External Examiners Policy

External Examiners Policy
Sponsor: Vice-Rector (Academic)
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Version	Date Approved	Author / Owner Approving Authority	Summary of Changes	Next Review Date
1.0	February 2026	Vice-Rector	Initial release	February 2027
2.0	August 2026	Vice-Rector (Academic)	Governance terminology updated (3.4/7.3/9.3/10.1/13/14.1/14.2)) Eligibility restriction reduced from 5 to 3 years (4.1) Responsibilities roles update (9.2/13.7) Approval body terminology updated (15.5)	February 2027

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1. Introduction

1.1 External Examiners play a crucial role in the quality assurance of courses. One or more External Examiners will be appointed to any provision that leads to an MLA College award.

1.2 This is based upon the expectation placed upon UK higher education providers to 'make scrupulous use of external examiners' in assuring academic standards and the associated 'Indicators of sound practice' identified in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

1.3 For the purpose of this policy, the term 'External Examiner' should be taken to mean a suitably qualified individual from an organisation external to MLA College who is not otherwise engaged in work for the College or any voluntary advisory capacity within its structures.

1.4 This policy sets out minimum standard practice. The College must also ensure that any additional requirements specified by any appropriate Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies are met.

2. Purpose and Scope

2.1 External Examiners are appointed to provide impartial and independent advice to help ensure:

- that the College is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements, and that the standards of student performance are properly judged against this;
- that the assessment process measures student achievement against intended learning outcomes, and is rigorous, fairly operated, and in line with College policies and regulations;
- that the assessment process is fair and is fairly operated in the marking, grading and classification of student performance, and that decisions are made in accordance with College regulations;
- that the College is able to compare the standard of awards with those in other higher education institutions;
- that programmes and modules are well structured and balanced, with appropriate content;
- that good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment is identified and shared.

2.2 This policy incorporates:

- criteria for the appointment of External Examiners.
- the roles and responsibilities of External Examiners.
- induction and support.
- remuneration and length of service.

3. Criteria for appointment

3.1 The External Examiner will demonstrate:

- Knowledge and understanding of UK academic standards and of the assurance and enhancement of quality;
- Appropriate competence and experience, and continuing active involvement in the relevant field(s) of study, or parts thereof;
- Relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined;
- Breadth of knowledge, experience and standing within the subject to demonstrate credibility to peers;
- Competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures;
- Familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed;
- Recent experience of delivery at the relevant level(s) of provision;
- Fluency of English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s);
- Awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula;
- Competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

3.2 The External Examiner will meet any applicable criteria set by external professional bodies, such as appropriate registration with the relevant body and/or required recordable qualifications.

3.3 Individuals who have retired may be appointed but they should provide sufficient evidence of continuing involvement in the academic area in question, and with current developments in higher education learning, teaching and assessment.

3.4 Where there is a legitimate reason for making an appointment that does not fulfil all of the criteria, the Chair of the relevant Programme Committee should set out these details in the External Examiners Nomination Form, and they should be approved by the College Academic Board. These exceptions may be assisted by ensuring the other External Examiners on a programme have complementary expertise. Where a proposed appointee does not fully fit the criteria, appropriate induction and support should be provided.

3.5 MLA College will check that the incoming external examiner does not hold an unreasonable number of other external examiner appointments. It is recommended that there should not be more than two appointments at any one time.

4. Conflicts of interest

4.1 To avoid conflicts of interest:

- The nomination must not constitute a reciprocal External Examining relationship between the same discipline academic groupings in different higher education institutions. The College must keep a list detailing where their own staff act as external examiners, to avoid this occurring. Recruiting from different colleges within the same university is not a breach of the reciprocity rule;

- The nominee must not be from the same institution as his or her predecessor or as other External Examiners for that award;

- Current members of staff, or members of the governing body or other College committees of MLA College or its collaborative partners, are not eligible to act as External Examiners for MLA College awards;

- Former academic staff or students of the College may not be invited before at least three years and sufficient time for all students taught by or with that person to have passed through the system has elapsed;

- The nominee should not have been an External Examiner at MLA College for at least five years;

- External Examiners should not have any previous or current close involvement with the College (whether professional, personal or contractual) that might compromise their objectivity, for example:

    - be a close relative of a student or member of staff of the College;

    - be employed by one of the College's Collaborative Partners;

    - assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme;

    - be in a position to influence strongly the possible employment of examinees.

- External Examiners should not be involved significantly in current or recent research collaborations with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, assessment or management of the programme for which they are appointed.

4.2 The nominated external examiner should declare, using the Nomination Form, any conflicts of interests that should be given due consideration before they can be formally appointed.

