Handbook on the policy and procedures for the external examining of taught courses

Academic Quality and
Partnerships Office

2024/25

Section F: Procedures for the acknowledgement and circulation of External Examiners' reports

INTRODUCTION, FOREWORD AND SUMMARY GUIDANCE

This document sets out the University's policy and procedures for the external examining of taught courses (including partnership provision) and is published by the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office (AQP), University of Sussex. The handbook is updated regularly to take account of the requirements and guidance published by the QAA in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education for External Expertise and related national policy.

External Examiners are one of the principle means by which we uphold our academic standards at the University of Sussex.

In line with the key principles of transparency, consistency and independence in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education on External Expertise, our processes promote.

> Transparency – we will publish your report for current students and staff and intend to make this available to prospective students
> Consistency – a standard process for moderation

SECTION A: DUTIES AND POWERS OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

1. Duties of External Examiners

Duties fall into two categories:

- core duties (shared by External Examiners for all taught courses);
- discipline/appointment-specific duties.

1.1 *Core duties*

The core duties of External Examiners are:

(a) To report on whether the **standards set are appropriate for the University's awards**, or award elements, by reference to published national subject benchmarks, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, course specifications and other relevant information. Faculties/Partner institutions should agree with their External Examiners how their judgements are expected to relate to these agreed reference points and this should be **explicitly documented** as part of the material sent to External Examiners by Faculties/Partner institutions.

(b) To report on the **standards of student performance** in courses or parts of courses which they have been appointed to examine, and on the comparability of the standards with those of similar courses or parts of courses in other UK higher education institutions.

(c) To report on the extent to which **processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards** are rigorous, ensure equity of treatment for students and have been fairly conducted in accordance with the University regulations and policies, as demonstrated by reviewing a sample of assessed work.

(d) To report whether the **assessment processes** measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended learning outcomes and enable students to demonstrate the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

(e) To report on the appropriateness of the published **marking criteria**.

(f) To scrutinise and approve draft examination papers and assessment tasks for essays/large weighted assessments. External Examiner will be advised of the Faculty's marking strategy.

(g) To confirm tha9Ws5rTfra526.9 Tm/F2 12 Tf1 0 0 1 230.85 237.08 Tm0 g0 G 0

appropriate, based on the sample of assessments reviewed for the cohort;

3.2 not confirm that the outcome of the marking and internal moderation processes are appropriate, based on the sample of assessments reviewed for the cohort. In this case the External Examiner may request a second sample for scrutiny or refer back for a full or partial remark for the whole cohort;

3.3 request and obtain reasonable access to assessed parts of any course taken within the academic year, including evidence about a student's performance on a placement.

In addition, External Examiners:

3.4 may comment on the method for selecting a sample of students' work for external scrutiny taking account of the need to provide a representative sample covering the full range of marking bands (NB: for e-submission assessments the sample is automatically generated in line with the regulations);

3.5 should

SECTION B: PROCEDURES FOR THE NOMINATION AND APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

6. Nomination of External Examiners

The procedures for the nomination of External Examiners include:

- consultation within Faculties/Partner Institutions
- discussion with the proposed External Examiner to ensure that the nature and extent of the role is understood;
- scrutiny of nominations by the Faculty Education Committee (for courses provided by the University);
- approval of nominations by the Chair of University Education Committee (UEC) on behalf of Senate.

7. Procedures for the nomination of External Examiners

7.1 *Completion of a nomination form and consultation within the Faculty/Partner Institution*

The Academic Quality and Partnerships Office (AQP) will routinely inform the Chair of the Board of Study, Director of Teaching and Learning (and the relevant Curriculum and Assessment Officers) of the nominations needed for the forthcoming year. All External Examiner appointments should be made before the start of the acaTf1 0 0 1.6(mi)-6(c)-34((a)-y6(a)-6(rn)1((a)-y6513(a)-

A completed and signed nomination form, together with a supporting CV, **which makes explicit both the nominee's discipline expertise and their experience in assessment matters,** should be returned to the following:

- In the case of courses provided at the University: The relevant Curriculum and Assessment Officer, who will put forward the proposal to the Faculty Education Committee (FEC) for consideration. If endorsed by the FEC, the Curriculum and Assessment Officer will forward the form to the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office for consideration by the Chair of UEC. If unsuccessful, the nomination will be returned to the originating officer for revision or for a new nomination, if appropriate.

