Appointment of external examiners

1. Appointment criteria

1.1 The University applies the following UK-wide set of criteria for appointing individuals, drawn from academia, industry, business and the professions, as external examiners. This ensures that only those with appropriate academic standing, examining experience and expertise are appointed to act as external examiners.

The University appoints external examiners who can show appropriate evidence of the following:

i. knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;

ii. competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof;

iii. relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examiners, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate;

iv. competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures;

v. 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;

vi. familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed;

vii. 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 judgement(s);

viii. meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies;

ix. awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula;

x. competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

1.2 It is important that the University should be assured that all criteria have been met when nominations are made. Where there are exceptional circumstances appropriate arguments must be put forward. If a Board of Study is unsure of a nominee's acceptability, the Registry should be consulted in the first instance.
1.3 The University, through careful consideration and approval by SCEEN, may make appropriate use of exceptions and special cases to the full criteria in 3.1.1 when considering:

i. nominees who have considerable professional experience relevant to a professional or vocational programme (from business, industry or the professions);

ii. nominees who have no previous experience as an external examiner for an institution;

iii. nominations for external examiners in disciplines which are very small and specialist and where the pool of potential external examiners is therefore restricted.

Nominees who have professional experience may be unable to fulfil all the criteria in 3.1.1 and appointment would only be approved where appropriate support in relation to academic expectations is provided. Normally the nominee would be appointed as part of an experienced external examining team (i.e. not the sole external examiner for the award and his/her expertise is complemented by that of others who do satisfy the criteria). Schools should provide details on the nomination form.

Where the nominee has no previous experience as an external examiner for any institution, appointment would only be approved where the appointment was made to a team of external examiners and/or with mentoring arrangements (refer guidance on nomination form). Schools should provide details on the nomination form. First-time external examiners would be expected to attend the University’s external examiners’ workshop within their first year of appointment. Where the external examiner is unable to attend, the Course Leader should make alternative arrangements to meet the external examiner and brief him/her.

1.4 The University encourages external examiner nominations to be drawn from a wide variety of institutional/professional contexts and traditions in order that the course benefits from wide-ranging external scrutiny. There should be an appropriate balance and expertise in any team of external examiners whose remit requires them to attend any common examination board, including examining experience, academic and professional practitioners and a range of academic perspectives.

An analysis of external examiner institutional/professional backgrounds is considered annually by SCEEN.

1.5 The University may agree to the appointment of a Chief External Examiner from within a team of approved external examiners. The approval of the appointment of a Chief External Examiner who is to act in this capacity will be subject to the normal criteria and the person will be expected to have subject and/or course responsibilities within the team.
2 Conflicts of interest

2.1 To avoid conflicts of interest and to ensure that external examiners are sufficiently independent to fulfil their role, the University should not appoint as external examiners anyone in the following categories or circumstances:

i. a member of the Board of Governors of the University of Brighton or member of a governing body of one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the appointing institution or one of its collaborative partners;

ii. anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study;

iii. anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study;

iv. anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study;

v. anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme(s) or modules in question;

vi. former staff or students of the institution unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s);

vii. a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution;

viii. the succession of an external examiner by a colleague from the examiner’s home department and institution;

ix. the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution.

2.2 The University uses the criteria in 3.2.1 to ensure that potential conflicts of interest are identified and resolved prior to nomination and appointment or as soon as they arise.

2.3 Former members of validation panels are rarely appropriate as first external examiners for a course, as they are not well placed to comment on course structure and outcomes (having already been part of the process which approved the course). Members of the validation panel should be nominated only in exceptional cases, with a clear statement in the rationale for why it is appropriate in this case.

2.4 Members of staff of the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton’s Partner Institutions have agreed that it would be inappropriate for their members of staff to be used as external examiners for each other’s courses.

Members of staff associated with courses in other institutions and for which the University has primary responsibility for quality assurance may not be appointed as external examiners to the University.
2.5 In order to protect their independence, external examiners should not act as consultants to a course team on course design, or be members of any panel(s) established to review the course(s) they examine during the period of their appointment, although they may be consulted on proposed changes to the existing module(s) or course(s) for which they have responsibility.

2.6 Once appointed, where a potential conflict of interest arises, the external examiner should declare this to the Chair of the Examination Board as soon as possible. Where this cannot be resolved the external examiner should resign their appointment.

3 Terms of office

3.1 The duration of an external examiner’s appointment will normally be for four years, with an exceptional extension of one year to ensure continuity.

A reallocation of duties ie to include further or new modules may also be considered by SCEEN within this term of office.

3.2 An external examiner may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.

3.3 An external examiner should normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes at any point in time.

3.4 External examiners who retire during their period of appointment may normally be permitted to continue at the University provided there is sufficient evidence of continuing involvement in their academic area.