

# THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL EXAMINER

“AdvanceHE



## The Degree Standards Project

The Degree Standards project, which is led by Advance HE and managed by the Office for Students on behalf of England, Northern Ireland and Wales, is exploring, across those three nations, sector-owned processes focused on professional development for external examiners.

Degree Standards Project purpose

What we have done for 2019-20

External Examiners Directory

Find out more about our projects

### The purpose of this five-year project is to:

- Design, pilot and deliver different approaches to the professional development of external examiners.
- Propose evidence-based and cost-effective longer-term approaches to the professional development of external examiners operating across the higher education system in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.
- Explore approaches to the calibration of standards, presenting recommendations for future work in this area.

## The revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education

UKSCQA/02  
March 2018



## DEGREE CLASSIFICATION

TRANSPARENCY, RELIABILITY  
AND FAIRNESS –  
A STATEMENT OF INTENT



## Quality Standards

Inputs and processes related to the assessment activity (e.g. assessment briefs, boards and procedures)

## Academic Standards

Output measure focussing upon student achievement (i.e. standard situated within the students work)

Use of external expertise to assure academic standards of courses in terms of:

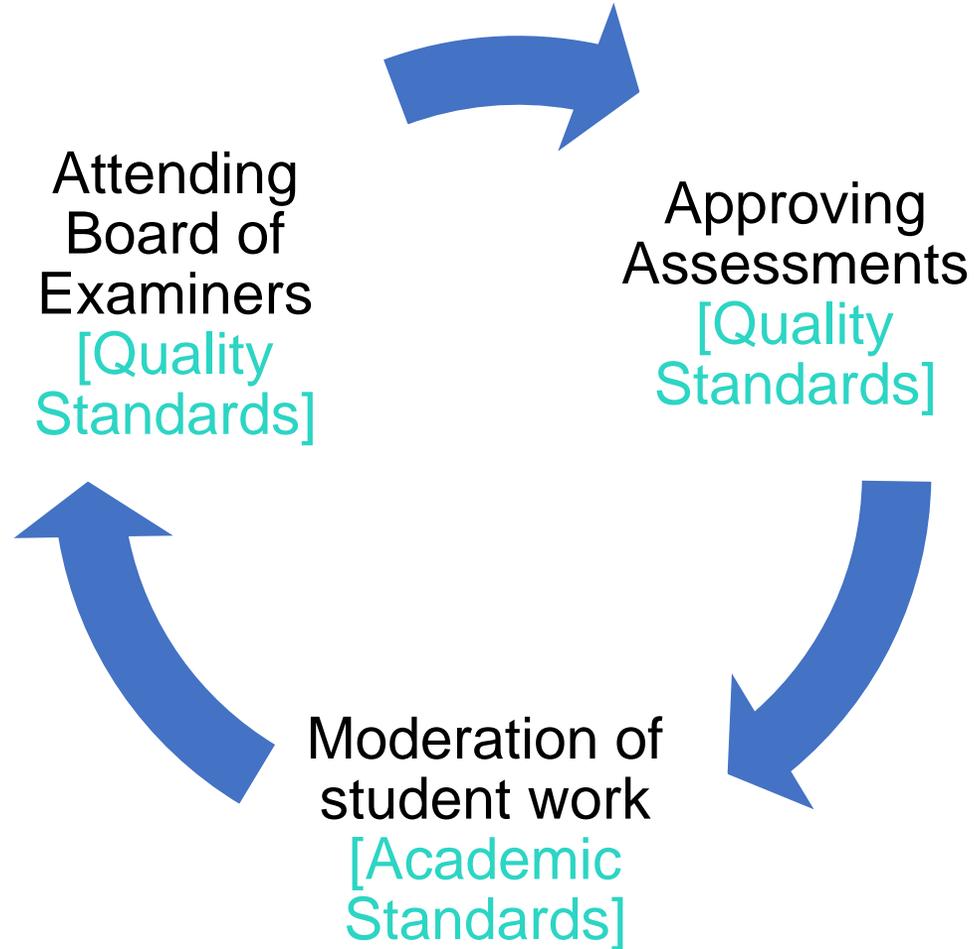
- Meeting the requirements of relevant national qualification frameworks
- The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector recognised standards

(Quality Code 2018)

# External Examiner Core Practices

- The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national standards. **[Maintainer of academic standards]**
- The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers **[Guardian of national standards]**
- The provider uses ..... assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent **[Process checker]**

*External examiners play an important role in identifying good practice and making recommendations for enhancement of assessment policies and procedures' **[Critical friend]** (Quality Code 2018)*



# Task 1: Dilemmas in External Examining

- You will be called into a breakout group
- You have 10mins to discuss a question regarding your role as an external examiner
- Consider your role as per the Quality Code (2018)
- Assign a spokesperson for your group for the plenary

*There is an assumption that we hold shared standards but this is not supported by research*

## Socially Constructed

Standards are constructed by our interactions with others and the academic/professional communities we are part of.

The language of standards is open to interpretation.

We have all had many different influences on our standards.

## Tacit Knowledge

Marking of standards is usually learnt 'on the job'.

Judgements are complex and often hard to articulate or pin down e.g. I know a 2:1 when I see one.

As we become more expert we are less conscious of what we take into account.

# Task 2: Influences on your standards

- For 2-3 min consider the things that you think have influenced your academic standards
- Share these with the group or add to the chat

# Typical Categories of Influences

- I. Influential people and groups
- II. Experience
- III. Personal values and beliefs

It is important to take into account documentary reference points to help guide academic standards...

- QAA FHEQ
- QAA Subject Benchmark statements
- QAA Outcome Qualification Descriptors (recent publication)
- Professional standards
  
- LJMU grade descriptors
- Programme and module outcomes
- Assessment guidance and marking criteria



External



Internal

...however they do have limitations.

- External examiners are the key mechanism for safeguarding national standards
- There are different aspects of the external examiner role that need to be balanced
- The nature of academic standards is complex and we have a range of different influences
- There are tools that can support consistency of judgements but some 'calibration' based on these is important