- In the case of courses provided at a Partner Institution: The AQP Office will forward the form for approval by the Chair of UEC. If unsuccessful, the nomination will be returned to the originating officer for revision or for a new nomination, if appropriate.

7.2 *Scrutiny and processing of the nomination*

The processing of a nomination has four stages:

a) *Role of the Curriculum and Assessment Officers/AQP Office:*

Nomination forms are returned to the relevant Curriculum and Assessment Officers for courses provided by the University or to the AQP Office (Partnership) (in the case of validated courses at partner institutions), who will:

- check that the form is complete and that all the criteria[1] are met. Where necessary the form will be returned to the person who made the recommendation. The AQP Office may be consulted for guidance.

- prepare the nomination for consideration by Faculty Education Committee (for courses provided by the University) for subsequent recommendation to the Chair of the University Education Committee;

- inform the AQP Office and proponents of the outcome of the Faculty Education Committee scrutiny by forwarding a signed nomination form with CV to the AQP Office following consideration by the Faculty Education Committee.

[1] Criteria for the appointment of external examiners are given in Section C

b) *Role of Faculty Education Committees*

Nomination forms with accompanying CVs will be scrutinised by the relevant committee in order to make recommendations to the Chair of the University Education Committee. It is expected that these committees will particularly focus on the experience and expertise of nominees in relation to assessment matters, research links and possible conflicts of interest, including avoiding reciprocal External Examiner arrangements.

c) *Role of the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office*

The AQP Office will:

- produce a consolidated list of existing External Examiners for taught courses/modules. The consolidated list will enable the University to maintain an overview of the home institutions of External Examiners for a Faculty when considering a new nominee.

- forward nominations recommended by Faculty Education Committees to the Chair of UEC for consideration.

- Notify relevant officers (Director of Teaching and Learning, Chair of the Board of Study and Curriculum and Assessment Officer) of the outcome of consideration by the Chair of UEC.

- Issue the letter of appointment. This will include details of the course/s the External Examiner has been appointed to; period of appointment which states the start and finish date and information regarding the requirement to provide proof of eligibility to work in the UK. (Section D provides a list of materials that will be sent by the University and the Faculty).

d) *Chair of University Education Committee*

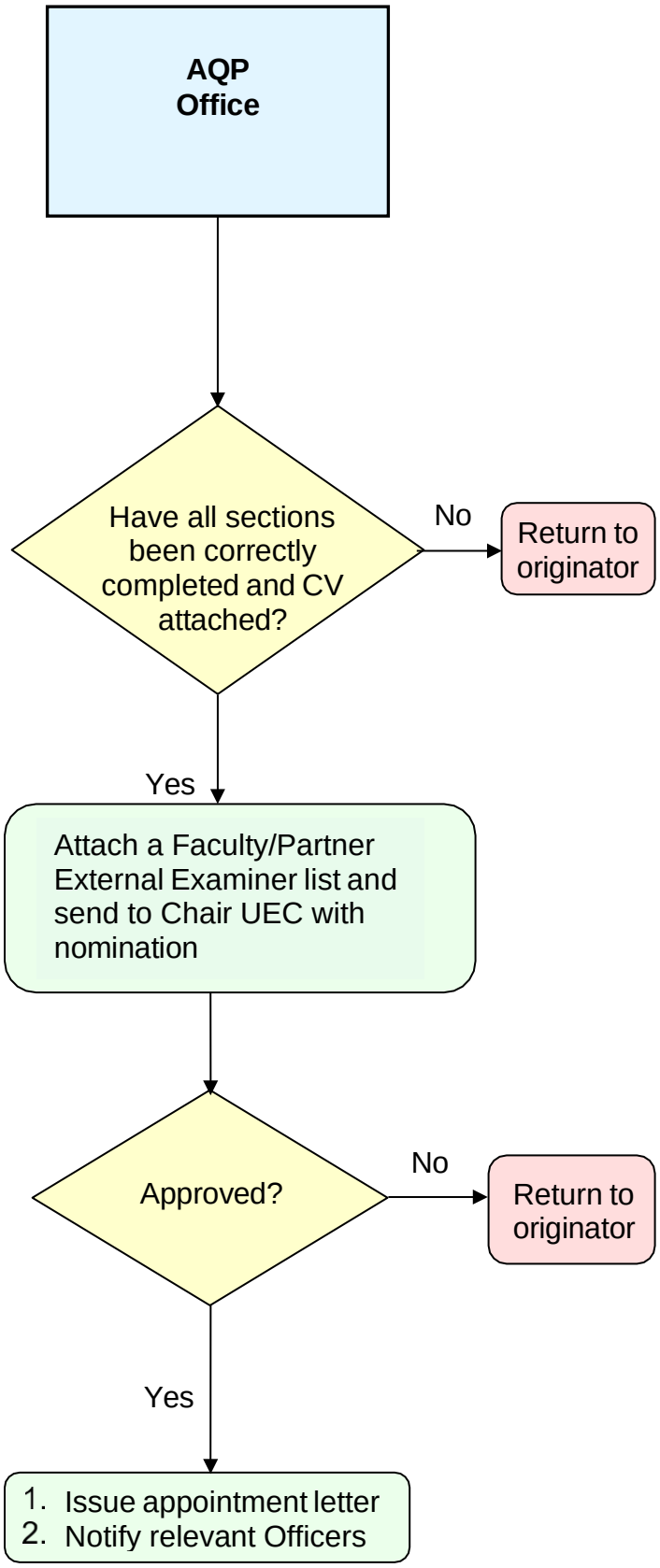
The Chair of University Education Committee scrutinises the recommended nominations in the context of the existing approved appointments and any other relevant recommendations and approves (or otherwise) the appointment. If approved, the signed nomination form is returned to the AQP Office and an appointment letter issued. If rejected, the Faculty or Partner institution will be informed of the reasons and requested to bring forward an alternative nomination or provide further information.