5. Ensuring appropriate coverage

5.1 The relevant Programme Committee must ensure that a sufficient number of external examiners are appointed so that adequate expertise is available to cover all the major areas of the programme(s) being examined including the requirements of any professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. They must also ensure an appropriate match between the numbers of external examiners and the quantity of material being examined.

5.2 Where there are multiple external examiners who moderate different parts of the programme, a senior external examiner will assure the quality of the assessment and academic standards across the whole programme (Programme External Examiner).

6. Length of appointment

6.1 The External Examiner's term of office will normally be one which allows the External Examiner to assess four annual intakes of students up to a maximum of four years. Appointments will normally commence on 1st August and terminate on 31st December (4 years and 4 months after appointment).

6.2 This does not preclude MLA College from appointing External Examiners for shorter periods; however appointments of one year are discouraged as it is important to maintain continuity over a number of years.

6.3 An appointment may exceptionally be extended for a further year to ensure continuity, for example where a programme is coming to an end.

7. Process for appointment

7.1 The process for approval of new External Examiners should take place the academic year prior to the existing examiner completing their term of office or, for new programmes, the academic year prior to the start of the programme.

7.2 The Chair of the relevant Programme Committee will identify nominees for External Examiners, discuss with them the role and responsibilities, and confirm their willingness to be nominated.

7.3 An External Examiner Nomination Form should then be completed by both the Chair of the Programme Committee and the nominee. All nominees will be considered and approved by the College Academic Board.

7.4 All External Examiner appointments will be subject to a specific written agreement, before which no work must be undertaken. The College may require that this is verified by sight of applicable documentation prior to the commencement of the duties of the External Examiner.

7.5 All External Examiners that are appointed must provide proof of their eligibility to work in the UK and this will be verified prior to appointment.

7.6 The Programme Services team will send to the newly appointed External Examiner:

- information about the College;
- a formal letter of agreement, for signature;
- a copy of the terms and conditions of appointment as External Examiner;
- information on how to access College policies and procedures;
- copies of relevant personnel and expenses forms;
- External Examiners Policy.

7.6 If a proposed External Examiner has not undertaken the role before, the College will provide them with access to support to enable them to fulfil their role effectively.

8. Induction

8.1 The Programme Services team should send a course information pack to new External Examiners and should arrange a briefing session with the External Examiner.

8.2 All new External Examiners must be briefed on their role as soon as possible after appointment. The briefing should include:

- the dates of Assessment and Awards Board meetings;
- reporting deadlines;
- the External Examiner's role in relation to the assessment team as a whole;
- the aims and learning outcomes of units/programmes;
- handbooks, syllabuses and teaching methods;
- the methods of assessment and marking scheme (including examples of previous examination papers and assignments);
- the regulations for the course including those concerned with opportunities for reassessment;
- the extent of Examiners' discretion;
- the institution's internal monitoring and evaluation procedures;
- external validating bodies' requirements (benchmarks) and conditions of award.

8.3 External Examiners without previous examination experience should receive additional support as necessary, for example mentoring or shadowing.

9. Fees & Expenses

9.1 Appropriate expenses, including the provision of overnight accommodation where necessary, will be agreed and paid for by the College.

9.2 If External Examiners are to be paid a fee, this will be agreed at the time of appointment. Fees will be payable upon the receipt of the External Examiner’s completed Annual Report. Examiners will be given a fees form to complete and return to the Head of Student and Programme Services. Payment of fees will be approved by the Vice-Rector (Academic).

9.3 The level of fees will be determined by the College Academic Board. A record of agreed fee levels will be maintained by the Programme Services team.

10. Duties of the External Examiner

10.1 The External Examiner is ultimately responsible to the College Academic Board for the performance of their duties.

10.2 Prior to the confirmation of mark lists, pass lists or similar documents, the External Examiner is required to endorse the outcomes of the assessment processes they have been appointed to scrutinise.

