



UNIVERSITY OF  
**OXFORD**

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**POLICY AND GUIDANCE  
ON EXAMINATIONS AND ASSESSMENT**

**2011**

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**Note:** New material for 2011/12 has been shaded in yellow for ease of identification.

## 1. Preface

1.1. This document brings together both the relevant examination regulations and statements of policy and guidance on examinations and assessment. Its purpose is to provide a summary of the main regulations relating to examinations and assessment (both for undergraduate and taught graduate courses), and to set out those additional policy requirements relating to examinations and assessment which the University has established. As with all matters relating to examinations, the document should be read in conjunction with the *Examination Regulations* and with the extensive associated guidance provided by the Proctors, *Proctors' Notes for the Guidance of Examiners and Chairs of Examiners*. The annual changes introduced for 2011-12 reflect aspects of policy which Education Committee has reviewed, drawing on its consideration of internal and external examiners' reports, the annual reports from the Senior and Junior Proctors, and (of increasing significance) the decisions made by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. The references to the *Examination Regulations* have been amended to refer to the 2011 edition. The document takes account of the revised section of the QAA Code of Practice on External Examining now published in the UK Quality Code at: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/default.aspx>

1.2. The University has traditionally provided a framework for examinations and assessment through a three-fold pattern: specific regulations, set out in the *Examination Regulations*; policy requirements, and specific Proctorial guidance provided for examiners and chairmen of examiners. Supervisory bodies, in addition to following the regulations, are normally required to observe the policy requirements in framing their own policy and practice (including any special regulations). Where they wish to vary that policy or practice significantly from the policy requirements set out by the Education Committee, they are required to present a reasoned case, and to receive approval from or on behalf of the Education Committee.

1.3 Education Committee attaches considerable importance to the observance by all examiners of the obligations placed on examiners by the Examination Regulations and set out in detail in the Proctors' *Notes for the Guidance of Examiners and Chairs of Examiners*. In his 2009 report on taught course examinations the then Junior Proctor drew attention to a range of concerns relating to the role of examiners during his Proctorial year. These referred in particular to:

- concerns relating to the accuracy of examination papers;
- failure to observe the deadlines for the submission of examination papers;
- the importance of declaring any conflicts of interest;
- the absence of examiners at examiners' meetings.

Education Committee is acutely conscious of the extent of the burdens placed on examiners but must reiterate the critical importance of examiners following the regulations, policy and guidance provided for their task.

1.4. The Proctors are required to ensure that examinations are properly conducted and in accordance with the statutes and regulations governing them; and they may make such regulations concerning the conduct of examinations as they consider necessary (Statute IX, 20 – <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/785-121.shtml>). In the course of these responsibilities, they may consider aspects of policy and draw points of concern or areas for clarification to the Education Committee's attention. They may also bring concerns about the conduct of examinations directly to the attention of supervisory bodies.

1.5. The role of the Education Committee is to exercise overall responsibility for the definition and keeping under review of the educational philosophy, policy, and standards of the collegiate University in respect of teaching, learning, and assessment (including all aspects of the practical arrangements for examination, in consultation with the Proctors). The Education Committee's quality assurance role gives it a particular concern to oversee the robustness of arrangements to monitor, evaluate and demonstrate the fairness and consistency of the assessment methods used throughout the University (Council Regulations 15 of 2002 – [http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/520-122a.shtml#\\_Toc27975214](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/520-122a.shtml#_Toc27975214)).

1.6. Under the University's arrangements, boards of examiners operate under the authority of the body or bodies responsible for the subject or subjects concerned ('supervisory bodies'). These bodies set the general parameters within which boards of examiners operate, and approve the examiners' conventions. Where they exist, faculty boards are the supervisory bodies for examinations, under the divisional board; where there are no longer faculty boards, divisional boards will be the supervisory bodies for particular subjects. Divisional boards have a general responsibility for various aspects of examinations and assessment arising out of their overall responsibility for the maintenance of educational quality and standards within the respective division (<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/522-122.shtml>). They have a specific responsibility for the consideration of the reports of examiners, including external examiners, on the advice of their constituent subjects.

## 2. The University framework for examinations and assessment

2.1. The pattern of undergraduate examinations in Oxford involves a first public examination (Preliminary Examinations, Moderations or Honour Moderations) for most subjects at the end of the first year, and a second public examination (Final Honour School) which concludes the programme. The second public examination may have more than one part, spread over years two, three, and (where applicable) four. It is designed to assess the success with which students have mastered the overall body of knowledge, and gained the skills and understanding required by their programme. Questions may be both specific and integrative.

2.2. Within the University's examination regulations and policy framework and subject to approval by the Education Committee and the relevant division, the Education Committee regards the nature and pattern of assessment to be a matter for the academic judgement of those responsible for designing courses and programmes of study, who will be best placed to relate the desired pattern of assessment to the learning outcomes of the programme concerned. The Committee endorses the position that a range of assessment and examining practices may operate across the University and a good practice guide on assessment is included at Annexe D.

2.3. The University's general policy on the question of second-year undergraduate examinations was established in 2000, when it was agreed that subjects might make a case for the introduction of second-year examinations on an individual basis, on the understanding that changes in some subject areas would not lead to wholesale change where this was not felt to be academically desirable. The Education Committee recognises that in many subject areas there is a clear rationale for a pattern of examination that leaves the second year free of formal public examination (see Annexe C for a statement of such thinking).

2.4. The University does not support the principle of modularisation of courses (modularisation here being defined as a system in which degree courses are assembled by the selection of building blocks of modules with quantitative credit ratings, levels and common examination conventions within an institution-wide framework). It considers that widespread modularisation of courses, with the concomitant need for central institutional directives on module weighting, strict definitions of level etc., would necessitate a uniformity of examining structures and practices which is neither essential nor appropriate within the University. Annexe I indicates the normal understanding of the University's courses in relation to the credit framework recently adopted for England and into which English universities may opt if they so wish.

2.5. While it is divisional, faculty or departmental bodies who are responsible for the methods of assessment used to decide the final outcome and level of the student's performance on a course (*summative assessment*), the responsibility for the routine and regular informal assessment provided in tutorials and supervisions is shared throughout the University by academic staff teaching in colleges, faculties and departments. Within the University, this form of assessment (*formative assessment*) is an important element in providing personal and immediate feedback on a student's work, so as to indicate to the student how he or she is progressing with their work and in which direction it should develop.

2.6. It is recognised that types of feedback may legitimately vary from individual to individual, college to college, or subject to subject (within the bounds of guidance laid down by colleges or subjects). Students recognise that this is the case while putting a high premium on clear and regular feedback which both informs the work which they are undertaking and gives some indication of the standards which they are achieving. Where

more formal methods of formative assessment are involved, e.g. trial papers for college 'collections', then particular weight is placed on clear and speedy feedback.

2.7. Graduate taught courses make use of a range of examination and assessment methods according to the elements within the subject to be assessed. The assessment or examination norm for a course which is completed within a year is the equivalent of two three-hour examination papers and a dissertation or thesis of 10 – 15,000 words.

2.8. The University requires external examiners to prepare a report addressed to the Vice-Chancellor at the end of each year of their period of office. External examiners are asked to comment on the following points (which are drawn from the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, chapter B7 'External Examining' 2011). According to the QAA guidance, examiners are asked to provide informed comment and recommendations on:

- (i) whether or not an institution is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements;
- (ii) whether or not the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the institution's policies and regulations;
- (iii) whether or not the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which the external examiners have experience;

and, in relation to process, clear and informative feedback to:

- (iv) confirm that sufficient evidence was received to enable the role to be fulfilled;
- (v) indicate whether issues raised in previous reports have been, or are being, addressed to their satisfaction;
- (vi) address any issues as specifically required by any relevant professional body;
- (vii) give an overview of their term of office (when concluded).

2.9. The annual reports of external examiners are an important part of the University's quality assurance procedures. The Education Committee monitors all external examiners' reports on receipt to identify any matters of urgency and forwards them to divisions, highlighting areas of particular concern as necessary, for consideration with the relevant examiners' reports. External examiners are specifically asked to return their reports as soon as possible after the completion of the examination process in order to assist academic committees with their consideration of the reports. All reports are considered by the relevant committees in faculties and departments and by divisions; composite reports are then provided for Education Committee and a consolidated report highlighting key points emerging from the year's reports is considered annually by or on behalf of Education Committee.

### 3. Nomination of examiners and assessors and duties of supervisory bodies

#### SUMMARY OF RELEVANT REGULATIONS<sup>1</sup>

3.1. Supervisory bodies must have standing orders governing the number of examiners, period of office, and appointment of chairman, on all University examinations for which they are responsible, and for the composition and constitution of any nominating committee(s) operating on their behalf [*Examination Regulations*, 2011, p. 17, ll. 9-20].

3.2. Nomination of examiners and assessors is undertaken by the supervisory bodies according to their standing orders. Boards *may* appoint nominating committees and delegate power to them but need not do so other than in the case of an examination for a course which is the responsibility of more than one board or other body, where the responsibility must be delegated to a jointly-appointed nominating committee<sup>2</sup> [*ibid.*, p. 17, ll. 30-31, p.18, ll. 1-8].

3.3. Nominating committees must have at least three members and their composition must be reported annually to the Proctors and the Head of Examinations and Assessment [*ibid.*, p. 18, ll. 5-11].

3.4. Nominations must be submitted to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Proctors [*ibid.*, p. 18, ll. 26-29] in advance of the commencement of the examination.

3.5. Sufficient examiners must be appointed for each candidate (other than in Mods or Prelims) to be examined by no fewer than two examiners, [*ibid.*, p. 15, ll. 36-39, p.17, ll. 1-4] and in undergraduate examinations (other than in specified cases) no more than two members of the same college may examine in the same examination [*ibid.*, p.16, ll. 31-34].

3.6. The conventions to be used by the examiners in any examination shall be approved annually by the supervisory body responsible for the course and the examination [*ibid.*, p. 24, ll. 24-29] subject to the right of a board of examiners to make minor adjustments to the conventions during any particular examination, without reference to the responsible body, if there are exceptional circumstances which so require. In cases of doubt or difficulty, the examiners should consult the Proctors. Nothing in this provision shall affect the authority of the examiners in the making of academic judgements on the performance of each candidate. [*ibid.*, p. 43, ll. 37-39, p.44, ll. 1-7]

3.7. The relevant supervisory body should appoint a chairman of examiners who shall have responsibility for the proper conduct of the business of the Board of Examiners, including taking proper account of relevant University guidance [*ibid.*, p. 22, l. 12 - p.23, l. 9].

#### POLICY REQUIREMENTS

3.8. Apart from a small number of specialist exams, the number of examiners and assessors appointed is a matter for the supervisory body according to their standing orders. However, the University requires large final honour schools to have more than one external

<sup>1</sup> This summary is not intended to be exhaustive. The full regulations relating to the conduct of University Examinations are now grouped together in the *Examination Regulations (Examination Regulations*, 2011, pp. 14-54).

<sup>2</sup> In a small number of subjects, the Education Committee has approved a dispensation to allow the continuation of pre-existing arrangements.

to cover the full breadth of the examination; it also requires that in joint schools each panel of examiners, drawn from the parent schools, should include at least one external.

3.9. Supervisory bodies are asked to keep under review the mechanisms for their part in the nomination and appointment of examiners, including the chairman and external examiner(s), and for ensuring the competence and avoidance of conflicts of interest in relation to all examiners, including external examiners.