a) Flowchart for role of the Curriculum and Assessment Officers/AQP Office (Partnership)

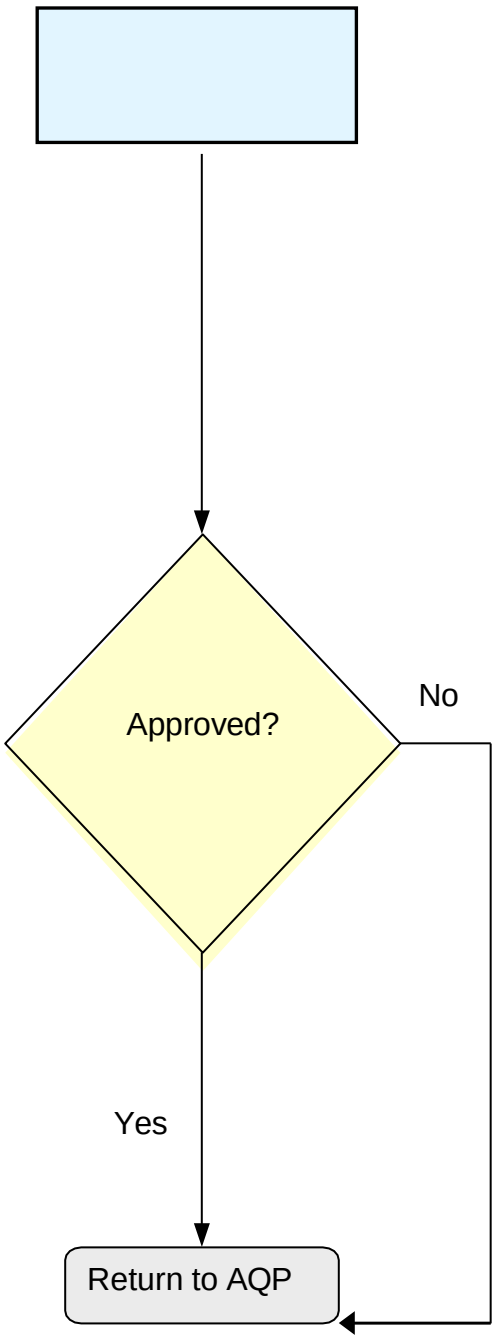
b)

1

Send to AQP Office



d) Flowchart for role of Chair of University Education Committee



SECTION C: CRITERIA FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

13. Policy on the criteria for the appointment of External Examiners

The principles underpinning the **criteria** for the appointment of External Examiners:

require that External Examiners have knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;

require that External Examiners are sufficiently qualified and have sufficient expertise and experience in discipline-specific and assessment matters and in course design;

Have relevant subject expertise in the fields covered by the course. This may be indicated by: the present (or last, if retired) post and place of work; the range and scope of experience across HE or the professions; current and recent active involvement in research/scholarly/professional activities in the field of study concerned.

Relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification to be externally examined and knowledge of Professional and/or Statutory Body (PSRB) requirements where relevant

support the exercise of objective, impartial and independent judgements about awards made by the University;

avoid arrangements which resBDC q0.0000eavo

An External Examiner should

- course leading to a named award, such that there is appropriate expertise to inform decision-making at the PAB.

- module delivered at Level 5 or above. An External Examiner must be assigned at module level – the Faculty or Partner Institution ensure that all modules are assigned before moderation takes place.

- validated course at partner institutions.

15.13 The University does not currently publish criteria for the relationship between the number of External Examiners and the quantity of assessed material being scrutinised. It is the responsibility of the

SECTION D: THE INDUCTION OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

16. Materials to be sent to the External Examiner

In addition to the appointment letter setting out contractual arrangements, External Examiners should receive the following information (some material may be provided by URLs):

16.1 *Materials sent to External Examiners by the AQP Office:*

- Handbook on the policy and procedures for external examining of taught courses
- Examination and Assessment Regulations
- Teaching and Learning Strategy (currently being revised)
- Summary and Analysis of External Examiner Reports (Institutional issues identified by the University including agreed actions)
- Schedule of UG/PG PAB dates and proposed timescale for external moderation.

Material is also available on:

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/standards/externalexaminers

In the case of validated courses at partner institutions, the AQP Office will send the Handbook on the policy and procedures for external examining of taught courses and will request that the partner institution sends a copy of their own examinations and assessment regulations.

16.2 *Materials sent to the External Examiner by the Faculty/Department/Partner Institution at the start of the appointment or start of the year (where*

16.3 *Materials sent to External Examiners at the point of moderation*:

- Assessment task
- Access to the full marks register for the cohort
- Module marks statistics
- A moderation form containing the internal moderator's comments about the sample of assessments reviewed as part of internal moderation.

16.4 *Related policy information*

The following information can be accessed via the web. External Examiners are requested to acquaint themselves with University policy in these areas:

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/equalities/

17. Induction

New and continuing External Examiners will be invited to a centrally-organised induction session annually. External examiners will also receive an induction from the faculty, setting out what to expect, when they will receive samples for moderation and what modules they will be assigned to. The induction within the faculty will also cover best point of contact and accessing Sussex resources i.e., Canvas and Sussex Direct.

The materials indicated in 16.1 and 16.2 above form part of the induction. New External Examiners should also have the opportunity to meet the Faculty/Department/Partner Institution staff prior to the first formal visit.

17.1 *Induction of External Examiners with little or no previoureW*nBT/F2 12 Tf1 0 0 1 108.0*

17.3 *Significance of an External signature on the statement of compliance at the PAB*

As part of their induction process, Faculties/Partner Institutions are asked to draw External Examiners' attention to the following points:

- the signature of an External Examiner on the statement of compliance (Appendix 4) indicates the External Examiner's endorsement of the outcomes of the assessment process and the PAB.

- once a statement of compliance has been signed by an External Examiner at a PAB those outcomes represent the final decision of the PAB and will not normally be reconsidered except in the case of a decision by a virtual PAB, the discovery of factual errors or an appeal.

SECTION E: CONTENT AND FORMAT OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS REPORTS

18. Annual reports

External Examiners are required to submit an annual External Examiner report to the University within 6 weeks of the exam board. Generic issues of concern and areas of good practice will be considered as part of the University's Annual Course Review. If you are coming to the end of your appointment, we do ask for an overview of your term of office in your final report. This is valuable both to the institution but also the incoming External Examiner. External Examiners are asked to complete the University's standard report form. The link below provides a web page with the fully formatted form:

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/standards/externalexaminers

Each report should be submitted

Reports which are incomplete or not in the correct format may be returned to the External Examiner by the AQP Office for amendment and completion. All External Examiner reports should be completed in sufficient detail to fulfil their role in safeguarding the standards and quality of provision.

