

Zhejiang University-University of Edinburgh Institute Handbook for External Examiners of Taught Programmes

Purpose of Handbook

The handbook is focussed at the External Examiner and is intended to give a succinct outline of the role, duties and procedures that External Examiners at the Zhejiang University-University of Edinburgh Institute (ZJU-UoE Institute) must follow.

Overview

The handbook is based on the University of Edinburgh Handbook for External Examiners of Taught Programmes, and meets the same expectations as that document. The University of Edinburgh Handbook for External Examiners of Taught Programmes is approved by the University of Edinburgh Quality Assurance Committee. Link to University of Edinburgh handbook: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/externalexaminerhandbook.pdf>

The ZJU-UoE Institute Handbook for External Examiners of Taught Programmes is updated in line with the equivalent University of Edinburgh handbook. Any required changes are approved by the ZJU-UoE Institute Board of Studies. In cases where there is a deviation from the University of Edinburgh handbook, approval must be sought from the University of Edinburgh Quality Assurance Committee.

Scope: Mandatory

The handbook is applicable to all External Examiners appointed to taught programmes or courses at the ZJU-UoE Institute.

Contact Officer ZJU-UoE Institute Academic Administrator

Document control

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15.12.16	September 2016	N/A	June 2017

Section responsible for policy maintenance and review: ZJU-UoE Institute Academic Administrator

Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations

ZJU-UoE Institute Taught Assessment Regulations

ZJU-UoE Institute Board of Examiner Guidance

ZJU-UoE Institute External Examiner Handbook

All relevant regulation, policy and guidance documents can be found on the ZJU-UoE Institute website: <http://zjue.intl.zju.edu.cn/en/policies-regulations>

If you require this document in an alternative format please email: ZJU-UoE Institute Academic Administrator

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Introduction

1. Thank you for agreeing to act as an External Examiner at the ZJU-UoE Institute for the University of Edinburgh. The University of Edinburgh appreciates the commitment that you have shown in agreeing to undertake this role. The University of Edinburgh adheres to the precepts of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B7: External Examining (October 2011), recognising that External Examiners play a vital role in the maintenance of academic standards, and in ensuring rigorous and fair assessment processes.
2. This handbook sets out to provide essential information to External Examiners to allow them to carry out their duties for the University of Edinburgh. It provides information on the role and responsibilities of External Examiners and guidance on administrative and business processes; for example, arrangements for Board of Examiner meetings, submission of reports and payment of fees and expenses.
3. The handbook should be read in conjunction with:
 - The ZJU-UoE Institute Policy for External Examiners of Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes
 - The ZJU-UoE Institute Taught Assessment Regulations

Roles and Key Responsibilities of External Examiners

4. The External Examiner system forms a key part of the University of Edinburgh's quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms. External Examiners help to ensure that degrees awarded by the Universities are comparable in standard to those of other equivalent departments in UK universities, although their content may differ. They also ensure that the assessment process is operated equitably and fairly in respect of the treatment and classification of students, and in line with the Universities' policies and regulations. External Examiners also advise on the quality and enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment. The views and recommendations of the External Examiner at the ZJU-UoE Institute are taken into account when considering student performance in courses that contribute to ZJU degrees.
5. In order to achieve these purposes, External Examiners need to be able to:
 - a) participate in assessment procedures (see related sections 11 and 29); and
 - b) comment and give advice on assessment procedures and standards and jointly agree, as a member of the Board of Examiners, the detailed assessment, award and final degree results.
6. An important requirement of the role is the provision of an annual report based on what the External Examiner has observed of the ZJU-UoE Institute assessment processes and students' assessed work. External Examiners can offer advice on good practice and opportunities to enhance the quality of programmes and/or courses, where appropriate. External Examiners are invited to offer a view of how standards compare with the same or

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similar awards at other Universities of which they have experience. External Examiners are also invited to comment on course content, balance and structure and on degree programme curricula.