3.10. Where assessors are to be nominated who are not members of a Faculty or a department (see *Examination Regulations, 2010*, p. 16, ll. 25-28) then the nomination(s) must include sufficient information to allow the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Proctors to assess their suitability for the examining task involved (i.e. qualifications, experience of teaching and examining, technical expertise). When nominating a postgraduate student to act as an Assessor, the Nominating Committee must state how the criteria set out in Annexe G will be met.

3.11. In exercising their overall responsibility for the membership, powers, procedures and accountability of examiners, supervisory bodies should take care to ensure that boards of examiners are aware of:

- requirements relating to declarations of personal interest;
- the minimum numbers of internal and external examiners who must be present for decisions to be valid;
- the extent of any discretion in the light of evidence provided by the Proctors in relation to medical circumstances or other factors affecting performance;
- the keeping of appropriate records of examiners' meetings and the reasons for any specific decisions in relation to individual cases.

3.12. In approving conventions, supervisory bodies should ensure that consideration is given to:

- clear criteria for marking;
- internal moderation;
- aggregation of marks (any changes to aggregation procedures should be checked against a set of marks for a previous year to ensure that there are no unanticipated effects);
- procedures for the reconciliation of marks in cases of disagreement between markers;
- rules and regulations for progression (including qualifying tests in graduate courses);
- final awards and classification including criteria for the award of 'Distinction' where relevant) and;
- compensation.

## 4. External examiners

### SUMMARY OF RELEVANT REGULATIONS

4.1. On the nomination of a supervisory body, or of a nominating committee acting on its behalf, the Board of Examiners for each University Examination *must* include a person as an external examiner who is approved to act as an external arbiter of standards; and it *may* also include a person as an external examiner to provide academic expertise not otherwise obtainable from within the University. All such nominations in either category must be designated as an external examiner by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Proctors. [*Examination Regulations*, 2011, p.19, ll. 22-27]

4.2. Unless they are appointed to examine in separate subjects or in separate parts of an examination divided into Part I and Part II, no two persons who are, or have been during the two preceding years, on the teaching staff of the same college or university or other institution shall be nominated to serve at the same time as external examiners in the same examination. [*ibid.*, p.20, ll.1-6]

4.3. External examiners should have access to all examination papers in their draft form (*ibid.*, p. 24, ll. 30-34); they are not required to attend the statutory meeting of examiners prior to the examination, but should be informed by the chairman of its proceedings and decisions. [*ibid.*, p. 23, ll. 3-5]

### POLICY REQUIREMENTS

4.4. It should be noted that individuals may be nominated to serve as external examiner in two categories: either (1) as an external arbiter of standards or (2) to provide academic expertise not otherwise obtainable within the University. The same individual may only serve in both categories at the same time with the permission of the Proctors, since it should be noted that, outside courses with very small numbers of students, this is likely to impose **an excessive** load on the external examiner concerned.

4.5. Bodies responsible for nominations should have available for scrutiny, in the first instance by the Proctors, brief details of each individual proposed as an external examiner (e.g. current post, relevant experience etc) along the lines of the summaries boards forward when they are nominating external electors to professorships or external members of review committees.

4.6. **Appointments of external examiners should normally observe the UK-wide set of criteria for appointing external examiners set out in the Quality Code and reproduced as annexe J.**

4.7. **Supervisory bodies should ensure that external examiners have sufficient and appropriate information for their role, i.e. organisational procedures, practices, and academic regulations, including a written statement on the nature and scope of the external examiner's roles, responsibilities and powers within the examination process, from the responsible body to be passed on by the secretary to the nominating committee at the time of invitation.** External examiners should be supplied with all the course information needed to carry out their task in time for the commencement of their duties (the course handbook being a minimum requirement). External examiners should be supplied with a copy of the examination conventions. **At this point, external examiners should also be informed that they have the right to raise any matter of serious concern with the head of the institution, if necessary by a separate confidential written report.**

4.8. Supervisory bodies should ensure that all those involved in the examining process understand the University's expectation that external examiners will be used primarily for the purposes of moderation and arbitration. National guidance requires external examiners to report on three major areas **related to standards**:

- (i) whether or not an institution is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements;
- (ii) whether or not the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the institution's policies and regulations;
- (iii) whether or not the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which the external examiners have experience.

It also requires informative comment and recommendations on:

- good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment observed by the external examiners;
- opportunities to enhance the quality of learning opportunities provided to students.

Within this framework, boards of examiners will work with their external examiner(s) in a variety of ways, **but the University expects external examiners to have sufficient evidence to enable them to discharge their responsibilities, i.e. to:**

- (a) have opportunity to comment on all examination papers in draft form [as required under *Examination Regulations, 2011*, p. 24, ll. 30-34];
- (b) have access to all scripts and other material submitted by candidates;
- (c) see a sample of scripts including scripts at the borderlines of classes;
- (d) see a sufficient sample of dissertations, extended essays and course work to be able to comment on the marks awarded;
- (e) be in a position to comment on the fairness of any procedures for the reconciliation of marks, moderation, scaling and adjustments arising out of medical or other evidence;
- (f) be provided with sufficient evidence to endorse the outcomes of the assessment processes concerned.

In relation to (e), the University does not regard this as requiring the external examiner to give a definitive final mark where there is initial disagreement between first markers (although examining boards may choose to ask the external examiner(s) to act in this way), but to be in a position to report on the soundness of the procedures used to reach a final agreed mark. **Similarly the University does not normally expect external examiners to make individual decisions relating to medical or other factors affecting performance but it does expect external examiners to be in a position to endorse the overall fairness of the procedures followed.** External examiners understandably attach considerable importance to having sufficient time to undertake the tasks in (b) - (e) and the timetabling of arrangements should take account of this.

## 5. Specific requirements relating to marking

### POLICY REQUIREMENTS

5.1. The supervisory bodies should frame their policy according to the following University requirements.<sup>3</sup>

#### 5.1.1. Standardised expression of agreed final marks

The University requires all examiners in Honour Moderations and second public examinations to express **agreed final marks** for individual papers (including those for formally assessed coursework) in the following form on the basis of the following class boundaries.

70 - 100	First Class
60 – 69	Upper Second
50 – 59	Lower Second
40 – 49	Third
30 – 39	Pass in Finals/Honour Mods
29 – 0	Fail

Examiners should be encouraged to use the entire range of the marking scale.

All examination candidates will be provided with a transcript showing their final agreed marks for the individual examination papers or other examined elements of their degree programme, and (for undergraduate degrees) how these marks relate to the final degree classification.

The transcript will show the final agreed marks according to the common scale and indicate the basis by which the classification is achieved. This may be on average mark alone, or may include specifications as to mark distribution (5 papers in the 2.1 class, etc.).

As Moderations and Preliminary Examinations are not classified, an amended version of this scheme is required as follows.

70 - 100	Distinction (where relevant)
40 – 69	Pass
39 – 0	Fail

#### *Postgraduate taught courses*

Following extensive consultation with divisions/Continuing Education, the Education Committee has concluded that, with appropriate explanation on any accompanying transcript, two models for the award of agreed final marks within the categories of distinction, pass and fail are acceptable. Agreed final marks must be expressed in numerical form.

<sup>3</sup> A fuller rationale for the requirements set out in this section is included in Annexe H.

(a)

70 – 100	Distinction
50 – 69	Pass
49 – 0	Fail

(b)

70 – 100	Distinction
60 – 69	Pass
59 – 0	Fail

Numerical marking, *which must be expressed in whole numbers for agreed final marks*, will be used for both undergraduate and graduate examinations.

There is currently no provision for the award of a degree 'with Merit', other than the special provision for the First and Second BM.

#### 5.1.2. Double-marking

There must be a mechanism to verify the marking of all papers for undergraduate second public examinations and graduate examinations under the aegis of all boards, and the minimum standard must be as follows:

In the case of papers for which there is a precise model solution and marking scheme approved by the examiners for every question, each script must be marked by an examiner or assessor; and every script **must be checked independently** (not necessarily by an examiner or assessor) to ensure that all parts have been marked and the marks and part-marks have been correctly totalled and recorded.

For papers without a model solution,

- (a) There should be an explicit process in place to ensure that a student's mark is not affected by relatively severe or lenient marking;
- (b) The majority of courses in the University use independent double marking for this purpose;
- (c) Alternative methods such as those used by Jurisprudence are permitted, if it can be demonstrated to the Education Committee that they serve the same purpose.

Every script or dissertation must be marked independently by two examiners or assessors (unless another marking method has been approved). Each division should have a consistent method across disciplines for reconciling the marks awarded by two markers.

Where subjects permit averaging of marks (over a narrow range) in reconciliation between markers, the system used must be clear and justifiable, and not operated to the detriment of candidates. If reconciliation is difficult, a third marker (perhaps – but not necessarily - the external examiner, see 4.8 above) should act as arbiter in agreeing the appropriate mark.

### 5.1.3. Scaling of marks

The Education Committee considers that it is appropriate to scale marks for a paper where it has been established that either:

- (a) a paper was more difficult or easy than in previous years, and/or
- (b) an optional paper was more or less difficult than other optional papers taken by students in a particular year.

In each case, examiners need to establish if they have sufficient evidence for scaling. Different considerations need to be taken into account for each of cases (a) and (b).

#### *(a) A paper was more difficult or easy than in previous years*

A significantly higher or lower median or mean mark for a paper relative to previous years would not in itself constitute sufficient evidence for this. Further evidence should also be identified, for example, via

- examiners' academic evaluation of the performance of the candidates (possibly guided by qualitative descriptors of each class);
- a comparison with the questions set in previous years' papers; and/or
- an analysis of the spread of candidates' performance in compulsory papers compared to their performance in the paper in question.

Scaling should not be used mechanistically to fit the spread of classes on a paper to historical norms (i.e. norm referencing).

#### *(b) an optional paper was more or less difficult than other optional papers taken by students in a particular year*

Again, a significantly higher or lower median or mean mark for an optional paper relative to other optional papers would not in itself constitute sufficient evidence for this. The differences in mean or median scores of students taking different optional papers could simply be the result of natural variation in ability within the cohort of students. If the number of students taking options is small, statistical analysis (say of performance of students in optional versus compulsory papers) can be an unreliable tool. Examiners should therefore exercise considerable caution before using scaling, and draw on the views of a third marker (who may be an external examiner).

In both cases (a) and (b), the general principles below must be followed by all boards of examiners when scaling is used:

- (i) Scaling should only be considered and undertaken after moderation of a paper has been completed;
- (ii) If it is decided that it is appropriate to use scaling, examiners should review a sample of papers either side of the classification borderlines to ensure that the outcome of scaling is consistent with academic views of what constitutes a paper in each class;
- (iii) All scaling of marks must be done in the year in which the paper(s) in question is/are taken. This point will be particularly pertinent for subjects with second-year examinations and for bodies considering initiating such examination arrangements;
- (iv) Detailed information about why scaling was necessary and how it was applied should be included in the Examiners' Report;

- (v) All examiners and boards should seek expert advice on the construction and operation of algorithms, where appropriate;
- (vi) All algorithms used for the purposes of scaling must be transparent and justifiable, and must be published as appropriate for the information of all examiners and students.

