

Taught Course Programmes - External Examiners Policy

Approving committee/person:	Academic Board
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Document owner:	Academic Services - Education Policy and Quality
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Equality Impact Assessment Outcome:	No impact
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Next review date:	31/07/2026

Date	Summary of update	Reviewed by	Minute reference
16 May 2025	Aligning with sector norms by removing the right of external examiners not to endorse final marks. Decision agreed by TCC (and noted by Academic Board as part of approving TCC's minutes, following consultation with the external examiners).	Taught Courses Committee	TCC 12/24/2.4
22 Jul 2024	Changes include reordering the policy and separating it from the operating procedure. Information on external examiner procedures have been moved from the Academic Regulations into this policy to avoid drift and mirror that for other external expertise. Minor	Academic Board	A/7/24/4.4

	changes have been made to take into account title changes within Academic Services, changes made to the way the Annual Monitoring Exercise is presented, and changes in external quality governance. The policy includes the two associated forms (nomination of a new external examiner and external examiner report form).		
25 Apr 2022	Minor changes in wording for better clarity and accuracy and also to bring it into alignment with the QAA Quality Code.	Academic Board	A/4/22/7.4
20 Jul 2020	Minor changes have been made to reflect changes to Academic Services structure, to remove duplication and clarify process, and to identify where a process is Chair of Exam Board or Chair of Academic Board.	Academic Board	A/7/20/7.3
23 Apr 2018	- References specific to the MSc in Oncology to be removed (e.g. "Part A, B and C Guides" to ensure applicability to any future taught courses at ICR). - Reference to the MSc Annual Stakeholders Meeting removed, in line with current practice, and previous agreement at TCC that this was not necessary (TCC 06/17/9). - Minor edits to the procedure for consideration of External Examiner reports to reflect the role of the Academic Governance and Events Manager, and editorial changes for clarity. - A new, clearer flowchart outlining the overall process drafted.	Academic Board	A/4/18/7
28 Jul 2017	Updated to reflect changes in Academic Services personnel and to update reference to regulations	Amy Moore	No minute reference.
16 Jul 2012	Replaces version approved on 3/11/2008, following substantial changes to national guidance on external examiners. Form approved by TCC 15/11/12.	Liz Wickstead	TCC/11/12/10, A/7/12/3(ii),4(iv)

1.Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Context

This document covers taught postgraduate programmes at The Institute of Cancer Research. The ICR is responsible for the quality and standards for taught postgraduate awards made in its name. The purpose of this document is to set out the principles of using External Examiners, and the procedures for their appointment and support, and the procedures for the implementation of the provisions in the ICR Regulations which relate to External Examiners.

1.2 Scope

The ICR believes External Examiners are a key aspect of the system for ensuring that its taught course awards are set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that the role of the External Examiners and the arrangements for their nomination and appointment and for responding to their reports should be clear and comprehensible, and consistent with the national framework.

This policy must be read in conjunction with the Academic Regulations and any changes cross-checked with the Academic Regulations and the Registry Operating Procedure to ensure consistency of approach.

1.3 Roles and responsibilities

Overall responsibility for this procedure is with the Academic Dean but is delegated on a day-to-day basis to the Academic Governance and Quality Manager (AGQM), the Course Directors and the Head of Clinical Taught Courses. The Academic Governance and Quality Manager (AGQM) is responsible for updating the procedure and ensuring that it is used in line with the guidance from the Office for Students (OfS).

The Academic Governance and Quality Manager (AGQM) will maintain a Register of all External Examiners appointed by the ICR, with their dates of office and affiliations. A list of all nominations, including those not resulting in appointment, shall also be retained confidentially.

1.4 Definitions and Glossary

Academic Board (AB)

Academic Governance and Quality Manager (AGQM)

Annual Monitoring Exercise (AME)

Office for Students (OfS)

Taught Courses Committee (TCC)

2. Nomination and Appointment of External Examiners

2.1 In accordance with the OfS Conditions of Registration B1, B4 and B5, the Academic Regulations specify the process for appointing external examiners and that evidence will be sought of a nominee's compliance with the person specification set out below. Should a successful nominee not do so, Academic Board will record the reasons for making the appointment.

2.2 Person specification

The ICR has adopted the person specification set out in the QAA's Quality Code. In approving the person specification Academic Board noted that the ICR's ability to ensure that the best person could be chosen for the job should not be restricted. Applications may proceed if evidence cannot be obtained, or if some aspects of the person specification are not met, and a note of the reasons why the nominee is nonetheless recommended should be included when the decision is put to Academic Board.

2.2.1 An External Examiner will not normally hold more than two External Examinerships in higher education at any level.

2.2.2 An External Examiner shall not normally be drawn from those in the following categories:

- i. a member of a governing body or committee of the ICR or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the ICR 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 course of study;
- iii. anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the course of study;
- iv. anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the course of study;
- v. anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programmes(s) or modules in question;
- vi. former staff or students of the ICR unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the External Examiner have completed their programme(s);
- vii. anyone involved in a reciprocal arrangement involving similar programmes at another institution;
- viii. anyone succeeding an External Examiner who is a colleague from the examiner's home department and institution; or
- ix. staff from the same department of the same institution as an existing appointment, i.e. no more than one External Examiner should be appointed from the same

department of the same institution.