7. The College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, Deanery of Biomedical Sciences, or the ZJU-UoE Institute may also choose to invite External Examiners to see and comment on reports and feedback related to curriculum review and quality of educational provision. This may be on an informal basis, or as part of the external advice on review and development of courses and/or programmes.
8. External Examiners may be asked to comment on the wider quality and enhancement aspects of a programme or course, such as its design, curriculum, mode of delivery and assessment methods.
9. External Examiners have the right to see any assessment material pertinent to the role and may comment about any aspect of a course or programme for which they are appointed as an External Examiner.
10. In addition to fulfilling their formal roles, External Examiners are encouraged to make use of opportunities to communicate with the ZJU-UoE Institute informally about the teaching of the course, assessment issues and overall performance of the students.
11. External Examiners will not be asked to assess directly the work of individual students unless this is explicitly stated in the External Examiner's terms of appointment. Where External Examiners are expected to advise on individual cases, the final decision will still be made by the Board of Examiners, with the views of the respective examiners made known to the Board.
12. External Examiners may be required to have oversight of the decision process of the Undergraduate Progression Board. The ZJU-UoE Institute will specify which Course or Programme External Examiner has responsibility for progression decisions and specific Progression Boards. This responsibility is usually exercised by a Programme External Examiner.

Role of Course External Examiners

13. Course External Examiners are appointed to examine an individual course or courses. Course External Examiners are expected:
 - a) to assess and comment on whether the course enables students to achieve the defined learning outcomes and whether the assessment is appropriate in this regard;
 - b) to consider the level of achievement of candidates on the course in relation to standards elsewhere in the sector for the same kind of course within similar degree programmes;

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- c) to review and approve, if appropriate, all examination papers and assessment criteria for the courses examined;¹
- d) to scrutinise a representative sample of all assessed work across each of the courses examined, in order to judge whether the marks are fairly and consistently applied to students across the courses and whether markers are applying the marking scheme consistently and using the full range of marks where justified;
- e) to participate as a member of the relevant Board of Examiner meetings; and
- f) to be satisfied that the business of the Board of Examiners is correctly and robustly carried out, in line with the ZJU-UoE Institute's policies and regulations.

Role of Programme External Examiners

14. Programme External Examiners are appointed to give oversight of a whole programme. Programme External Examiners are expected:

- a) to assess and comment on whether the programme design enables students to achieve the defined learning outcomes for the programme;
- b) affirm that the programme overall meets recognised national standards for the final award;
- c) to consider the application of the scheme of award for classification of honours to ensure this is correctly and fairly applied to all students on the programme;
- d) to participate as a member of the relevant Board of Examiner meetings and to agree jointly, as a member of the Board of Examiners, the decisions of the Board of Examiners;
- e) to be satisfied that the business of the Board of Examiners is correctly and robustly carried out, in line with the ZJU-UoE Institute policies and regulations.

Induction/briefing

15. The appointment will be made by the University of Edinburgh and the appointment letter will be jointly signed by the Dean of Biomedical Sciences and the Dean of Institute. This will include:

- i) a formal letter of appointment and details of the External Examiner contract; and
- ii) guidance on the payment of fees and expenses, including relevant forms and policies.

¹ Exam scripts, exam papers and model answers are the property of the ZJU-UoE Institute. External Examiners are reminded that, on completion of the work, they must be returned to the Institute in the manner advised by the Institute.

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16. The ZJU-UoE Institute will brief External Examiners as appropriate to enable them fulfil their duties. This information will include links to relevant sections of the International Campus General and Supplementary Regulations, course handbooks, programme handbooks, objectives of the courses, curricula and teaching methods, methods of assessment and marking scales or grade schemes, the schedule for aggregation of marks of the various components in the overall assessment, any arrangements for credit on aggregate or reassessment of parts of the programme. The ZJU-UoE Institute must also ensure that the External Examiner is briefed on their oversight role, where they have one, for an Undergraduate Progression Board.

17. At the beginning of the academic session, the ZJU-UoE Institute should provide the following information to the External Examiner:
 - i) information on dates of meetings;
 - ii) details of the Board of Examiner's composition;
 - iii) detailed arrangements for other examining activities such as attendance at orals or practicals;
 - iv) any other material the ZJU-UoE Institute considers necessary for the External Examiner to fulfil their role effectively.