External Examiners are asked to complete a statement of compliance which acts as

iv) If the AQP Office does not receive the report in time for the Annual Course Review the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education and Students) may consider terminating the contract

v) The payment of External Examiner fees will be initiated by the AQP office upon receipt of a report, after which the authorising body will be asked to review and confirm the payment. We will endeavour to pass payments through the approval process as efficiently as possible. The AQP Office will notify the External Examiner of the final deadline.

vi) Fees will not be payable for reports that have been delayed beyond usefulness, i.e. after the Annual Course Review has taken place. It is important to note that travel expenses will always be paid by the University on submission of an expense claim form.

21.4 Guidance for Faculty Education Committees

The following guidance is intended for all members and officers of Faculty Education Committees:

1. Committee secretaries will include the reports within the formal circulation to committee members.

2. The External Examiner provides assurance to the University on the standards and quality of the teaching, learning and assessment processes at the University. In addition, the External Examiner confirms that the assessment and moderation processes have been conducted consistently and appropriately in accordance with the University's regulations and policies.

3. The External Examiner's report is intended as a tool to assist the University in identifying strengths and weaknesses in provision and a key purpose of the report is to encourage the External Examiner to act as a critical friend to the course. It is therefore to be expected, and is an essential part of the process that External Examiners raise queries and concerns related to courses or modules and make proposals to better manage assessments going forwards.

4. The University publishes the full report (or extract of) to the current students and staff and External Examiners should therefore not identify individuals directly or indirectly. In addition, the University intends to publish reports to prospective students and the public.

SECTION G: PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

22. Procedures for taught courses provided at the University

22.1 All External Examiners' reports are subject to detailed scrutiny by the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office. AQP will draw to the attention of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) individual reports where there is evidence of good practice, or where there are matters of particular significance or concern. Reports falling into the latter category are raised directly with the relevant Faculty or support unit to ensure appropriate action is being taken. In addition to this, the Pro Vice-Chancellor has access to all External Examiner reports at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

22.2 Chairs of Board of Studies, Chairs of Module Assessment Boards and Progression and Award Boards should discuss issues raised in the External Examiners' reports. Every effort should be made to engage with elected student representatives when reviewing these reports within the formal committee structures. The Director of Teaching and Learning should ensure that an action plan is prepared for the Faculty Education Committee that addresses each issue and that where no action is proposed a clear reason must be given for that recommendation. The External Examiners' report(s) and the proposed action plan should:

a) be considered by the Board of Study/department meeting where relevant, and

b) be submitted to the Faculty Education Committee (FEC) in Semester 1 (undergraduate provision) or Semester 2 (postgraduate provision).

22.3 The FEC will consider the External Examiner's reports and associated action plans and either approve the action plan or ask for further action to be taken. The FEC will also monitor actions taken in the previous year and ensure that

22.7 The AQP Office will send the summary report with agreed actions to all External Examiners on behalf of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students).

23. Procedures for taught courses provided at partner institutions

23.1 All External Examiner reports are subject to detailed scrutiny by the AQP Office (Partnership). The AQP Office (Partnership) will draw to the attention of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) individual reports where there is evidence of good practice or where there are matters of particular significance or concern. Reports falling into the latter category are raised directly with the relevant partner institution to ensure that appropriate action is being taken. In addition to this, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor has access to all External Examiner reports.

23.2 The relevant partner institution's officers should discuss issues raised in the External Examiner's report and prepare an action plan which addresses each issue; where no action is proposed, a clear reason must be given for that recommendation. The External Examiner's report and

make a written statement regarding the allegation. The investigator will provide the Hearing Manager with a report of their findings, and the Hearing Manager will then assess the case and outline the next steps. The possible outcomes of any investigation of External Examiner misconduct are as follows:

- No case to answer
- Withdrawal of any further offers of work

28. Misuse of data

As External Examiner a sample of student work will be made available to you. This material is confidential and is made available for the express purpose of carrying out your duties as an external examiner. The University acts as a Data Controller when University of Sussex appointed external examiners process personal data for students while carrying out their duties. Under data protection legislation the University is required to process personal data for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and ensure the data is not further processed in a manner that is incompatible with those purposes. This is the 'purpose limitation' principle. Using information, you are privy to in your role as external examiner for an unrelated action that is not compatible with the original purpose (i.e., external examining) is not an appropriate use of personal data.

