to implement recommendations, or support the answers that have been provided in the report. Where content is considered incomplete or insufficient the department may ask you to add further commentary.

3. Are the annual reports published?

Annual reports, with departmental responses, will be published on the University’s AberLearn Blackboard site and will be available to registered students at the University. It is therefore important that reference is not made to individual candidates and individual members of staff by name.

4. How is the annual report considered?

On receipt of the annual report the Academic Registry will forward the report to:

- Departments, who should respond to you after their Departmental Board has considered the report;
- Reports and departmental responses are forwarded to Associate Deans who compile a faculty summary;
- Associate Dean summaries are considered by the appropriate faculty committee;
- Faculty minutes are considered by Academic Board.

External Examiners receive a copy of the extract of Faculty and Academic Board minutes relating to the reports. External Examiners may also receive a direct response for the Chair of the Committee should it be necessary.
5. Fees and expenses – how and when are they paid?

Annual fees are detailed in the appointment letter; the Academic Registry will calculate the per capita fee as it will change annually based upon the number of FTE per session.

Fees are settled by bank transfer and subject to PAYE.

Expenses will be paid (subject to submission of original supporting receipts) by bank transfer.

Payment of the annual and per capita FTE fee and expenses are dependent upon receipt of your annual report (at the end of Semester Two) and a completed Expenses Claim Form; you should submit an Expenses Claim Form when you submit your annual report.

For taught postgraduate External Examiners, keep a record of the names of the dissertation candidates examined; a claim form may be submitted at the time a dissertation is examined, or a complete list submitted on a claim form when you submit the short dissertation component report (Nov/Dec).

It will not be possible to process expenses or fee claims if the right to work verification process has not been completed.

6. Is there an induction / training event?

External Examiners are invited to attend a Briefing Day, usually held at the end of November/start of December.

7. Is my right to work in the UK checked?

All External Examiners are checked for their right to work in the UK; this is undertaken at the Briefing Day, or on the first visit to Aberystwyth if unable to attend. External Examiners are asked to scan and email a copy of the approved documentation (this is usually a passport or full birth certificate) as part of the nomination process, and bring the original right to work documentation to this event where the verification process will be completed. If you are unable to attend this event, the process will be completed upon your first visit to the University.

8. How am I granted access to E-Learning resources?

A New Starter Form will be sent with the appointment letter which the External Examiner is asked to complete and return. Upon receipt of the completed New Starter Form, the External Examiner will be added to the University Finance and Information Services systems. An aber user id will be generated which will allow departments to add External Examiners to the relevant modules on AberLearn Blackboard, the portal through which e-submission is undertaken. The aber user id is not a University email account; it is a means of granting the correct levels of access to the Information Services systems.

External Examiners are strongly encouraged to complete the security questions once the account has been activated; this enables you to manage your password yourself 24/7 in the event that you forget it or that your account has been locked. This can be done here: https://myaccount.aber.ac.uk/

9. What information do I receive, and from whom, to enable me to undertake the role?

The Academic Registry provides a link to all appropriate central documentation on Rules and Regulations and Examination Conventions (published within the Academic Quality Handbook) in the appointment letter (we do not post out hard copies although these can be requested).
The Academic Registry provides a copy of the previous external examiner’s annual report with the invitation to the Briefing Day. If it is not available at that time it will be forwarded as soon as it becomes available.

Departments provide subject/departmental specific information, including exam board dates.

10. Are the names of external examiners published?

Departments publish names, roles and home institutions on their departmental staff webpage, and against module/scheme details on the module/scheme database; contact details are not published and students are advised that direct contact with an external examiner is not permitted.

11. Useful links and contact information

Guidance on QA Procedures:  
http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/quality-assurance/

Examination Conventions:  
http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/academic-quality-records-office/exams/exam---conventions/

Completion of security questions - IS account:  
https://myaccount.aber.ac.uk/

Guide for External Examiners who need to review module materials and student submissions to Turnitin:  
Blackboard & Turnitin External Examiners Guide

Information Services: is@aber.ac.uk, 01970 622400

Blackboard Team: bb-team@aber.ac.uk, 01970 622472

Academic Registry: aqrstaff@aber.ac.uk, 01970 622527

Kerry Bertenshaw, Assistant Registrar: kkb@aber.ac.uk, 01970 621886

5.14 Template Forms

- UG & PGT External Examiner Annual Report Form
- Travel and Subsistence Details
- Fee & Expenses Claim Form
- PGT External Examiner Report Form - Dissertation component
- Nomination Form for New External Examiner
- New Starter Form
- Request form for an Extension of Appointment of external examiner
- Faculty summary of external examiners’ reports
- Timeline for receiving and responding to External Examiner reports
- Right to work in the UK – approved documents