Examiners should also satisfy themselves that, if a computer algorithm is used in the classification process, its rules are fully consistent with the current conventions, especially if changes are being made to the conventions (see Section 3 for further detail on examination conventions).

#### **5.1.4. Use of vivas**

Examiners (and, if invited, an assessor) may examine a candidate viva voce in a University examination only where the specific regulations make provision for the use of vivas. Examiners should be clear as to the purpose of a viva voce examination, for example, it should not be used as a means of assessing suspicions about possible plagiarism, **which should be referred directly to the Proctors.**

#### **5.1.5. Retention of records**

Supervisory bodies should ensure that all examiners acting on their behalf are aware of the Proctoral requirements relating to the retention of records.

#### **5.1.6. Disclosure of marks and transparency**

The Proctors take the view that all agreed marks awarded should be disclosed to students, on the grounds of both the Data Protection Act (1998) and the educational value of feedback on assessed work. Evidence of recent medical problems etc. should have been considered at this stage in the process (see Annexe B). Degree classification will continue to be a matter for boards in accordance with their examination conventions using the complete set of standardised marks.

#### **5.1.7. Late submission and extensions of time for submission of dissertations, extended essays etc**

Procedures for the late submission of all material are clearly set out in the *Examination Regulations*, 2011, pp. 46-47. Unless the regulations governing a course make special provision for alternative procedures (which the Education Committee would not normally permit) then any applications for late submission should be made in this way to the Proctors. However, where an application for extension will take the marking of the work in question outside the timescale for the *current* examiners, then the application should be directed to the Education Committee (see Annexe A). In all cases, the applications will be considered on the basis of the evidence provided to support the additional time sought.

#### **5.1.8. Arrangements for re-sits for postgraduate taught courses**

For postgraduate taught courses the Education Committee's normal expectation is that any re-sits will be taken at the time the subject is examined the following year, **unless the special regulations permit an alternative practice.**

Where the whole of a component of an examination (the dissertation or **all** the written papers) has been successfully completed at the first examination, then the mark for the successful component can be carried over to the succeeding year and only the component or components which have been failed at the first examination re-taken. A component is taken to cover each of the main elements of an examination: dissertation, written examinations, extended essays, language papers or any other form of coursework.

Regulations should normally indicate what arrangements will be in place for re-sits. Where it is proposed that a re-sit may be taken earlier than the time at which the course is next examined, a full case must be made for this exception. It is likely that such a case will be approved only in relation to qualifying examinations where a delay would significantly increase the total length of a course, or for research master's courses where a decision about whether candidates can or cannot proceed to a research degree is dependent on re-sitting the examination on a shorter time scale.

#### **5.1.9 Releasing interim marks**

On the question of releasing interim marks, Proctoral policy supported by the Education Committee reflects the fact that agreed marks have to be made available to candidates within a prescribed time limit. In courses which involve the submission and assessment of material throughout the length of the course, effective feedback depends on marks being available. In such cases, arrangements to release marks and to provide feedback on individual elements of assessment should be agreed with the Proctors. Particular care should be taken either: (i) to ensure that procedures involving external examiners are in place to allow the approval and publication of final marks at various points throughout the year; or (ii) that candidates are made unequivocally aware that unmoderated marks may be subject to change at a later point. In relation to (ii) it has to be accepted that the release of such information, before any scaling or consideration of medical evidence, even with a clear warning that they might subsequently be changed, is to lay the University open to challenge if the marks concerned are subsequently altered at the time of final classification.

## 6. Information for students

### POLICY REQUIREMENTS

6.1. Supervisory bodies should ensure that all students receive appropriate guidance on the seriousness with which the University views all forms of plagiarism, and on means to avoid it (a template is annexed at F).

6.2. All students should be reminded that it is their own personal responsibility to ensure that all course work is submitted in the required format (including numbers of copies), by the right day and time, and at the right place.

6.3. Supervisory bodies should ensure that full and appropriate information is made available in good time for all students and academic staff involved in the assessment process. The Education Committee is particularly concerned to avoid late or incomplete information being circulated to candidates by chairmen of examiners. The essential details of examination conventions, weighting of papers, scaling mechanisms and the like should be included in course handbooks. Boards are asked to ensure that subsequent circulars to candidates concerning the fine detail of arrangements should be clear, accurate and timely. Should there be any discrepancy between the *Examination Regulations* and any other published course material, the *Examination Regulations* take precedence.

6.4. Examination conventions should include the name, position and institution of the external examiner(s) appointed to the examination of their course.

6.5 The attention of students should be drawn to the role of the Proctors in ensuring the proper conduct of examinations and in investigating complaints in relation to the assessment of student work. The University places a high priority on the fair and consistent operation of assessment procedures, especially in relation to measures to prevent fraudulent activities; to the detection of any forms of academic misconduct relating to assessment such as plagiarism, collusion, cheating, impersonation and the use of inadmissible material; and to the imposition of appropriate penalties for the late or non-submission of material for assessment. All these matters should be referred to the Proctors.

6.6. Decisions of examination boards should be published as speedily as possible, consistent with appropriate rigour in assessment and decision-making and accurate and systematic recording.

## 7. Examiners' reports and reviews of examination procedures

### POLICY REQUIREMENTS

7.1. Divisions and other supervisory bodies must ensure that they have appropriate mechanisms in place to:

- give full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations of external examiners (and any comments/questions from the Education Committee);
- ensure that there is appropriate student representation on the committees reviewing external examiners' reports;
- take consequential action and record it formally;
- inform the external examiner(s) in a considered and timely fashion where and why action has or has not been taken in response to their comments/recommendations;
- report back to the Education Committee where specific concerns/questions have been raised;
- make all reports (other than those where individuals might be identifiable) available to students via appropriate mechanisms;
- (where necessary) put in place revised arrangements for the examination round in the succeeding year.

7.2. Such mechanisms should secure the speedy consideration of examiners' reports in order to provide comment on any significant concerns for the relevant division and through the division to the Education Committee, and to ensure feedback to external examiners on a reasonable timescale. **Education Committee is particularly concerned that each year a small number of individual external examiner's reports indicate that they have not received such feedback on their previous year's suggestions.** The requirement for feedback to external examiners should not be taken, however, to imply a change in the nature of the University's relationship to external examiners. That is, the University remains responsible for the standard of its awards, and is under no compulsion to implement particular recommendations made by external examiners, although it is clear that the responsible body must always be in a position to explain why it did or did not adopt a particular proposal.

7.3. The University regards the reports made on behalf of all the examiners as an important element of its quality assurance arrangements. A template for the content of these reports is annexed at E. Responsible faculty/department academic bodies should use the annual reports by examiners (including the comments from external examiners), with their detailed breakdown of the assessment process, to monitor:

- any changes which the examination process might have suggested in relation to the existing content of the course;
- any changes which the examination process might have suggested in relation to the existing methods of assessment;
- any need to review specific options;

- the overall standard of performance in the examination, including any trends in results or in relation to particular areas of the curriculum;
- any possible changes in examination conventions, procedures or regulations suggested by the examiners' experience of the examination process.

7.4. Divisions should ensure that they have effective mechanisms in place for monitoring the class percentage figures for Schools under their aegis, and should take appropriate steps to investigate and, if appropriate, seek to effect changes in those for any school which seems to be out of line with others in the division as a whole. The Education Committee monitors the class percentage figures by Final Honour Schools each year.

## 8. Assessment

### POLICY REQUIREMENTS

8.1. The University's general principles in relation to overall methods of assessment have been covered above (see especially 2.2. – 2.6.). Divisions should keep the nature and methods of assessment for each course under review. In reviewing the assessment procedures used throughout the University or any unit or sub-unit of the University, divisions should pay attention to:

- the extent to which the assessment methods used
  - remain a valid, fair and reliable means of assessing student achievement;
  - provide appropriate evidence of the academic standards of the course being met by the majority of candidates;
  - are appropriate to the teaching methods employed and the intended learning outcomes of the course;
- any evidence that the amount of assessment or its timing is having a detrimental impact on the work of candidates;
- the evidence of the teaching quality and methods as revealed through the examination process and the reports of examiners.

8.2. Examiners are not permitted (other than in authorised pilots) to require candidates in taught course examinations to submit material solely by electronic means. The Education Committee takes the view that the complex issues relating to the integrity of the examination which this mode of submission raises are such that a consistent and fair approach could not be guaranteed.

This does not prohibit submission in electronic form or by electronic means in addition to submission by other modes, for example for the purposes of plagiarism detection.

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## Annexe A: Reasonable adjustments requiring significant changes to University course and assessment regulations

### Summary

1. The various parts of the equality legislation relating to disabled students in higher education<sup>4</sup> require all universities not to discriminate against disabled students. Discrimination includes treating a disabled student less favourably and failing to make 'reasonable adjustments'. As a consequence, the University needs to have procedures for approving 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure that disabled students (or prospective students) are not placed at a 'substantial disadvantage' in comparison with their non-disabled peers. This obligation covers many aspects of higher education but this annexe deals only with significant adjustments to course and assessment requirements which require approval on behalf of the Education Committee. In this area institutions are not required to make adjustments which would compromise the academic 'competence standards' of the courses in question. This annexe describes the types of adjustments involved and the normal procedures to be followed in considering applications for such adjustments. It should be noted that all universities are subject to the public sector equality duty<sup>5</sup>, the effect of which is to require universities to promote and embed disability equality proactively across institutional policies, procedures and practice<sup>6</sup>.

### Some key definitions

2. A **disability** is defined as a condition which has a long-term (has lasted for 12 months or is likely to do so), substantial (not minor or trivial) and adverse impact on an individual's capacity to undertake normal day-to-day activities. Disability covers a wide variety of conditions, encompassing long-term illness (often from the point of diagnosis) as well as physical or psychological problems, e.g.

- Vision or hearing impairments;
- Physical impairments such as paraplegia, cerebral palsy, repetitive strain injury (RSI) and arthritis;
- Mental health difficulties such as depression, anxiety and eating disorders;

<sup>4</sup> The Equality Act 2010 replaced the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA, 1995, amended 2001, 2005). In amending the DDA, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA, 2001) introduced the concept of 'reasonable adjustments' to the provision of higher education. The 2005 revision to the DDA placed a 'positive statutory duty' on public bodies (including the University) to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between disabled and other persons and to avoid disability-related discrimination (among other obligations). All these provisions have been incorporated into the Equality Act, together with a new, broader public sector equality duty.

<sup>5</sup> The public sector equality duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and foster good relations between people with a 'protected characteristic' and those without. 'Protected characteristics' are defined as age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity.

<sup>6</sup> The EHRC will publish updated guidance for providers of post-compulsory education during the course of 2011/12. The draft guidance is currently available to download from [http://equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/EqualityAct/draftcopfehe.doc](http://equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/EqualityAct/draftcopfehe.doc).

- Specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder. These conditions do not need to be shown to have a substantial adverse effect on 'normal day-to-day activities' as it is accepted that they will in all cases significantly affect students in higher education;
- Long-term health conditions such as HIV, diabetes, epilepsy, inflammatory bowel disease/Crohn's disease, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/ME, multiple sclerosis and cancer. A person with such a condition continues to be regarded as disabled despite fluctuations in the severity of their condition or, in the case of cancer, after recovery.

Case law has indicated that undertaking examinations is considered to be a day-to-day – rather than specialised – activity<sup>7</sup>.