SECTION I: ELECTRONIC INFORMATION AND CONTACT ADDRESSES

29. All centrally produced information, including report forms, expenses forms and handbooks, can be found on the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office (AQP) web pages at:

Appendix 3 - The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree- Awarding Bodies (October 2014)

Extracts from 4 - The qualification descriptors

meet the descriptor in part. Paragraphs 4.10-4.18.6 provide further information about the qualification descriptor for each level of the framework. They explain which qualifications meet the descriptor

a reference point for other qualifications at level 5 of the FHEQ, including Diplomas of Higher Education, Higher National Diplomas, etc.

Foundation degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed

a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline

an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline

conceptual understanding that enables the student:

- to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline
- to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent

material, and taken usually by those who are already graduates in another discipline, leading to, for example, graduate certificates or graduate diplomas.

4.17 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 7 on the FHEQ and

sound judgement, personal responsibility and initiative in complex and unpredictable professional environments.

4.17.2 Master's degrees are awarded after completion of taught courses, programmes of research or a mixture of both. Longer, research-based programmes may lead to the degree of MPhil. The learning outcomes of most master's degree courses are achieved on the basis of study equivalent to at least one full-time calendar year and are taken by graduates with a bachelor's degree with honours (or equivalent achievement).

4.17.3 Master's degrees are often distinguished from other qualifications at this framework level (for example, advanced short courses, which often form parts of continuing professional development programmes and lead to postgraduate certificates and/or postgraduate diplomas) by an increased intensity, complexity and density of study. Master's degrees, in comparison to postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas, typically include planned intellectual progression that often includes a synoptic/research or scholarly activity.

4.17.4 Some master's degrees, for example, in science, engineering and mathematics, comprise an integrated programme of study spanning several levels. Such programmes typically involve study equivalent to at least four full-time academic years in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and five in Scotland. Of this, study equivalent to at least one full-time academic year is at level 7 of the FHEQ/SCQF level 11 on the FQHEIS and the final outcomes of the qualifications themselves meet the expectations of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 7/level 11 in full. Study at bachelor's level is integrated with study at master's level and the programmes are designed to meet the qualification descriptors in full at level 6 of the FHEQ/SCQF level 10 on the FQHEIS as well as those at level 7 of the FHEQ/level 11 of the FQHEIS. Such qualifications are often termed 'integrated master's' as an acknowledgement of the prior period of study at lower levels (which typically meets the expectations of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 6/level 10).

THE UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Appendix 4 – Statement of Compliance

External Examiners are asked to complete this checklist stating whether or not the relevant examination and assessment procedures and policies have been adhered to in a satisfactory manner. External Examiners are reminded that a report must be completed in addition to completing this statement of compliance and that the report will be made available to students. The statement of compliance is for internal use only.

Course materials

Did you receive:

a)	Course handbook(s)?	Yes / No
b)	Exam and assessment regulations?	Yes / No
c)	Module descriptions (these may be in the course handbook)?	Yes / No
d)	Assessment schedule/marking criteria?	Yes / No

Draft examination papers

a)	Did you receive all the draft papers?	Yes / No
	If not, was this at your request?	Yes / No
b)	Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate?	Yes / No
	If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?	Yes / No

Marking examination scripts

a)	Did you receive a sufficient number of scripts?	Yes / No
	If you did not receive all the scripts, was the method of selection satisfactory?	Yes / No
b)	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?	Yes / No
c)	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?	Yes / No

Dissertations/project reports

a) Was the cho0.65 368.re473.525 373.38 0.5 0.5 rem3 reW*nBT/F2 1088 4e31 0 1 491.7 495

Appendix 5

Key dates for External Examiners 204/25

Please note, dates are to be confirmed by Faculties, the below institutional deadlines are for guidance as internal processing dates may be earlier.

MAB: Module Assessment Board – External Examiners may be consulted, not required to attend

PAB: Progression and Award Board – External Examiner attendance required

ZJSU: Zhejiang Gongshang/ Sussex University partnership

DL: Online Distance Learning modules and courses

Refer also Term dates