

External Assessor Guidance Notes

1. Introduction

The QAA Quality Code places considerable emphasis on externality in ensuring Quality and Standards.

'Higher Education providers make use of reference points and expertise from outside the programme in programme design and in their processes for programme development and approval'. [Chapter B1: Programme design, Development and Approval – Indicator 5].

'Higher Education providers make use of reference points and draw on expertise from those outside the programme in their processes for programme monitoring and review.' [Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review – Indicator 6]

2. Background to the partnership

Lancaster has been in partnership with Blackpool and the Fylde College and Blackburn College for over 20 years, validating a range of HE programmes leading to Lancaster University degree awards, and since that time the range and volume of provision validated by Lancaster has grown significantly.

The University's approach to its collaborative teaching partnerships is underpinned by a commitment to help partners build their own capacity to manage quality and standards effectively. The Colleges take a leading role in programme and module design and annual review of teaching. As the degree awarding body, however, the University continues to review and monitor the provision through core quality assurance procedures. Through the process of validation and revalidation of programmes, the University is able to:

- secure the academic standards of those awards and qualifications made in its name by the Colleges, and
- assure the quality of the learning opportunities available to students studying on those programmes leading to an award of the University.

The University seeks, through these procedures, to secure equivalence with its own awards and qualifications.

3. General information about Revalidation/Validation Panels

External Assessors form part of the revalidation or validation panel for Lancaster validated programmes at the Regional Partners. Each validation or revalidation panel consists of: the Chair who is usually an experienced member of Lancaster staff (but not necessarily an expert in the subject under consideration); one Lancaster University Subject Specialist who provides defined subject expertise and considers the programme in comparison with Lancaster University standards; an Academic Quality Standards and Conduct representative who provides guidance on procedures and regulations; and an External Assessor who offers independence and objectivity to the decisions taken and provides a basis for comparability of academic standards with external benchmarks and across the higher education sector. The University will determine

membership of the panel, with the responsibility for approaching and appointing External Assessors for each revalidation and validation event at the Regional Partners resting with the Academic Quality Standards and Conduct team. The panel's task is to consider the programme proposal and make a recommendation to the University on the revalidation or validation of the programme(s), including the setting of conditions where appropriate. The final decision regarding programme approval and the sign off of any conditions lies with the Lancaster panel members.

4. Criteria for Appointment

The following criteria will apply for the appointment of external assessors.

External Assessors will:

- 1) hold an academic or professional post of an appropriate level of seniority and/or have extensive practitioner experience where appropriate;
- 2) have knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
- 3) have expertise and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof;
- 4) have relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being considered;
- 5) have sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline;
- 6) have awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula;
- 7) have experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

External Assessors must be completely independent from the College and the University. External Assessors bring their professional expertise to the revalidation/validation process and provide an external benchmark with the wider higher education sector. They are a valuable asset to the University in assuring that the programmes it validates are academically coherent and relevant to the needs of employers.

The descriptions below provide a general outline of the role of the External Assessor.

As a member of the panel, the External Assessor will be expected to:

- 1) provide guidance on the curriculum and other subject-related issues in relation to the wider higher education sector;
- 2) offer independent and objectivity to the decisions taken and provide a basis for comparability of academic standards across the higher education sector;
- 3) offer judgements on the setting and maintaining of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities in the context of the FHEQ, subject benchmarks and other associated elements of the UK Quality Code;
- 4) advise, where appropriate, on whether proper consideration has been given to the requirements and regulations of professional and statutory bodies;
- 5) comment on the ability of the programme to provide a relevant and effective experience in the context of preparation for vocational or professional practice;
- 6) make recommendations to the Panel on syllabi, learning and teaching strategy, learning outcomes and assessment in the context of relevance to current professional and

- employment practices, developments in academic research in the wider higher education sector;
- 7) contribute to the decision on the approval of the proposed programme, the setting of conditions;
 - 8) comment on the response to those conditions as appropriate.

In order to do this, the External Assessor will be required to:

- 1) provide subject and/or teaching learning and assessment expertise during the validation or revalidation process for the programme being considered;
- 2) read documentation relating to the validation or revalidation of the relevant programme prior to the validation or revalidation event;
- 3) attend the validation or revalidation event for the programme and provide input into the discussions on programme content, assessment arrangements, professional requirements (if the award is seeking professional accreditation) and practical requirements (particularly for Foundation Degrees);

6. Payment and expenses

Payment is made through the University payroll and the amounts paid are subject to tax and National Insurance contributions. The external assessor fee is £450.

Travel and Expenses

External Assessors can claim travel and expenses by liaising with Rebecca Hogan, contact details below. The expense claims must be made in line with the Expenses Manual available on the Lancaster University website.

We ask that you please send completed expenses forms in duplicate, with receipts, parking or rail tickets, to:

Academic Standards and Quality
C Floor, University House
Lancaster University
Lancaster, UK
LA1 4YW

7. Contacts

Any queries regarding the external assessor role should be directed to:

Rebecca Hogan

r.hogan@lancaster.ac.uk