**3. Reasonable adjustments** are central to the concept of disability equality. Where a disabled student suffers – or would suffer – a substantial disadvantage, the University is under a duty to make reasonable adjustments to overcome that disadvantage. The intention is that the adjustments should 'level the playing field' for the disabled student. It is important that adjustments meet the needs of the individual disabled student rather than providing a generic response to a class or type of disability. Once implemented, adjustments do not provide automatic precedents for other students, but may be taken into account when considering what would be appropriate in a different case. The duty is anticipatory which means that the University should not wait until it is asked to consider what adjustments might be made, but should be ready – where feasible – with solutions to overcome disadvantages. The failure to make reasonable adjustments cannot be legally justified and if an adjustment is deemed to be reasonable then it must be made.

**4. Competence standards.** There is no obligation to make adjustments to competence standards. Competence standards are the 'academic, medical or other standard[s] applied for the purpose of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability'<sup>8</sup> in their course. A competence standard must not itself be unlawfully discriminatory<sup>9</sup>, therefore it must not be applied only to a disabled student and must be:

1. Genuinely relevant to the course;
2. Applied equally to all students, whether with or without a disability; and
3. A proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

5. The *proportionate means* component requires that:

- i. There is a pressing need that supports the standard's purpose;
- ii. The application of the standard will achieve that aim; and

<sup>7</sup> Paterson v The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis (2007) UKEAT 0635/06.

<sup>8</sup> Equality Act 2010 c. 15 s. 13 4(3).

<sup>9</sup> Unlawful discrimination includes direct discrimination, which is never justifiable, and indirect discrimination or discrimination arising from a disability which cannot be justified in accordance with the numbered requirements set out in paragraph 4.

- iii. There is no other way of achieving the aim that is less detrimental to disabled people.

Not all competences or assessment criteria which students might be expected to fulfil on a particular course can necessarily be considered 'competence standards'.

6. Competence standards cannot be used to justify 'direct discrimination' against a disabled person. For example, a blanket refusal to allow a student to participate in any assessed experimental work merely because they are physically disabled would clearly be direct discrimination.
7. *Examples of competence standards.* These will vary considerably between disciplines and there are few relevant examples in the published guidance. Competence standards include admissions criteria – such as having studied a modern foreign language – where these are valid requirements for the course. However, it would be unusual to require 'good spoken English' for admission, unless it was genuinely essential, as this would risk discrimination against prelingually D/deaf people and users of sign language. In the sciences, students may be required to undertake laboratory practicals or complete manual clinical tasks in order to achieve the learning outcomes for an award. A time limit may be imposed on the assessment of a fundamental skill where this is genuinely relevant and necessary, e.g. a clinical measurement or task. In some examinations, for example those assessing knowledge of and application of quantitative techniques, the format of the assessment may be restricted by the nature of the test. A timed, invigilated assessment may therefore be most appropriate when candidates are being tested on their crystallised knowledge and ability to select and apply relevant techniques and skills. Where candidates are expected to demonstrate competence in a variety of modes of assessment, it would be reasonable to state that, for example, submission of a research project or extended piece of writing formed one of the competence standards for the course.
8. *Identifying competence standards.* Each course's educational aims and the programme outcomes students are expected to achieve are set out in the relevant programme specifications. These provide the framework within which competence standards are applied in order to determine whether students have achieved the requirements for an award. Course supervisory bodies with responsibility for assessment should consider which aspects of the programme aims may justifiably be considered competence standards, i.e. strictly relevant and necessary for course completion. This will involve identifying the particular knowledge, skill or ability which is being tested, and the appropriate standard required in order to obtain the award. Once these have been identified, it is important to consider the objective the competence standard is intended to achieve, whether that objective is a legitimate aim, and whether the standard is a proportionate means of achieving that aim. A competence standard which fails this test may be unlawfully discriminatory.
9. *Distinguishing competence standards and methods of assessment.* While competence standards are exempt from the obligation to make reasonable adjustments, the method by which students demonstrate their attainment of a learning outcome is not itself a competence standard (although there may be rare occasions where the competence standard and the method of assessment are inextricably linked, e.g. a musical performance). Thus, requiring all candidates to complete a written exam

within three hours would lead to indirect discrimination<sup>10</sup> and discrimination arising from disability<sup>11</sup> against people with fatigue conditions, physical impairments, or learning disabilities unless it could be shown that the three-hour time limit met all the requirements of criteria (1) to (3) in paragraph 4 above. This would be unlikely in most courses given the variety of methods of assessment already accepted within the University, as well as the difficulty of demonstrating that an ability to write within a single particular time limit was an integral and irreplaceable component of the standards applied in order to determine whether the student has the required level of competence or ability.<sup>12</sup> Failure to make adjustments to the mode of assessment for disabled students could therefore give rise to claims of discrimination, including a failure to make reasonable adjustments. By contrast, a method of assessment which required candidates to demonstrate synoptic knowledge of material studied over the course of one or two years is likely to be regarded as an acceptable competence standard. However, a method of assessing this knowledge which required high levels of stamina in order to complete a number of papers within a limited time scale would not be justifiable.

10. *Examples of reasonable adjustments to the assessment of a competence standard.*

There is a wide range of adjustments that may be made to provide disabled students with an opportunity to meet the competence standards required on their course. Most commonly these involve adjustments to the conditions under which timed examinations are taken, including the provision of extra time and/or rest breaks; taking exams in college or in a separate room; the use of word processing and other assistive technology; ergonomic furniture; and permission to take food, drink or medication into the examination hall. Additionally, disabled students undertaking practicals or clinical assessments can be provided with an adapted laboratory environment, permitted the use of assistive technology, or allowed extra time to complete non-time critical elements of the task<sup>13</sup>. When a candidate's disability-related needs cannot be met by such adjustments, it is necessary to consider more significant adjustments that may require dispensation from the regulations.

<sup>10</sup> 'Indirect discrimination' occurs when a policy, criterion or practice applied equally to all students has the effect of putting disabled students at a substantial disadvantage and is unlawful unless it can be justified as a 'proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim'.

<sup>11</sup> 'Discrimination arising from disability' occurs where a person is treated less favourably as a result of his or her disability and the treatment cannot be justified.

<sup>12</sup> The Disability Resource Centre publication 'Understanding the Disability Discrimination Act: A guide for colleges, universities and adult community learning providers in Great Britain' (2007, p.142) suggested that 'The following are examples which are unlikely to amount to competence standards in most cases:

- being able to cope with the demands of a course
- having good health and/or fitness (if this is unnecessary for the course. For example, it may be necessary for a sports science course)
- attendance requirements
- speaking or writing clearly.' [i.e. legibly]

This publication is available to download from the Skill website at [www.skill.org.uk/uploads/Understanding%20the%20DDA.doc](http://www.skill.org.uk/uploads/Understanding%20the%20DDA.doc).

<sup>13</sup> The latest edition of the General Medical Council's guidance to medical schools 'Gateways to the Professions. Advising medical schools: encouraging disabled students' (GMC, 2010) contains a comprehensive Appendix with numerous examples of the reasonable adjustments made for medical students in UK medical schools. ([http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/gateways\\_guidance.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/gateways_guidance.asp))

Infrequently, these might include a course supervisory body devising an alternative assessment format which will test the same competence standards as the original assessment, e.g. a take-home paper. If an alternative assessment is not possible or practicable, adjustments to the timing and duration of a timed written examination can be made to take account of a candidate's disability, e.g. splitting the examination over more than one session or allowing the candidate significantly longer to complete it. Students undertaking laboratory work or extended research projects may be given extra time and additional access to resources (e.g. over the vacation) to complete their work to the required level.

#### *Current procedures for evaluating the needs of disabled students*

11. In most cases, candidates with significant long-term health conditions should be evaluated under the provisions relating to disability. A full assessment undertaken in conjunction with the Disability Advisory Service will provide recommendations for support arrangements and adjustments to study conditions. Medical professionals or other specialists may also be asked to provide specific guidance. Advice on reasonable adjustments to assessment should be sought from the Disability Advisory Service<sup>14</sup> – and if necessary from the Proctors – well in advance of the examination. In some circumstances a dispensation from the examination regulations will be required for which applications to the Chairman of the Education Committee need to be made as early as possible. It should be noted that candidates with eligible long-term health conditions continue to be regarded as disabled even when they have been deemed well enough to resume study or assessment. Furthermore the duty to make reasonable adjustments continues to apply.

#### *Significant adjustments to course or assessment requirements*

12. Under the University's current procedures, reasonable adjustments which require significant changes to University examinations are approved by or on behalf of the Education Committee. The committee has delegated authority from Council to approve the necessary dispensations from the regulations required to put such changes into effect. Education Committee seeks supporting material from a number of sources in reaching decisions on applications of this type.
13. First, the application is routed through the student's college and therefore the expectation is that it will have been discussed and considered with relevant college tutors before submission. An indication of the extent of a college's support for an application is obviously helpful. Similarly it is expected that the college will have considered the nature and type of any adjustments which it wishes to ask the University to consider, and will set these out in the application. It will normally also have been in contact with the Disability Advisory Service.
14. Second, an application must be supported by appropriate medical or other specialist evidence to confirm the nature of the disability and its likely impact on a student's capacity to undertake all or parts of a course. The evidence should provide sufficient detail to enable those concerned to take a view on the reasonableness, in particular the need for and effectiveness of the requested adjustments.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/exams/>

15. Third, for most cases, a view of the application will also be sought from the Disability Advisory Service which has substantial experience of providing appropriate support for students with disabilities and identifying appropriate adjustments.
16. Fourth, the application will be sent to the relevant supervisory body for the course concerned and that body will be asked to provide a comment on the adjustments proposed. It is important that the relevant board of examiners are also consulted, particularly about any changes in the mode of assessment which they will be asked to oversee. In giving its view, the supervisory body should refer explicitly to the material setting out the competence standards for the award, for example the programme specification and/or assessment criteria.
17. In the light of the material collected from these sources, a decision is then taken on behalf of the Education Committee and passed back to the supervisory body/examiners, to the Disability Advisory Service and to the college (which communicates the decision to the student). Clearly the aim of the process is to secure a way forward which is acceptable all round, although the final decision rests with the Education Committee (normally the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) acting on its behalf). If a student is not content with the decision that is reached, then the normal route of appeal is to two members of Council who are also members of Education Committee (who have not previously been involved in the decision). Ultimately recourse would be to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education<sup>15</sup>.
18. A reasonable adjustment to a mode of assessment would normally be implemented via the Examination Schools as overseen by the Proctors. Once the decision has been made it is therefore also communicated to the Examination Schools and to the Proctors' Office.

#### *Examples of adjustments*

19. An extensive range of adjustments is already made via the Proctors' Office and the Examination Schools and details of these and the application process are set out in the Proctors' and Assessor's Memorandum<sup>16</sup>. These would include some of the most frequent adjustments allowed such as additional time, rest breaks, adaptations to an individual's timetable, etc. The adjustments which would require approval on behalf of the Education Committee are more significant in character and usually require a dispensation from the existing regulations governing aspects of the student's course. Examples might include any of the following:
  - A student is awarded an extension to the submission date of his or her thesis or dissertation which will take it beyond the current examination season (i.e. it may not be able to be examined by the current board of examiners).
  - A student is allowed to extend the overall period of time within which a course is normally taken, i.e. to timetable the component elements of a Final Honour School across three rather than two years.