18. The External Examiner will also be provided with web links to:
 - i) the ZJU-UoE Institute External Examiners Handbook;
 - ii) the ZJU-UoE Institute External Examiners for Taught Programmes Policy;
 - iii) the ZJU-UoE Institute Taught Assessment Regulations; and
 - iv) Chapter B7 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

19. External Examiners are expected to have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the ZJU-UoE Institute's requirements for the assessment, examination, and award of undergraduate and/or postgraduate degrees.

Useful Links:

Internal Links:

ZJU-UoE Institute regulations, policies and guidance: <http://zjue.intl.zju.edu.cn/en/policies-regulations>

External Links:

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- UK Quality Code for Higher Education - <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-andquality/the-quality-code>)
- Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework - <http://scqf.org.uk/the-framework/>
- The Higher Education Academy A Handbook for External Examining – https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/HE_Academy_External_Examiners_Handbook_2012.pdf

Terms of appointment

20. The duration of an External Examiner's appointment will be for four years. An exceptional extension of one year may be permitted, if necessary. Where an External Examiner retires from their institution during their four year External Examiner term, their appointment with the University of Edinburgh as an External Examiner will cease at the end of the academic session. An exceptional extension of one year to ensure continuity may be approved.
21. The University of Edinburgh reserves the right to terminate an External Examiner's appointment at any time, for failure of the External Examiner to fulfil their obligations, or if a conflict of interest arises which cannot be satisfactorily resolved.
22. On nomination, the proposed External Examiner has the opportunity to declare any conflict of interest that would compromise their role as an External Examiner, as outlined in the ZJU-UoE Institute External Examiners for Taught Programmes Policy. If a change in an External Examiner's circumstances during the term of appointment gives rise to any conflicts of interest, the External Examiner may need to resign or the contract may need to be terminated unless the conflict of interest can be resolved. The External Examiner must keep the ZJU-UoE Institute informed of any changes in circumstances that may give rise to a conflict of interest so that appropriate action can be taken.
23. The External Examiner must keep the ZJU-UoE Institute informed of any changes in contact details.
24. In view of the time commitment required to fulfil the duties of an External Examiner, it is recommended that an individual should hold no more than one other External Examiner appointment for taught programmes during the period of employment as an External Examiner at the ZJU-UoE Institute.

Details of External Examiners

25. The ZJU-UoE Institute will publish the names, positions and institutions of External Examiners in the relevant course/programme handbook, which will be made available to students. This information will also be made available to relevant staff in the University of Edinburgh and Zhejiang University, and, where relevant, to external bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency. Where an External Examiner is appointed to fulfil a role on behalf of a professional body, this will be stated. The ZJU-UoE Institute informs students that they must not make direct contact with External Examiners, and that other routes exist for queries about the assessment process. Should a student make an attempt to contact

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an External Examiner, the External Examiner should report the details immediately to the University of Edinburgh through the relevant ZJU-UoE Institute contact.

