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## Purpose of the policy

The PTFI is responsible for the quality and standards of all academic awards made in its name. The UK Quality Code for Higher Education places considerable emphasis upon externality and Union Theological College is committed to making use of external expertise in the development, delivery and review of all programmes. This will involve ongoing consultation, both formal and informal, with a variety of key external stakeholders: colleagues from other educational institutions; relevant regulatory bodies; and the main employers of its students. The role of the external examiner is one of the principal means for ensuring externality as part of the College's process for maintaining academic standards and ensuring quality assurance and enhancement.

This policy sets out the role and responsibilities of external examiners (EEs) appointed to postgraduate taught (PGT) programmes and the role of Union Theological College in the EE Processes. It has been developed to be in alignment with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

## The role of a Programme External Examiner

EEs participate in the assessment process by providing comment and independent advice on:

- curricula, teaching and assessment within the programme;
- the degree to which the programme enables students to achieve the designed learning outcomes;
- how the programme is maintaining threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with UK Higher Education agreed reference points and for the

maintenance of academic standards (including subject benchmarks) within the UK Quality Code for Higher Education;<sup>1</sup> and

- the extent to which the standard of final award is comparable to similar programmes of which the EE has experience.

An EE is a full member of the PTFI Exam Board and has the right to attend all relevant meetings. The EE is normally expected to attend the final Exam Board meeting in May. The EE will have access to any material relevant to any aspect of the assessment of the programme and will scrutinise a representative sample of all assessed work. This sample must provide enough evidence to determine that the internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard.

An EE may, if so desired, ask to meet with students as part of their oversight.

The EE is not permitted, and shall not be asked, to undertake any of the following:

- setting assessment tasks;
- first or second marking of student assessment; and
- revising the marks awarded for the work of an individual student.

The EE can expect to receive annually from the programme:

- a current programme specification;
- module descriptions with learning outcomes and assessment methods;
- where appropriate the marking criteria adopted for assessment;
- a selection of assessed student work (with evidence of moderation);
- full details of the marks within the modules for which they receive samples; and
- information concerning the dates and times of Exam Board meetings.

The EE shall submit an annual report within six weeks of the final Exam Board's meeting to the Principal of the College. The EE is also encouraged to provide informal feedback to the College. The EE may submit a separate, confidential, report to the Principal to raise any matters of serious concern, should s/he feel this to be appropriate. Reports must not contain any identifiable references to individual staff or students. The report will be received by the Principal and directed to the appropriate Programme Coordinator who will provide a written response to the EE, copied to the Principal, within three weeks of receipt. All reports will be reviewed by the Quality Assurance Team which will monitor both the receipt of reports and the timeliness of the responses.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Threshold standards' are the minimum level of achievement necessary to be awarded the qualification and 'academic standards' include the standards of performance that a student must demonstrate to achieve a particular classification of qualification.

EE reports and associated College responses will be made available to the students on the College student intranet.

The report from the EE will be considered as part of the Annual Programme Evaluation (APE).

## Selection of External Examiners

EEs will be selected from suitably qualified people and potential conflicts of interest must be considered. In order to be nominated, an individual must show appropriate evidence of:

- knowledge and understanding of the UK Higher Education agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards (including subject benchmarks) and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education;
- sufficient academic standing and experience to command authority and respect;
- competency and experience in the design and delivery of relevant curricula and operating relevant assessment;
- fluency in any relevant languages that the programme may assess; and
- awareness of trends in training for ministry nationally and internationally and willingness to be a critical friend to innovation.

In line with QAA best practice, the PTFI seeks, where possible, to appoint EEs from outside the Northern Ireland Higher Education sector.

A programme coordinator should consult with colleagues teaching on the programme and, having ascertained that the proposed individual would be willing to accept the nomination, would propose the name to Faculty. If in agreement, the Faculty present the nomination to the Management Committee through its Curriculum Panel who are responsible for making the appointment.

## Appointment and Induction

Once a nomination has been approved the Principal will send a formal letter of appointment communicating the EE's oversight duties and details of the fee and any expenses that will be paid on receipt of the annual report. An EE will normally be appointed for a four-year term.

Fees are payable on a scale related to the amount of external examination requested. Currently the minimum fee is £225 for modules which account for no more than 200 CATS.

The names, position(s) and institution(s) of the EE will be included in the relevant programme handbook with a note that students must not make direct contact with the EE

since other routes exist for raising queries about the assessment and standards. If such contacts are attempted the EE should report these immediately to Union College.

### Termination of Appointment

Union College may terminate an appointment if the EE is deemed to have not fulfilled their obligations or if a conflict of interest arises which cannot be satisfactorily resolved.