Guidelines for Schools and Institutes on External Advisers for Undergraduate or Postgraduate Taught Programmes Proposals

Purpose

These guidelines are provided for Schools and Institutes to enable them to choose appropriate External Advisers when developing new programmes.

An external adviser is a member of academic staff from a different HEI, who is asked to review proposals for new undergraduate or postgraduate taught programmes.

Schools and institutes should provide a copy of the Guidelines for External Advisers (attached) when requesting a review of new proposals from an External Adviser. External input is an essential part of programme development and is a compulsory part of the programme approval process: The QAA’s UK Quality Code for Higher Education states that:

‘In programme approval, the involvement of individuals external to the higher education provider is necessary to offer independence and objectivity to the decisions taken. This contributes transparency of the process and provides a basis for comparability of academic standards across the higher education sector’.

External Adviser Criteria

An External Adviser should not be an External Examiner at Queen Mary. Schools and institutes should ensure that External Advisers meet the following criteria which are based upon the criteria provided in Chapter B8 of the QAA’s UK Quality Code:

Subject expertise and programme management/approval experience,

- Academic qualifications at least to the level of the proposed programme;
- Appropriate and relevant expertise in the subject discipline, including familiarity with current developments in the subject area concerned;
- Understanding of current practice and developments in teaching, learning and assessment in HE, with prior experience of teaching on programmes at the same level or above;
- For professional or vocational programmes, relevant professional qualifications and an awareness of the educational requirements of the profession;
- Experience of programme management, development or approval, or as an external examiner
- Where a joint programme is proposed External Adviser comments should be sought from experts in both subject disciplines.

Independence

- They may not concurrently hold appointment as an external examiner at Queen Mary. Former external examiners may not be appointed, unless a period of at least three years has elapsed since the completion of their contract;

1 http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b
- Former members of staff may not be appointed, unless a period of at least five years has elapsed since their departure.
- Staff who are members of partner institutions are not eligible.
- There must have been no other formal involvement with the school/institute; offering the programme during the last five years as a former member of staff or the last three years as an External Examiner.

In most cases, a senior academic within the discipline with experience of teaching on a similar programme at another HE institution would be appropriate. However, an external panel member drawn from a relevant business or professional background may also be required. It is not always possible for any single external adviser to meet all the above requirements, in which case the programme team may nominate additional external advisers to ensure a balance of expert advice.

**The Role of External Advisers**

The Part 2 submission for a new programme must include a written expression of support and/or commentary from an External Adviser academic in the area of the programme proposal. The External Adviser must meet the aforementioned criteria.

In the case of professional or vocational programmes it may also be appropriate to seek comments from a major employer or a professional body. An External Adviser is normally approached by the Head of School or equivalent responsible for the proposed programme.

In cases where the Taught Programmes Board allows a school/institute to dispense with the Part 2 submission, e.g. if the proposed programme represents a ‘re-packaging’ of previously approved modules, comments from an External Adviser may still be required. This reflects the fact that such a re-packaging leads to a new award and that Queen Mary needs to be assured of the quality of all of its awards. In such cases Schools/Institutes should seek guidance from the Academic Secretariat.
Guidelines for External Advisers

Purpose

External Advisers are usually members of academic staff external to Queen Mary, who are asked to comment on proposals for new undergraduate or postgraduate taught programmes.

In programme approval External Advisers are essential as they provide independent and objective feedback. This contributes to the maintenance of academic standards in developing new programmes and awards.

Suggested Criteria for Reviewing a Programme Proposal

External Advisers should refer to the following criteria, in addition to their own knowledge and experience, when reviewing proposals for new programmes/awards (this is not an exhaustive list and instead should be used as a reference point):

Aims, objectives and learning outcomes

- Does the programme have clearly articulated aims and learning outcomes which appear to meet the needs of students and equip them for further study or employment?
- Do the academic standards in subject content and teaching and learning match the aims and learning outcomes?
- Are all programme learning outcomes met within modules?
- Are the learning outcomes and the expectations of students clearly developed during the programme?

Curriculum, design, content and organisation

- Is the content of the programme consistent with its aims and learning outcomes?
- Is the specialist content of the programme up to date and comparable with that of similar programmes elsewhere?
- Is the structure of the programme clearly defined and explained?
- Does the programme include appropriate careers education?
- Is consideration given to work-based and placement learning?
- Are professional practice requirements noted where relevant?
- Have equal opportunities been considered in the development?
- Has consideration been given to work experience within modules?

Levelness

- Does the programme represent the distinctive features of a qualification for the assigned level?

External reference points

- Reference made to Benchmark Statements where applicable
- Reference made to Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)
- Does every award in the programme meet the expectations of the FHEQ?
- Reference made to any relevant Professional and Statutory Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) where relevant
• Reference made to the Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) credit level descriptors

Learning, teaching and assessment strategies
• Is there a clear and workable learning and teaching strategy?
• Is there a clear and workable assessment strategy?
• Do the teaching, learning and assessment methods allow students to achieve and demonstrate these aims and learning outcomes?

Admission, progression and achievement
• Is there a description of anticipated student profile?
• Are the entry requirements appropriate and clearly identified?
• Are there details for any special educational needs requirements?

Learning resources and facilities
• Have indicative reading lists been supplied and are they appropriate?
• Have any future resources requirements been clearly articulated?
• Is the use of QMPlus (the QM Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)) included?
• Is there use of blended learning?
• Are their details of and arrangements with placement providers where relevant?

Student guidance and student support
• Are there suitable arrangements for dealing with academic misconduct?
• Are there workable academic support arrangements at School and College level?
• Are there administrative arrangements for student support?

Quality management and enhancement
• Are there arrangements for programme management including Programme Committees?
• Are their clear quality assurance measures in place?
• Are details of continued currency and viability of the programme included?
• Is it clear how the programme listens to student feedback?

External reference points
• QAA Subject Benchmark Statements (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements)
• Framework for Higher Education (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2718#.VdMEbPm6eUk)