Participation in Assessment and Examination Procedures

26. External Examiners are full members of the Board(s) of Examiners. All External Examiners have the right to attend meetings of all relevant Boards of Examiners.
27. In order to be quorate, at least one External Examiner must participate in and approve the decisions of the Board of Examiners.
28. External Examiners should attend all Board of Examiners meetings relevant to their appointment. If an External Examiner is not able to attend at least one Board of Examiners meeting in a year, their non-attendance must be approved by the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine. If an External Examiner cannot attend a scheduled Board of Examiners meeting due to illness, travel disruption or similar unavoidable events, he or she should contact the ZJU-UoE Institute as soon as possible. Special arrangements can be put in place when an External Examiner cannot attend a meeting at which external participation is required, which may include, where practically possible, participation by live video link or telephone. Advice will be provided by the ZJU-UoE Institute contact.
29. The External Examiner's role is primarily that of a moderator of the assessment process. In some disciplines, an External Examiner may need to directly assess students in some parts of the assessment (e.g. orals) and this should be explicitly stated in the External Examiner's contract. In all other cases, the External Examiner must never be asked to directly mark/grade or otherwise assess the work of individual students.
30. External Examiner(s) must review and approve draft examination papers. Draft examination papers should be accompanied by model answers or solutions and the marking schemes to be applied.
31. The ZJU-UoE Institute will provide External Examiners with a sample of summative examination scripts or student coursework to review. Where necessary, further information on material for review will be provided by the ZJU-UoE Institute.
32. Examinations that contain practical, oral or performance elements are invigilated by members of academic staff and may be conducted jointly with an External Examiner.
33. External Examiners should have the same amount of involvement in both the content and process of practical examinations as they have for written papers and coursework.
34. External Examiners may be required to have oversight of the decision process of the Undergraduate Progression Board. This oversight may be done remotely; the External Examiner does not need to be physically present. The purpose of the External Examiner is to confirm that the process has been carried out appropriately: the External Examiner

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does not need to approve individual progression decisions as the academic standards and level of the student's course results will have been approved by an External Examiner as part of the Board of Examiners decision. The ZJU-UoE Institute will provide information on progression procedures and relevant information for the External Examiner to fulfil their role.

Further information about the operation of the Board of Examiners can be found in the ZJU-UoE Institute's Taught Assessment Regulations and the ZJU-UoE Institute Undergraduate Progression Boards Policy

Reports

35. An important feature of the external examining process is the submission of an annual External Examiner report. These reports provide invaluable independent feedback to the ZJU-UoE Institute and the University of Edinburgh at programme and course level, and sometimes also at the institutional level.

The College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine and the University of Edinburgh's Senatus Quality Assurance Committee use information from External Examiner reports to identify common themes in order to help shape their strategic approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement.

36. External Examiner reports must be submitted using the University of Edinburgh External Examiner reporting system.
37. External Examiners are expected to provide informative comment on:
 - i) academic standards;
 - ii) quality assurance and quality enhancement; and
 - iii) teaching, course structures and course content.
38. All External Examiners must submit their External Examiner Report for undergraduate programmes by the 31st July.
39. The ZJU-UoE Institute and the Deanery of Biomedical Sciences at the University of Edinburgh will give careful consideration to External Examiner reports. External Examiners will receive a response from the member of the University of Edinburgh designated to perform this role. This response will outline whether action will be taken in response to comments made or provide reasons for not taking action.
40. In accordance with QAA guidelines, the ZJU-UoE Institute will make External Examiner reports available to students on request.

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41. As part of students' involvement in quality processes, the ZJU-UoE Institute will give student representatives the opportunity to be involved in the consideration of the general themes extracted from External Examiner reports, including the Institute's response.

Serious Cause for Concern

44. External Examiners have the right to raise any matter of serious concern with the University of Edinburgh Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance. Such matters should be raised by means of a separate confidential written report sent directly to the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance who will respond in writing outlining any actions to be taken as a result.
45. Where an External Examiner has a serious concern relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme or programmes and has exhausted all procedures internal to the University of Edinburgh, including the submission of a confidential report to the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance, they may invoke the QAA's concerns scheme or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.

Data Protection

46. The business of Board of Examiners Meetings may include confidential information.
47. External Examiners are expressly asked not to identify students or staff by name in their reports. It should be noted that even if a student is not named it may be possible to identify the student, for e.g. via a student's exam number or matriculation number. The University of Edinburgh Records Management Section guidance is available at: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schoolsdepartments/records-management-section/data-protection/guidance-policies/examinersminutes>.

Freedom of Information

48. External Examiner reports and any correspondence engaged in by the External Examiner in connection with their External Examiner duties are disclosable in line with the University of Edinburgh's freedom of information obligations.
49. The University of Edinburgh will consider requests for the disclosure of any restricted reports made directly, and separately, to the Head of College or the Assistant Principal, Academic Standards and Quality Assurance on a case-by-case basis in line with the University of Edinburgh's freedom of information obligations.

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