2.2.3 Candidates are required to show appropriate evidence (via the Nomination Form below) that they:

- i. have a high degree of competence and experience in the fields covered by the course of study, or parts thereof, and have a good understanding of the UK higher education sector;
- ii. are appropriately experienced in course design and student assessment at the level of the award;
- iii. have the necessary academic experience and subject knowledge to assess standards in an effective manner, identify good practice and recommend enhancements to enable informed course development;
- iv. are experienced in acting as an external examiner (or are supported by the provider in undertaking their duties, for example, through training and mentoring);
- v. are impartial in judgement and wholly independent of the provider and its staff (including the governing body), and any relevant partners;
- vi. do not personally benefit from any student outcomes, nor have any connection to any student being assessed;
- vii. have had sufficient experience in quality assurance to enable them to discharge their role effectively;
- viii. are drawn from a relevant variety of institutional or professional contexts and traditions in order that the course benefits from wide-ranging external scrutiny;
- ix. comply with all relevant employment legislation, including safeguarding, as appropriate; and
- x. normally hold a limited number of concurrent external examining engagements (for example either one or two).

In addition the ICR also requires that external examiners:

- xi. have relevant academic and / or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and / or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate;
- xii. have 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;
- xiii. have fluency in English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s); and
- xiv. meet applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (where appropriate).

2.2.4 Any conflicts of interest should be noted.

2.3. Appointment length

External examiners are appointed normally for a period of four years (however, an extension of one year may be permitted to ensure continuity).

An External Examiner may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since the end of their last appointment. External Examiners may interrupt their four year appointment for one academic year (for example due to illness or taking sabbatical leave) and return to their examinership without a period of five academic years having elapsed, and without being subject to the formal nomination process again, until they have served for a total of four years.

2.4. Early termination of Appointment

The appointment may be terminated early by either side, subject to due notice being given.

Circumstances in which the ICR may terminate an appointment include, but are not confined to:

- a failure to attend Examination Board meetings;
- a failure to submit reports or the provision of incomplete reports; or
- the emergence of a conflict of interest which cannot be satisfactorily resolved or otherwise acting in breach of these Regulations.

Neither the raising of well-founded concerns, nor the submission of a confidential report to the Chief Executive, shall constitute grounds for termination.

When circumstances arise which are considered as possible grounds for termination of a contract, the Chair of Academic Board will write formally to the examiner to inform them that termination is being considered and to offer the examiner an opportunity to explain the circumstances. The Chair of Academic Board will take the final decision and will notify the examiner and Academic Board in writing of the circumstances of the case, its outcome and the notice period.

An External Examiner who wishes to terminate the appointment early should normally give six months' notice, and this should be included in the letter of appointment.

2.5. Information Provided to External Examiners on appointment

On appointment external examiners are provided with a number of documents (i) the current ICR Strategy (ii) Student Handbook (iii) The ICR's Academic Regulations (iv) the Assessment Policy (v) Module Guides (vi) Marking Criteria and any other documents

deemed appropriate at the time of appointment. The letter should also include a link to the OfS website regarding the Conditions of Registration, and should include HR requirements regarding tax responsibilities and confirmation of right to work in the UK. External Examiners are given read-only access to course material and policies via the VLE and additionally to an Exam Board specific space containing information pertinent to the Board and assessments.

3. Duties of External Examiners

The duties of the taught course external examiners are set out in the letter of appointment and below.

3.1. External examiners are expected to attend both Exam Boards each academic year and have an opportunity to speak freely at these meetings. Where possible, arrangements will be made so that the external examiners will have the opportunity to meet with students, attend student presentations and vivas.

3.1.1. All External Examiners must attend all Examination Boards and familiarise themselves with all the material sent to them on appointment. External Examiners who cannot attend an Examination Board without good reason should normally be asked to resign their examinership. External Examiners are also expected to attend vivas where required.

3.1.2. External Examiners shall have full voting rights at all meetings of Examination Boards of the course on which they are an External Examiner.

3.2. External examiners are required to provide written reports following each Exam Board for consideration at TCC and Academic Board (see below for more details).

3.3 The principal responsibilities of an External Examiner are:

- to ensure the academic standard of the course of study is appropriate to the award concerned;
- that it is consistent with the equivalent (or a similar) programme at the same level elsewhere in UK higher education;
- that the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme; and
- that it is conducted in line with ICR policies and regulations.

3.4 An External Examiner must not assume the responsibilities of an Internal Examiner.

3.5 In carrying out their overall duties, External Examiners shall:

- be consulted on the proposed content of examination papers, coursework and other assessments as far as is practical;
- be given a representative sample of answers to written assessments and will have the right to see all answers to a written assessment;
- review borderline cases;
- consider the overall standards of student performance by reviewing the classification profile of the cohort and comparing it with achievement at other higher education institutions with which they are familiar to ensure consistency;
- act as an advocate to ensure students are treated fairly;
- have an opportunity to provide an oral report at Examination Boards.