10.3 In order to fulfil this role, the External Examiner has the following rights and responsibilities:

- **The External Examiner has the right:**

- to be briefed on his/her tasks as soon as possible;
- to be informed of dates of assessment and awards boards, and any subsequent changes in dates, in a timely manner;
- to continued updating regarding changes in content or practice within the course in question;
- to be consulted about any proposed changes to assessment regulations directly affecting students currently on the course. MLA College retains the authority to consider and approve all changes to regulations;
- to be consulted about any proposed changes associated with re-approval processes for the programme in question, and be provided with revised programme documentation following the completion of re-approval processes;
- of access to all draft assessment materials which they have to verify and the right to suggest appropriate revisions in accordance with the Assessment, Marking and Moderation Policy;
- of access to all assessed student work which contributes summatively to the award classification/grading;
- of access to course materials including definitive programme records and module specifications;
- to meet with internal examiners prior to the Assessment and Awards Board;
- to conduct or attend a viva voce examination of any candidate where the assessment regulations allow.
- to meet with students if this is a requirement of the relevant external professional bodies;
- to participate in decisions relating to cases of suspected or proven cheating/assessment offences in accordance with the Academic Offences Policy;
- to be informed of the arrangements for recognition of candidates with a Learning Support Profile;
- of access to previous External Examiners' recent reports and to recent Assessment and Awards Board minutes;
- of access to quantitative data on current and recent cohorts' student performance;
- to request such other materials as are commensurate with the role;
- to be informed of any arrangements regarding students on the course in question who might be undertaking a period of study in another institution.

- **The External Examiner has the responsibility:**

- to attend all formal meetings at which decisions or recommendations for awards, or decisions regarding progression, are made;
- to seek to ensure that there has been consistency and equity of application of course regulations and of the procedures of the institution;
- to judge student performance impartially on the basis of work submitted for assessment;
- to draw to the attention of the Assessment and Awards Board any disagreement with the overall marking standard. This should include marks for any element of the award along with any recommendation for a cohort's marks to be remarked or scaled. Confirmed marks are, however, the decision of the relevant Assessment and Awards Board and the External Examiner is not empowered to amend individual student marks;
- to seek to ensure that awards made are comparable in standard to those in similar subjects at the same level offered in other institutions nationally and that standards have been appropriately applied; to comment on teaching standards as revealed in students' assessments;
- to oversee the procedures for the drafting of assignments and papers contributing towards the award(s), in accordance with the Assessment, Marking and Moderation Policy;
- to approve summative assessments (examination papers/questions and proposed assignments);
- to sample the assessment of work, in accordance with the Assessment, Marking and Moderation Policy, in order to ensure that each student has been fairly assessed, is fairly placed and accurately graded in relation to the rest of the cohort;
- to report any undetected academic malpractice of individual students to the Chair of the Assessment and Awards Board;
- to engage with MLA College's on-line facilities in order to access course information, student work, and records of the assessment processes;
- to comment on the assessment process, the schemes for marking and classification and the Assessment and Awards Board procedures;
- to endorse the outcomes of assessment;
- to submit an annual report by the agreed deadline;
- to attend academic appeal hearings if called as a witness;
- to declare any changes in his/her status and circumstances which may prejudice the role of External Examiner;
- to comment on proposed modifications to courses post-validation including learning outcomes and the appropriateness of teaching and assessment methods.

11. Assessment and Awards Board

11.1 External Examiners are full voting members of all Assessment and Awards Boards. External Examiners may advise the Board on the general standard of student performance in relation to those elements of assessment that they have scrutinised. They should be made aware of the outcome of any previous meeting to consider extenuating circumstances. They should be satisfied that all decisions are appropriate and consistent, and that the management of the assessment and the decision-making process is appropriate and consistent.

11.2 Programme External Examiners should sign the list of results relating to the award of degrees and such results, once signed, will not normally be changed without the consent of the Programme External Examiners.

11.3 Where scheduling of assessment boards will cause difficulties for an External Examiner to attend, the External Examiner should liaise in a timely manner to explore whether alternative scheduling could be arranged. In the event an examiner cannot attend a specified meeting, alternative processes should be arranged, such as telephone conference or another means of incorporating the External Examiner's views. In such cases, External Examiners are responsible for providing assurance that the results to be presented at the board are suitable for ratification, and to provide feedback on issues pertinent to the Assessment and Awards Board's considerations.

12. External Examiner's Report

12.1 External Examiners are required to submit an end of year report on the conduct of assessments and the standards achieved, and provide recommendations for enhancement. The report should be submitted on an External Examiners Report Form, in accordance with any agreed deadlines, directly to the Head of Programme Services, who will forward it to the Chair of the relevant Programme Committee.

12.2 Deadlines for the submission of reports should be published in advance and will usually be within two weeks of the final meeting of the Assessment and Awards Board.

12.3 The report will consider the extent to which:

- The standards required of students align with the relevant academic thresholds for the award and subject and the performance demonstrated by students is comparable to peers on equivalent courses in other institutions;

- The awards are aligned with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, national subject benchmarks and, where appropriate, professional benchmarks and standards;

- The assessment strategy measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the learning outcomes of the course and, where applicable, the requirements of other professional bodies;

- Assessment procedures have been carried out in accordance with MLA College and course specific (where applicable) policies and regulations, e.g. internal and external moderation, conduct of Assessment and Awards Boards, assessment documentation;

- Feedback provided to students is constructive, related to assessment criteria, promotes learning and facilitates improvement;

- Assessment outcomes indicate that students have sufficient access to appropriate resources;

- Student performance in assessments provides evidence of good quality of teaching and learning;

- Other general comments including examples of good practice, particular strengths, distinctive or innovative features relating to standards, curriculum and assessment processes worth drawing to the attention of external audiences;

- How the College has considered recommendations from the previous year's report.