<sup>15</sup> [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/proctors/info/pam/>

- A student is permitted to substitute an alternative method of assessment for one or more of the normal assessment items. This usually, though not universally, entails finding alternatives to unseen written examinations, e.g. extended essays, take-home papers, or an additional dissertation. Where this is not feasible, it may be possible to alter the timing or duration of the assessment, e.g. by splitting it over more than one session or allowing the candidate significantly longer to complete it.
  - A student is exceptionally permitted to omit one or more papers from the normal assessment requirement on the basis that the examiners are content that they will have sufficient material on which to reach a classified outcome.
20. These four examples illustrate the exceptional nature of such adjustments, and the care with which they need to be considered and put in place. It is also important to understand that the requirement is to identify what would be fair and reasonable for the student concerned in his or her individual circumstances, while maintaining the academic standards of the course. Approval for a particular application should not therefore be taken as providing an automatic precedent for another student. Each case has to be considered on its merits. Fairness to other candidates is ensured by taking very seriously the requirement not to compromise the competence standards of the course. Therefore it is important that an adjustment to a particular assessment method should not relax the academic requirements to be assessed as a whole. However, for the type of disabilities envisaged in this section, 'levelling the playing field' is unlikely to be a straightforward process.

#### *Marking and classification*

21. Examiners are often concerned as to whether reasonable adjustments should constitute the sole accommodation made to take account of a candidate's condition. Under Part 10 of the regulations for the conduct of University Examinations, a candidate with special examination needs can apply – through his or her college – for both (a) 'special examination arrangements relating to his or her condition' (Part 10.2 (1)) and (b) 'for the condition to be taken into account by the examiners as a special factor that may affect his or her performance in examinations' (Part 10.2 (2))<sup>17</sup>.
22. This means that even when special examination arrangements have been implemented to take account of a candidate's condition, the college may submit evidence to the examiners – via the Proctors – requesting them to take the candidate's circumstances into account.
23. It is accepted that examiners cannot assess undemonstrated performance and that candidates should not receive double compensation. Nevertheless, where they are directed to do so by the Proctors, examiners are asked to take a view as to whether the reasonable adjustments are likely to have fully compensated for a candidate's condition and allowed him or her to demonstrate his or her ability.
24. Furthermore examiners are also asked to consider the possibility that an examination adjustment may itself have adverse effects on a candidate's performance and that

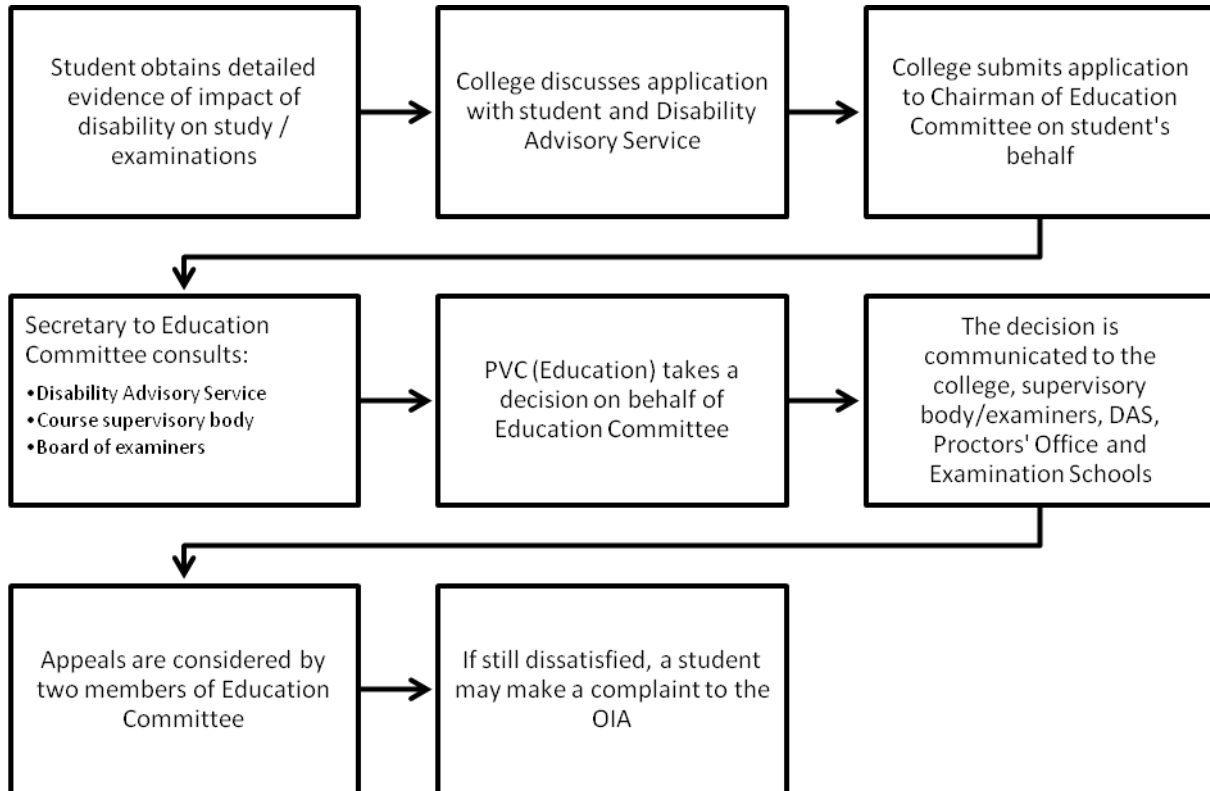
<sup>17</sup> *Examination Regulations*, Regulations for the Conduct of University Examinations; Part 10 Candidates with Special Examination Needs.

some compensation might be appropriate even where the adjustment (e.g. extra time or rest breaks) has ostensibly compensated for the effects of the disability. Examples might include the fatigue caused by taking examinations with extra time; the experience of lengthy incarceration; and frequent interruptions due to the need to take rest breaks.

25. Parity with other candidates is maintained by the requirement that all candidates must fulfil the assessment criteria of the course. Reasonable adjustments to the mode of assessment or the conditions under which the assessment is taken are designed not to compromise these academic standards. The identification of a course's competence standards is key to avoiding unlawful discrimination and enabling the University to meet its anticipatory duty to make reasonable adjustments (paragraph 3). Therefore, supervisory bodies are urged to clarify the competence standards of their courses in order to be better prepared for future applications for major adjustments to the mode of assessment<sup>18</sup>. This will make it easier to determine the most appropriate assessment for a disabled candidate.
26. The board of examiners is asked to bear these factors in mind when attempting to determine the candidate's proper class. Examiners may find the contextual evidence of especial use in cases where candidates have provided short weight answers or been placed close to a borderline.
27. See Annexe B: 'The use of medical and other certificates in examinations and assessment' for further guidance on the procedures to be followed in the consideration of medical and other evidence. Of particular importance is the necessity of keeping written records of the process of consideration and its outcome.

<sup>18</sup> The OIA has recommended that the University review its assessment criteria and processes with the aim of identifying appropriate competence standards for its courses.

## REQUESTING SIGNIFICANT ADJUSTMENTS TO COURSE OR ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS



## **Annexe B: The use of medical and other certificates in examinations and assessment**

### *Summary*

1. The purpose of this annexe is to set out the main lines of the University's policy on the use of medical certificates. It draws attention to the relevant sections of the Examination Regulations and then deals with the policy aspects of procedures and timing. It also makes cross-reference to the other new and related annexe approved by the Education Committee which deals with major adjustments for disabled students (Annexe A).

### *Background*

2. Section 6 of the QAA *Code of Practice: Assessment* states that institutions should provide guidance on 'the circumstances in which a panel or board may legitimately exercise discretion, and the extent of that discretion' and that this may 'helpfully include advice on the treatment of evidence provided about students whose assessment performance might have been adversely affected by extenuating circumstances'. In addition the University's procedures relating to medical evidence have been a factor in a number of determinations from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). In this context, the University's governing regulations are reviewed regularly and the guidance provided by the Proctors is updated each year in the light of issues which emerge from each examination period.

### *Some key principles*

#### *(a) Regulations*

3. The OIA emphasises the importance which it attaches to an institution following the relevant regulations and those regulations themselves being fair and transparent. There are two sets of applicable regulations in the current regulations for the conduct of University Examinations<sup>19</sup>.
4. **Part 10 Candidates with Special Examination Needs** relates to students with some form of disability, i.e. candidates 'who have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'<sup>20</sup>. These regulations apply to *all forms of disability* which impair a candidate's capacity to demonstrate their academic abilities in the same way as candidates without a disability. See Annexe A for further guidance on disability.
5. It is important to note that there are two dimensions to the general rules in Part 10, so that a candidate with special examination needs 'may apply to the Proctors through the Senior Tutor of his or her college (1) for special examination arrangements relating to his or her condition; and (2) for the condition to be taken into account as a special factor that may affect his or her performance in examinations' (*ibid.*, Part 10.1 (1) – (2)). The first provision relates to reasonable adjustments to the conditions

<sup>19</sup> *Examination Regulations: Regulations for the Conduct of University Examinations, Parts 10 and 11.*

<sup>20</sup> *Regulations for the Conduct of University Examinations; Part 10 Candidates with Special Examination Needs (Part 10.1 (1)).*

under which the examination is taken, including extra time, rest breaks, sitting the exam in college, using a computer or amanuensis, etc. It does not apply to major adjustments to the mode of assessment which would require an application to the Education Committee (see Annexe A)<sup>21</sup>. The second provision enables a college to provide medical evidence as to the likely impact of the disability on the candidate's examination performance, notwithstanding any reasonable adjustments already agreed. Where a college chooses to provide such supplementary evidence, it would be for the examiners to decide whether – in their view – the adjustments(s) in question should be regarded as providing a sufficient accommodation to the student's disability or, alternatively, that additional consideration might need to be given. This will require a balanced assessment of the medical (or other) evidence and consultation with the External Examiner(s).

6. In relation to the procedures used for marking and classification, reference should also be made to the following points drawn from the Education Committee's guidance on disability (Annexe A: *Reasonable adjustments requiring significant changes to University course and assessment regulations*). (The original numbering has been retained for clarity.)

23. It is accepted that examiners cannot assess undemonstrated performance and that candidates should not receive double compensation. Nevertheless, where they are directed to do so by the Proctors, examiners are asked to take a view as to whether the reasonable adjustments are likely to have fully compensated for a candidate's condition and allowed him or her to demonstrate his or her ability.
24. Furthermore examiners are also asked to consider the possibility that an examination adjustment may itself have adverse effects on a candidate's performance and that some compensation might be appropriate even where the adjustment (e.g. extra time or rest breaks) has ostensibly compensated for the effects of the disability. Examples might include the fatigue caused by taking examinations with extra time; the experience of lengthy incarceration; and frequent interruptions due to the need to take rest breaks.
25. Parity with other candidates is maintained by the requirement that all candidates must fulfil the assessment criteria of the course. Reasonable adjustments to the mode of assessment or the conditions under which the assessment is taken are designed not to compromise these academic standards. The identification of a course's competence standards is key to avoiding unlawful discrimination and enabling the University to meet its anticipatory duty to make reasonable adjustments (paragraph 3). Therefore, supervisory bodies are urged to clarify the competence standards of their courses in order to be better prepared for future applications for major adjustments to the mode of assessment. This will make it easier to determine the most appropriate assessment for a disabled candidate.