3.6. Consultation of External Examiners

External examiners should be consulted on relevant draft new policies and regulations.

Consultation may take place in the Exam Board meetings or the Head of Registry will send them relevant drafts when time permits.

4. Reporting

External Examiner reports are considered fully and seriously by the ICR.

4.1. The ICR requires its External Examiners to submit a report after each Examination Board using the standard form circulated after each board. This form is part of the policy and any amendments to it can be made only with TCC and Academic Board approval. The form recommends assigning high medium and low priority to comments.

4.1.1. Examiners are asked to comment on the Examination Board, Conduct of Examinations, and Academic Standards as well as providing general comments and suggestions for the development of academic practice.

4.1.2. Requests to submit reports (along with a deadline for submission) will be sent to External Examiners after each Examination Board by the AGQM to whom they should be returned by the deadline provided by the AGQM.

4.1.3. Payment of fees/ travel expenses to External Examiners is conditional on the receipt of written reports. On receipt of a copy of the External Examiner reports, the AGQM will contact the finance department and request that the examiner payment is made. The Course Management Team will provide support for claiming travel expenses etc.

4.2. Student representatives on TCC and on Academic Board are informed on election that their remit includes sight of (redacted) external examiners' reports and that they are welcome to comment on these, as on all other business before these committees.

4.3. A copy of the external examiner reports is made available on the VLE following discussion by Academic Board.

4.4. Reports are circulated to the Head of Clinical Taught Courses by the AGQM, who forwards them to the relevant Course Directors and the Chair(s) of the Examination Board for consideration and to implement any immediate actions.

4.5. Consideration of these reports as part of the annual monitoring exercise (AME - as detailed below) should not prevent the earlier adoption of urgent or minor recommended changes.

4.5.1. If the Chair of the Examination Board or Course Directors consider that a serious concern has been raised requiring immediate action they will raise it as a matter of urgency with both Academic Board and TCC members.

4.6. The AGQM provides a summary report to the TCC along with the full reports (as part of the Annual Monitoring Exercise) on the external examiner comments, details of any actions which will be taken, along with any updates to actions taken to implement the agreed recommendations of the previous set of External Examiners' reports. Where it is considered by TCC that no action should be taken, detailed reasons must be provided and recorded in the minutes.

4.7. Additionally, the Head of Clinical Taught Courses maintains a log of actions following Exam Board and the Course Directors comment on the external examiner reports via the AME provided to TCC annually.

4.8. Academic Board considers the summary report along with the relevant section of the TCC minutes and agrees actions to be taken (The full external examiner reports are available for AB on request). Should there be any further recommendations from Academic Board, the relevant extract from Academic Board minutes is sent to any Course Directors who are not members, and to the Head of Clinical Taught Courses, by the AGQM.

4.9. Urgent or minor changes may be implemented immediately with written consent from all affected students.

4.10. Actions requiring either changes to the ICR regulations or changes to assessments should be introduced at the start of the next academic year; progressing students must be informed and agree to these changes.

4.11. Course Directors are responsible for informing module leaders of actions required.

4.12. The TCC should monitor the impact of agreed changes.

4.13. External Examiners will receive a formal written response from the Academic Dean on all of the points they have raised after the report has been considered by the appropriate academic committees (normally following the Academic Board where the reports were discussed). This will summarise comments raised by the Course Directors, TCC and Academic Board and any recommended actions and updates to when action have been taken as a result of external examiner reports. If the ICR has decided that any recommendations from the external examiners will not be taken on board then reasons must be provided.

4.14. External Examiners may raise a concern at any point during the year if they believe it is too urgent to wait for their reports by contacting (in the first instance) the AGQM.

4.15. In addition, if an External Examiner wants to raise a matter of particular importance or sensitivity, they may make a confidential report to the ICR's Academic Dean or Chief Executive . Any such report would then be dealt with as the Chief Executive considers appropriate, and a reply will be sent to the External Examiner within one month informing them what decisions have been made and any actions taken. The Chief Executive or their delegate will inform staff and/or students of the report, or actions arising from it, where these have implications for them.

4.16. Decisions taken on all issues raised in External Examiners' reports, including on systematic failings, by Academic Board or (in the case of a confidential report) by the Chief Executive, are final.

5. Student contact with External Examiners

Students have the opportunity to meet with external examiners as part of exam board (Section 3), and the names and affiliations of external examiners are provided for information in the Student Handbook, However, the contacting of external examiners by students regarding any aspect of their programmes of study is prohibited.

6. Related documents

6.1. External Examiner Nomination Form

Download ( [External Examiner Nomination Form.docx](#))

6.2. External Examiner Report Form

Download ( [External Examiner Report Form.docx](#))

7. Mechanisms for implementation

Following review by TCC and approval by Academic Board, this policy should be sent to the current external examiners and Chair(s) of Exam Board, and published on the external website and the Taught Course VLE. Following changes to this policy the “Registry Procedure for External Examiners - Taught Courses” should be reviewed to ensure that it is kept up to date.

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ICR public website

Royal Marsden website

Royal Marsden Intranet