12.4 If this is the final report of their tenure, the External Examiner should provide a summary of their time in the role, noting any significant issues and enhancements that have characterised the provision.

12.5 The report must not name individual staff or students as it will be made widely available.

13. Consideration of External Examiners Report

13.1 The Chair of the relevant Programme Committee will provide the External Examiner with a written response to the Report, usually within four weeks, and may require the input and response of the Assessment and Awards Board on matters pertaining to its decisions and/or operation. The Chair of the Programme Committee will also provide a summary report for the College Academic Board and is responsible for reporting arrangements to any validating institutions.

13.2 The Chair of the relevant Programme Committee is responsible for any action (plans and delivery) which need to be taken in response to the report.

13.3 External Examiners Reports and responses will be used to inform the College's annual review and periodic review processes.

13.4 External Examiner Reports (and Responses) will be made available by the College to relevant internal committees and groups (including the Senior Management Team and Academic Quality and Standards Committee) and appropriate statutory and professional bodies.

13.5 The Report can also be made available to members of the public under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act. By signing the External Examiners Report Form, the External Examiner gives consent to such disclosure as the College considers appropriate.

13.6 Reports (and Responses) will be made available to students via the College's virtual learning environment. Students can raise any issues arising from the reports in the student-staff Liaison Committee and via their representatives on the College Academic Board.

13.7 Students are made aware of the identity and current position of external examiners appointed to their units, programmes and awards. Students are advised not to contact external examiners directly, and if an external examiner receives any direct contact from a student they should refer the matter to the Head of Student and Programme Services.

14. Raising serious concerns

14.1 Should external examiners encounter particular problems during their term of office, which they are unable to resolve with the appropriate academic staff or Chair of the Programme Committee, they may draw these to the attention of the Chair of the College Academic Board by submitting a special report to him/her at

any time, who will investigate the points raised. The relevant Programme Committee will provide a timely response to the Chair of the College Academic Board, describing the actions taken to address the concerns.

14.2 In the event that an external examiner has a serious concern relating to systemic failings with academic standards and internal procedures and feels the Chair of the College Academic Board has not sufficiently addressed the concerns, the matter can be raised with the Chief Executive Officer. If the issue has still not been addressed to the External Examiner's satisfaction, then the matter may be raised externally with the Office for Students (https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/).

15. Discontinuation of appointment

15.1 The appointment of an External Examiner may be discontinued by the College or the individual examiner before the completion of their period of appointment. If an External Examiner wishes to resign from their appointment, this would normally be after the External Examiner Report has been satisfactorily completed at the end of the annual cycle, where there is a natural break in activity. In these cases, the External Examiner must inform the Chair of the relevant Programme Committee in writing before the end of the academic year (31 July).

15.2 If the external examiner wishes to resign during the academic year, they must do so in writing, to the Chair of the Programme Committee, giving a three month notice period.

15.3 Where an external examiner resigns prior to the expiry of the appointed term they should be replaced as soon as possible.

15.4 In the event of unsatisfactory performance, the College reserves the right to terminate the appointment at any time with immediate effect. Unsatisfactory performance could cover a range of issues, including:

- the failure to attend appropriate Assessment and Awards Boards without prior agreement;
- failure to submit completed reports within specified timescales;
- where a conflict of interest arises during the term of office;
- failure to undertake the External Examiner duties to the satisfaction of the College, e.g. providing inadequate scrutiny of proposed assessment tools and/or assessment outcomes and/or an unacceptable delay in corresponding with Programme Teams on matters concerning examinations and assessment;
- cessation of, or non-recruitment to, a programme;
- changes to the level of a programme on re-validation that mean that the External Examiner no longer meets the criteria for engagement;
- unprofessional conduct.

15.5 The decision to discontinue shall be based on a statement by the Chair of the Programme Committee detailing the proposed grounds for discontinuation and approved by the College Academic Board.

16. Data Protection and Commercial Confidentiality

16.1 External examiners should be fully aware of information security when exchanging draft exam papers and other draft forms of assessment.

16.2 All personal data supplied by the External Examiner for the purpose of his or her appointment and subsequently his or her engagement as an External Examiner will be held in accordance with the College's Data Protection Policy and Privacy Policy.