<sup>21</sup> The Education Committee has the power to implement major adjustments to the mode of assessment as a dispensation from the special examination regulations for each course. Advice on 'Applications concerning individual students (Dispensations etc)' is available to download from the Education Committee website at [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/ga/policies](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/ga/policies) and the Committee's terms of reference may be viewed on the University's Statutes and Regulations website (Council Regulations 15 of 2002).

26. The board of examiners is asked to bear these factors in mind when attempting to determine the candidate's proper class. Examiners may find the contextual evidence of especial use in cases where candidates have provided short weight answers or been placed close to a borderline between classes.

7. **Part 11 Acute illness or other urgent causes affecting candidates** relates to unforeseen factors which may have an impact on a candidate's performance<sup>22</sup>. When such factors come to the attention of the college, the Senior Tutor informs the Proctors that they are likely to have (or to have had) an effect on a candidate's performance. The Proctors will forward this information to the chairman of examiners unless in their opinion it is irrelevant to the candidate's performance. The medical or other certificate may be submitted before, during or after the examinations, though the regulations say that it is unlikely to be passed on if it is received after the final meeting of the examiners<sup>23</sup>. These provisions do not relate only to sudden illness or accidental injury but also to more long-standing conditions which nevertheless fail to meet the criteria for a special examination arrangement under Part 10. They also encompass the effects of other 'urgent causes' such as bereavement or the impact of a crime.
8. If the Proctors decide not to pass on information of this kind, the regulations require them to give their reasons for their decision. A candidate or his or her college may appeal against a decision of this kind under the regulations governing appeals (*ibid.*, Part 18.1).
9. Where a candidate takes examinations at a particular disadvantage, it is always preferable to alleviate the disadvantage by appropriate special arrangements, such as extra time, than to expect examiners to compensate in their adjudication on the merits of performance. If a candidate has been working below his or her best ability or approaches the examination in this condition, he or she will have to choose whether to go ahead with the possibility of impaired performance or to withdraw until his or her situation improves. However, candidates who elect to take their examinations at a disadvantage do not thereby give up their right to be considered under the provisions relating to disability or 'factors affecting performance' (*ibid.*, Part 11) as described in the following paragraph.

(b) *Procedures*

10. Within the framework established by the regulations and the *Proctors' Guidance for Examiners and Chairs of Examiners*, individual boards of examiners have adopted different mechanisms for considering medical and other special circumstances transmitted to them via the Proctors. Neither the regulations nor the guidance lays down specific procedures. In some cases consideration is via a subset of the board of examiners and the recommendations are reported to the whole board; in others all the members of the board are involved in the detailed discussion.

<sup>22</sup> Regulations for the Conduct of University Examinations; Part 11 Acute illness or other urgent causes affecting candidates.

<sup>23</sup> The OIA has expressed concern that such information is filtered at both the college and the Proctoral level and that, on rare occasions, it may not reach the examiners. It is also likely that the OIA would normally expect this type of information to be passed on even if it only becomes available after the final meeting of the examiners and the production of the class list. Education Committee intends to review this regulation accordingly.

11. Three points of policy have been endorsed by the Education Committee:
- a. The procedure to be followed should be part of the information published for candidates (either in course handbooks or in the published examination conventions);
  - b. Whatever the specific procedure chosen, it should allow appropriate involvement by the external examiner(s) who should be in a position to certify the fairness of the procedure followed;
  - c. A brief formal note confirming (a) the fact that information about special circumstances (as authorised by the Proctors) has been considered by the examiners, (b) how that information has been considered, and (c) the outcome of the consideration with the reasons for the decisions reached, should always be made and be available as part of the minutes of the examiners' proceedings.
12. The importance of the final requirement in (c) is already stressed in the Proctors' Guidance and Education Committee underlines its importance in the context of an increasing number of appeals to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator where the use made of such material is critical.
13. Colleges should remind candidates that their supporting evidence (e.g. a medical certificate) needs to provide explicit detail about the way(s) in which their condition is likely to affect their examination performance, e.g. fatigue, poor concentration, panic attacks, etc., and should detail any recommended adjustments, i.e. extra time, rest breaks, not taking exams in the morning, an amanuensis, etc. Doctors should use the University form provided to them for this purpose, and ensure that they fill in all relevant information.

(c) *Timing*

***Applications under Part 10 Candidates with Special Examination Needs***

14. The applicable regulations operate according to different timescales. As indicated in paragraph 5 above, it will be for a college – in the light of the reasonable adjustments already approved, and with the student's consent – to decide whether it wishes to ask the Proctors to pass on supplementary medical or other evidence to the examiners. The college should make any such request to the Proctors at the earliest possible opportunity.

***Applications under Part 11 Acute illness or other urgent causes affecting candidates***

15. In relation to Part 11, the unforeseen nature of the factors involved makes it more likely that the window of opportunity available for (i) a student to liaise with his or her college and obtain a medical certificate, (ii) the college to submit the material to the Proctors, and (iii) the Proctors to pass this on to the examiners will be restricted. The regulations themselves provide guidance on timing. Section 11.8 makes it clear that:

If it comes to the notice of a candidate's college before, during or after an examination that the candidate's performance in any part of a University Examination is likely to be or has been affected by factors of which the examiners have no

knowledge, that college shall through the Senior Tutor inform the Proctors of this factor.

However, the subsequent clause includes a specific stipulation that:

The Proctors will normally not pass such information to the chairman of examiners if it is received after the final meeting of the examiners.

The Proctors will accept submissions made after the final meeting of the board of examiners only in exceptional circumstances. Every effort should be made to ensure that medical certificates or other documentation are passed on as soon as possible. (See paragraph 7 and footnote 23.)

16. The point at which examiners consider the possible impact of a medical or other factor on the performance of a candidate has been complicated by the introduction of multi-part examinations. Practice differs somewhat between subject areas. A number of boards of examiners prefer to consider medical or other factors at the conclusion of the final part of a multi-part examination when their impact on the final degree classification can be gauged more accurately. Others make use of medical evidence at each stage in order to moderate candidates' marks. Education Committee does not wish to lay down policy on this point except to stipulate that all interim marks should be final rather than raw marks, scaled if necessary and released to candidates in order to provide feedback on performance. In some circumstances it may be necessary to consider medical evidence at an intermediate point, e.g. when determining eligibility for progression. The Committee would also reiterate its general policy, i.e. that the examiners' preferred approach should be set out in the information available to candidates and should have the endorsement of the external examiners. A confidential record of previously submitted medical evidence will need to be kept, e.g. on a password-protected spreadsheet, for use in the final classification meeting for multi-part examinations.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Competence standards and reasonable adjustments*

17. When considering the impact of a disability upon a candidate's assessment, it is appropriate to bear in mind the relevant equality law. The following extract from *Annexe A: Reasonable adjustments requiring significant changes to University course and assessment regulations* provides guidance on these key concepts. Universities are obliged under the Equality Act 2010 (and its predecessor the Disability Discrimination Act (1995, amended 2001, 2005) to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled students. The only exception to this is in the application of a competence standard. However, there are limitations on what may fairly be judged to be a competence standard and in nearly all cases reasonable adjustments must be made to the way in which the standard is assessed. (The original numbering has been retained for clarity.)

<p><b>3. Reasonable adjustments</b> are central to the concept of disability equality. Where a disabled student suffers – or would suffer – a substantial disadvantage, the</p>
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<sup>24</sup> Under the terms of the Data Protection Act, sensitive personal information must be kept securely and accessed only on a 'need-to-know' basis. Adequate security measures must be observed, e.g. the information must not be copied to laptops or memory sticks and taken off the premises (c.f. the University's Policy on Data Protection at <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/dp/policy.shtml>).

University is under a duty to make reasonable adjustments to overcome that disadvantage. The intention is that the adjustments should 'level the playing field' for the disabled student. It is important that adjustments meet the needs of the individual disabled student rather than providing a generic response to a class or type of disability. Once implemented, adjustments do not provide automatic precedents for other students, but may be taken into account when considering what would be appropriate in a different case. The duty is anticipatory which means that the University should not wait until it is asked to consider what adjustments might be made, but should be ready – where feasible – with solutions to overcome disadvantages. The failure to make reasonable adjustments cannot be legally justified and if an adjustment is deemed to be reasonable then it must be made.

**4. Competence standards.** There is no obligation to make adjustments to competence standards. Competence standards are the 'academic, medical or other standard[s] applied for the purpose of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability'<sup>25</sup> in their course. A competence standard must not itself be unlawfully discriminatory<sup>26</sup>, therefore it must not be applied only to a disabled student and must be:

4. Genuinely relevant to the course;
5. Applied equally to all students, whether with or without a disability; and
6. A proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

5. The *proportionate means* component requires that:

- iv. There is a pressing need that supports the standard's purpose;
- v. The application of the standard will achieve that aim; and
- vi. There is no other way of achieving the aim that is less detrimental to disabled people.

Not all competences or assessment criteria which students might be expected to fulfil on a particular course can necessarily be considered 'competence standards'.

6. Competence standards cannot be used to justify 'direct discrimination' against a disabled person. For example, a blanket refusal to allow a student to participate in any assessed experimental work merely because they are physically disabled would clearly be direct discrimination.

**7. Examples of competence standards.** These will vary considerably between disciplines and there are few relevant examples in the published guidance. Competence standards include admissions criteria – such as having studied a modern foreign language – where these are valid requirements for the course. However, it would be unusual to require 'good spoken English' for admission, unless it was genuinely essential, as this would risk discrimination against prelingually D/deaf people and

<sup>25</sup> Equality Act 2010 c. 15 s. 13 4(3).

<sup>26</sup> Unlawful discrimination includes direct discrimination, which is never justifiable, and indirect discrimination or discrimination arising from a disability which cannot be justified in accordance with the numbered requirements set out in paragraph 4.

users of sign language. In the sciences, students may be required to undertake laboratory practicals or complete manual clinical tasks in order to achieve the learning outcomes for an award. A time limit may be imposed on the assessment of a fundamental skill where this is genuinely relevant and necessary, e.g. a clinical measurement or task. In some examinations, for example those assessing knowledge of and application of quantitative techniques, the format of the assessment may be restricted by the nature of the test. A timed, invigilated assessment may therefore be most appropriate when candidates are being tested on their crystallised knowledge and ability to select and apply relevant techniques and skills. Where candidates are expected to demonstrate competence in a variety of modes of assessment, it would be reasonable to state that, for example, submission of a research project or extended piece of writing formed one of the competence standards for the course.

8. *Identifying competence standards.* Each course's educational aims and the programme outcomes students are expected to achieve are set out in the relevant programme specifications. These provide the framework within which competence standards are applied in order to determine whether students have achieved the requirements for an award. Course supervisory bodies with responsibility for assessment should consider which aspects of the programme aims may justifiably be considered competence standards, i.e. strictly relevant and necessary for course completion. This will involve identifying the particular knowledge, skill or ability which is being tested, and the appropriate standard required in order to obtain the award. Once these have been identified, it is important to consider the objective the competence standard is intended to achieve, whether that objective is a legitimate aim, and whether the standard is a proportionate means of achieving that aim. A competence standard which fails this test may be unlawfully discriminatory.

9. *Distinguishing competence standards and methods of assessment.* While competence standards are exempt from the obligation to make reasonable adjustments, the method by which students demonstrate their attainment of a learning outcome is not itself a competence standard (although there may be rare occasions where the competence standard and the method of assessment are inextricably linked, e.g. a musical performance). Thus, requiring all candidates to complete a written exam within three hours would lead to indirect discrimination<sup>27</sup> and discrimination arising from disability<sup>28</sup> against people with fatigue conditions, physical impairments, or learning disabilities unless it could be shown that the three-hour time limit met all the requirements of criteria (1) to (3) in paragraph 4 above. This would be unlikely in most courses given the variety of methods of assessment already accepted within the University, as well as the difficulty of demonstrating that an ability to write within a single particular time limit was an integral and irreplaceable component of the standards applied in order to determine whether the student has the required level of competence or ability.<sup>29</sup> Failure to make adjustments to the mode of assessment for

<sup>27</sup> 'Indirect discrimination' occurs when a policy, criterion or practice applied equally to all students has the effect of putting disabled students at a substantial disadvantage and is unlawful unless it can be justified as a 'proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim'.

<sup>28</sup> 'Discrimination arising from disability' occurs where a person is treated less favourably as a result of his or her disability and the treatment cannot be justified.

<sup>29</sup> The Disability Resource Centre publication 'Understanding the Disability Discrimination Act: A guide for colleges, universities and adult community learning providers in Great Britain' (2007, p.142)

disabled students could therefore give rise to claims of discrimination, including a failure to make reasonable adjustments. By contrast, a method of assessment which required candidates to demonstrate synoptic knowledge of material studied over the course of one or two years is likely to be regarded as an acceptable competence standard. However, a method of assessing this knowledge which required high levels of stamina in order to complete a number of papers within a limited time scale would not be justifiable.

10. *Examples of reasonable adjustments to the assessment of a competence standard.*

There is a wide range of adjustments that may be made to provide disabled students with an opportunity to meet the competence standards required on their course. Most commonly these involve adjustments to the conditions under which timed examinations are taken, including the provision of extra time and/or rest breaks; taking exams in college or in a separate room; the use of word processing and other assistive technology; ergonomic furniture; and permission to take food, drink or medication into the examination hall. Additionally, disabled students undertaking practicals or clinical assessments can be provided with an adapted laboratory environment, permitted the use of assistive technology, or allowed extra time to complete non-time critical elements of the task<sup>30</sup>. When a candidate's disability-related needs cannot be met by such adjustments, it is necessary to consider more significant adjustments that may require dispensation from the regulations. Infrequently, these might include a course supervisory body devising an alternative assessment format which will test the same competence standards as the original assessment, e.g. a take-home paper. If an alternative assessment is not possible or practicable, adjustments to the timing and duration of a timed written examination can be made to take account of a candidate's disability, e.g. splitting the examination over more than one session or allowing the candidate significantly longer to complete it. Students undertaking laboratory work or extended research projects may be given extra time and additional access to resources (e.g. over the vacation) to complete their work to the required level.

suggested that 'The following are examples which are unlikely to amount to competence standards in most cases:

- being able to cope with the demands of a course
- having good health and/or fitness (if this is unnecessary for the course. For example, it may be necessary for a sports science course)
- attendance requirements
- speaking or writing clearly' [i.e. legibly]

This publication is available to download from the Skill website at [www.skill.org.uk/uploads/Understanding%20the%20DDA.doc](http://www.skill.org.uk/uploads/Understanding%20the%20DDA.doc).

<sup>30</sup> The latest edition of the General Medical Council's guidance to medical schools 'Gateways to the Professions. Advising medical schools: encouraging disabled students' (GMC, 2010) contains a comprehensive Appendix with numerous examples of the reasonable adjustments made for medical students in UK medical schools. ([http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/gateways\\_guidance.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/gateways_guidance.asp))

## Annexe C: Rationale for Final Honour Schools without a second year examination

- The two-year Final Honour School allows time for a coherent programme of study that can more effectively promote students' sustained academic development.
- The separation of teaching and examining gives more freedom to tutors to explore the subject with students.
- Students are obliged to carry forward skills and link together different strands of the subject; they are discouraged from 'modularising' their knowledge, skills and thought.
- Revision for finals becomes an important integrative part of the learning experience.
- Working for a single set of finals requires students to develop their ability to plan ahead, to manage time, and to prioritise their activities.
- One set of examinations after a two-year course may subject students to less pressure overall than annual examinations.
- The early parts of some FHS courses focus on helping students to acquire fundamental skills, and these may well merit early formative assessment; but summative assessment is best delayed to the end of a course by when students will have gained an appropriate body of knowledge and understanding to demonstrate the use of their skills to best advantage.
- The assessment for the degree takes place only when the students are in a position to demonstrate their ability at the most mature stage of their understanding of the subject.

## Annexe D: Good practice guide to assessment design

Assessment practices should:

- Promote the academic coherence of planned programmes of study. In designing courses it should be borne in mind that the mode of assessment, and the range of subject knowledge assessed, have a significant impact on students' learning and therefore their understanding of their subject.
- Encourage students to develop higher order intellectual skills as they progress through their programme of study. Assessment practices should therefore focus on synthesis, critical evaluation and the application of knowledge to unfamiliar problems, and should avoid reliance on testing of factual recall.
- Promote the integration of different strands and topics within the subject of study. The process of revision for formal public examination encourages students to integrate separate elements of knowledge and promotes a deeper understanding of underlying disciplinary issues. These benefits may, however, be lost if students are subject to excessive assessment or assessment focussed on factual recall.
- Enable students to demonstrate their ability at the most mature stage of their understanding of the subject.
- Test students' ability to **meet multiple academic demands**, manage their time and prioritise their activities.
- Allow tutors and students freedom to explore the subject and take intellectual risks free of excessive pressure of assessment.

The Oxford Learning Institute is able to provide advice on course design and development, including assessment.

## Annexe E: Form of Report on Examinations

*[In compiling their reports, examiners are asked to have regard to the Education Committee's Policy and Guidance on Examinations and Assessment, and any applicable divisional/subject guidance.]*

### [EXAMINATION TITLE AND DETAILS HERE]

**Part I** [This part to be forwarded as a matter of course to the joint consultative committees.]

**A. STATISTICS** [In each case please give the figures for the preceding two years in brackets.] **[Statistical data should not be provided for cohorts comprising five or fewer students.]**

#### (1) Numbers and percentages in each class/category

##### (a) Classified examinations

Class	Number			Percentage (%)		
	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
I		( )	( )		( )	( )
II.I		( )	( )		( )	( )
II.II		( )	( )		( )	( )
III		( )	( )		( )	( )
Pass		( )	( )		( )	( )
Fail		( )	( )		( )	( )

##### (b) Unclassified Examinations

Category	Number			Percentage		
	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
Distinction		( )	( )		( )	( )
Pass		( )	( )		( )	( )
Fail		( )	( )		( )	( )

#### (2) If vivas are used:

**Please include numerical detail of any vivas which were held, with an indication of the effect of any vivas on classes or results.**

### **(3) Marking of scripts**

**Please give details of scripts which are not double-marked.**

#### **B. NEW EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

[Please state here any new methods and procedures operated for the first time in the current academic year with any comment on their operation in the examination and on their effectiveness in measuring the achievement of the stated course objectives.]

**C. Please list any changes in examining methods, procedures and conventions which the examiners would wish the faculty/department and the divisional board to consider.**

**D. Please describe how candidates are made aware of the examination conventions to be followed by the examiners (Please attach to the report a copy of the conventions and any other relevant documentation [including the relevant standing orders – see *Examination Regulations, 2011, p. 17, ll. 9-20*]).**

### **Part II**

[i.e. the remainder of the report containing discussion of individual papers etc.] Examiners are asked to ensure that any comments that they do not wish to have transmitted to junior members are indicated clearly and are kept within the separate *Section E* of this report. The report should include the following sections:

#### **A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION**

[*excluding* comments on identifiable individuals and other material which would usually be treated as reserved business. This section should include any matters which the examiners wish to draw to the particular attention of the responsible body, including any comment on statistical trends as shown in section A. It is especially helpful to have a comment on the overall standard of performance in the examination, including any trends in results or in relation to particular areas of the curriculum, and on any developments or changes to the existing course which might have been suggested by the examination process.]

#### **B. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES AND BREAKDOWN OF THE RESULTS BY GENDER**

[Chairmen of examiners should include in the reports of their boards a commentary on any general issues relating to questions of equality and diversity, and of special educational needs (comments which might identify individual candidates should be confined to section E). A breakdown of the results by gender should always be supplied, so that it is possible to track systematically gender differences in examination performance. This section of the report should also include comments on the effect of different methods of assessment (e.g. problem questions, extended essays, essay papers) on any observed differences.]

#### **C. DETAILED NUMBERS ON CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE IN EACH PART OF THE EXAMINATION**

[This section should include the numbers taking any optional papers. Where appropriate, and where the information is likely to be useful, it should also include the number of attempts and a breakdown of the marks on each individual question. This will help towards a judgement about whether candidates are achieving a balanced coverage of the syllabus.]

**D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS**

[This part (which is likely to be the longest part of the report) should be physically separate. Together with the preceding sections, it will be scrutinised by teaching committees and examination committees, and made available to Joint Consultative Committees with Undergraduates and to college and departmental libraries. It must not therefore contain any material which would usually be treated as reserved business.]

**E. COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF IDENTIFIABLE INDIVIDUALS AND OTHER MATERIAL WHICH WOULD USUALLY BE TREATED AS RESERVED BUSINESS**

[This part must be physically separate, and must be detached from the version of the report sent to JCC's and to college and departmental libraries.]

**F. NAMES OF MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS**

## **Annexe F: Good practice in citation and the avoidance of plagiarism**

*The wording provided below is intended to provide a template of the information which should be made available to students; but it does not attempt to include the subject-specific points which individual supervisory bodies may wish to add by way of amplification.*

### **Academic integrity: good practice in citation and the avoidance of plagiarism**

Recognising the need for a set of University resources on these issues, the Education Committee has produced and approved an extensive set of web pages. These can be found at <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/goodpractice/>. The Education Committee asks all responsible bodies to incorporate the University definition of plagiarism (below) into their subject handbooks and websites. The accompanying explanatory material may also prove of use.

The Education Committee is clear that all resources of this sort need to be used as part of a co-ordinated strategy. It therefore asks divisions, faculties and departments to ensure that:

**Subject handbooks and websites** provide links to the Education Committee web pages. In conjunction with this link, individual subject handbooks/websites should provide:

- The University definition of plagiarism given below;
- Appropriate subject-specific guidance on plagiarism, including a range of relevant examples;
- Specific guidance on academic good practice and topics such as time management, note-taking, referencing, research and library skills and information literacy;
- Each subject should either produce or refer students to a style guide to inform them about appropriate referencing practice.

**Faculty/departmental induction sessions** should – in the Education Committee’s view – always incorporate separate sessions on good academic practice and the avoidance of plagiarism, which should include advice on note-taking, referencing practice and study skills. They should also emphasise how different university learning methods are from those employed at school. Further sessions on plagiarism and academic practice should be organised as students prepare to undertake projects and dissertations.

**Faculty/departmental guidance** should also consider the particular needs of students who are non-native speakers of English.

## UNIVERSITY DEFINITION OF PLAGIARISM

Cf. <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/goodpractice/>

### (For incorporation in faculty and departmental handbooks and websites)

Plagiarism is the copying or paraphrasing of other people's work or ideas into your own work without full acknowledgement. All published and unpublished material, whether in manuscript, printed or electronic form, is covered under this definition.

Collusion is another form of plagiarism involving the unauthorised collaboration of students (or others) in a piece of work.

Cases of suspected plagiarism in assessed work are investigated under the disciplinary regulations concerning conduct in examinations. Intentional or reckless plagiarism may incur severe penalties, including failure of your degree or expulsion from the university.

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### (Explanatory material for insertion in faculty and departmental handbooks and websites where desired)

#### Why does plagiarism matter?

Plagiarism is a **breach of academic integrity**. It is a principle of intellectual honesty that all members of the academic community should acknowledge their debt to the originators of the ideas, words, and data which form the basis for their own work. Passing off another's work as your own is not only poor scholarship, but also means that you have failed to complete the learning process. Deliberate plagiarism is unethical and can have serious consequences for your future career; it also undermines the standards of your institution and of the degrees it issues.

#### What to avoid

The necessity to reference applies not only to text, but also to other media, such as computer code, illustrations, graphs etc. It applies equally to published text drawn from books and journals, and to unpublished text, whether from lecture handouts, theses or other students' essays. You must also attribute text or other resources downloaded from web sites.

There are various forms of plagiarism and it is worth clarifying the ways in which it is possible to plagiarise:

- **Verbatim quotation without clear acknowledgement**  
Quotations must always be identified as such by the use of either quotation marks or indentation, with adequate citation. It must always be apparent to the reader which parts are your own independent work and where you have drawn on someone else's ideas and language.
- **Paraphrasing**  
Paraphrasing the work of others by altering a few words and changing their order or by closely following the structure of their argument, is plagiarism because you are deriving your words and ideas from their work without giving due acknowledgement. Even if you include a reference to the original author in your own text you are still creating a misleading impression that the paraphrased wording is entirely your own. It is better to write a brief summary of the author's overall argument in your own words than to paraphrase particular sections of his or her writing. This will ensure you have a

genuine grasp of the argument and will avoid the difficulty of paraphrasing without plagiarising. You must also properly attribute all material you derive from lectures.

- **Cutting and pasting from the Internet**  
Information derived from the Internet must be adequately referenced and included in the bibliography. It is important to evaluate carefully all material found on the Internet, as it is less likely to have been through the same process of scholarly peer review as published sources.
- **Collusion**  
This can involve unauthorised collaboration between students, failure to attribute assistance received, or failure to follow precisely regulations on group work projects. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are entirely clear about the extent of collaboration permitted, and which parts of the work must be your own.
- **Inaccurate citation**  
It is important to cite correctly, according to the conventions of your discipline. Additionally, you should not include anything in a footnote or bibliography that you have not actually consulted. If you cannot gain access to a primary source you must make it clear in your citation that your knowledge of the work has been derived from a secondary text (e.g. Bradshaw, D. *Title of book*, discussed in Wilson, E., *Title of book* (London, 2004), p. 189).
- **Failure to acknowledge**  
You must clearly acknowledge all assistance which has contributed to the production of your work, such as advice from fellow students, laboratory technicians, and other external sources. This need not apply to the assistance provided by your tutor or supervisor, nor to ordinary proofreading, but it is necessary to acknowledge other guidance which leads to substantive changes of content or approach.
- **Professional agencies**  
You should neither make use of professional agencies in the production of your work nor submit material which has been written for you. It is vital to your intellectual training and development that you should undertake the research process unaided. Under Statute XI on University Discipline, all members of the University are prohibited from providing material that could be submitted in an examination by students at this University or elsewhere.
- **Autoplagiarism**  
You must not submit work for assessment which you have already submitted (partially or in full) to fulfil the requirements of another degree course or examination, unless this is specifically provided for in the special regulations for your course.

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**(Examiners may wish to alert candidates to the following disciplinary regulations)**

In their Memorandum, **Essential Information for Students**, the Proctors and Assessor draw attention to the disciplinary regulations relating to plagiarism that must be observed by both undergraduate and graduate students:

*Section 9.6*

3. No candidate shall cheat or act dishonestly, or attempt to do so, in any way, whether before, during or after an examination, so as to obtain or seek to obtain an unfair advantage in an examination.

4. No candidate shall present for an examination as his or her own work any part or the substance of any part of another person's work.

5. In any written work (whether thesis, dissertation, essay, coursework, or written examinations) passages quoted or closely paraphrased from another person's work must be identified as quotations or paraphrases, and the source of the quoted or paraphrased material must be clearly acknowledged.

6. Unless specifically permitted by the special Subject Regulations for the examination concerned, no candidate shall submit to the Examiners any work which he or she has previously submitted partially or in full for examination at this University or elsewhere. Where earlier work by the candidate is citable, he or she shall reference it clearly.

7. No person shall dishonestly give help to a candidate before, during or after an examination so as to give, or attempt to give, that candidate an unfair advantage in an examination.

#### *Section 9.5*

The University reserves the right to use software applications to screen any individual's submitted work for matches either to published sources or to other submitted work. Any such matches respectively might indicate either plagiarism or collusion. Although the use of electronic resources by students in their academic work is encouraged, you should remember that the regulations on plagiarism apply to on-line material and other digital material just as much as to printed material.

A copy of this declaration is available to download from the Education Committee website at <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/goodpractice/>.

[FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL] OF [ . . . ]

## DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

[Instructions to candidates.]

Name (in capitals):

Candidate number:

College (in capitals):

[Supervisor/Adviser:]

Title of [thesis/extended essay] (in capitals):

Word count: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick to confirm the following:

I have read and understood the University's disciplinary regulations concerning conduct in examinations and, in particular, the regulations on plagiarism (*Essential Information for Students. The Proctors' and Assessor's Memorandum*, Section 9.6; also available at [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/proctors/info/pam/section9.shtml](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/proctors/info/pam/section9.shtml)).

I have read and understood the Education Committee's information and guidance on academic good practice and plagiarism at [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/goodpractice](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/goodpractice).

The [thesis/dissertation/extended essay/assignment/project/other submitted work] I am submitting is entirely my own work except where otherwise indicated.

It has not been submitted, either partially or in full, for another Honour School or qualification of this University (except where the Special Regulations for the subject permit this), or for a qualification at any other institution.

I have clearly indicated the presence of all material I have quoted from other sources, including any diagrams, charts, tables or graphs.

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[Insert subject-specific statements as necessary]

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## **Annexe G: Appointment of postgraduate students as assessors in taught-course examinations**

### **THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE'S POLICY ON THE APPOINTMENT OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AS ASSESSORS IN TAUGHT-COURSE EXAMINATIONS**

1. Only senior research students<sup>31</sup> should be eligible for appointment, though exceptions may be made in certain circumstances.
2. Students must have relevant expertise or experience. They should normally have teaching experience of the relevant paper.
3. It is preferable that nominees are employed either as Graduate Teaching Assistants / Teaching Associates etc or as College tutors.
4. Graduate students should only be nominated with the consent of the paper setter and the convenor of the subject teaching group.
5. They should have attended appropriate training or received individual instruction from an experienced examiner.
6. They should have access to information about the paper, examination conventions, marking procedures and general expectations of candidates.
7. Provision should be made for the supervision and monitoring of their performance.
8. Their scripts should be subject to additional sampling and consistency checks.
9. Otherwise qualified students without teaching experience should be confined to marking questions for which there is a precise model solution and an approved marking scheme.
10. Students should only be appointed to mark postgraduate examinations in exceptional circumstances.
11. Appointment of assessors is subject to the approval of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Proctors in each case.

<sup>31</sup> Senior Research Students are defined as those who have successfully completed transfer from PRS status.

## Annexe H: Consistency in marking and classification conventions for second public examinations

1.1. Across the disciplines within each division in the University, there are many similarities in the way we teach and assess undergraduate students. Some common features in marking and classification would therefore be expected within divisions. Marking and classification criteria must also be valid<sup>32</sup> and fair<sup>33</sup>, and this may involve a degree of variation from discipline to discipline.

1.2. Whilst academics in subject disciplines are best placed to determine the criteria used in marking and classification, Education Committee also has a duty to ensure that the processes used to apply these criteria are fair and transparent. What matters most is that there should be clear processes for marking and classification, and that where these differ from the norm and from cognate disciplines, there is a rationale for the divergence.

1.3. In Trinity term 2008, Education Committee reviewed the consistency of our marking and classification processes both within divisions, and across divisions. In addition to updating policies on independent double marking (5.1.2) and scaling (5.1.3) now contained in this document, it agreed that:

- The disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences divisions that do not have paper-level qualitative descriptors should develop this form of descriptor.
- The disciplines in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Medical Sciences divisions should provide descriptors for bands of marks within the classification level for a First.<sup>34</sup>
- Each division should develop a consistent method across disciplines for agreeing the marks awarded by two markers.
- Each division should ensure that all courses have an explicit short-weight convention. Each division should develop a common convention for short-weight, and work towards developing a common University convention across divisions.
- Taking proper account of any particular academic and/or discipline-based reasons:
  - a) The Social Sciences and Medical Sciences divisions should develop a common classification convention within each division.
  - b) The Humanities division should ensure that the board of the Faculty of Theology review the case for using the Humanities classification conventions in the Bachelor of Theology.

<sup>32</sup> Precept one in the QAA Code of Practice on assessment states that institutions must have 'policies and practices that ensure the standard for each award and award element is set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that student performance is properly judged against this.' Similarly, Precept 2 states that 'Institutions publicise and implement principles and procedures for, and processes of, assessment that are explicit, valid and reliable'

<sup>33</sup> Precept 7 in the QAA Code of Practice states that institutions must have 'transparent and fair mechanisms for marking and for moderating marks.'

<sup>34</sup> For example, see the following from Geography:  
<http://www.geog.ox.ac.uk/undergraduate/info/fhs/markings.html>

- c) The Humanities division should review the case for the continuation of the rule for a 'First by alternative route', in consultation with the boards of the Faculties of Theology and Music.
- The Humanities, Social Sciences and Medical Sciences divisions should review the minimum average mark in their classification conventions relative to the University's standardised expression of agreed final marks.
- The Humanities division should require explicit statements on scaling in the conventions of individual courses. The Medical Sciences and Social Sciences divisions should develop a common scaling policy in each division.

Changes agreed by the MPLS division since Michaelmas 2008 are described at:  
<http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/intranet/teaching-learning/documents/taught-course-examination-procedures>

## Annexe I: The University's courses and the English credit framework

1 The University is often asked to clarify its understanding of the position of its bachelors, integrated master's and master's degrees in relation to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA) and the European Credit Transfer System. The following is the standard approach adopted on behalf of the Education Committee in relation to the University's master's degrees. A similar approach is adopted in relation to questions relating to the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

The UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) recently updated its Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/default.asp>, updated August 2008). This framework provides a guide to the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of individual qualifications, and assists international comparability, particularly in the European context. The UK framework is fully aligned with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA).

A range of master's degrees is common throughout the UK and typically includes study equivalent to at least one full-time academic year at master's level (level 7). The University believes that its current master's courses fully meet the requirements set out in the relevant qualification descriptor for level 7 (annexed). The QAA framework (paragraph 23 - Table 1) indicates the equivalence of level 7 qualifications to second cycle (end of cycle) qualifications in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA). This was confirmed in the recently published document: [Verification of the compatibility of The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland \(FHEQ\) with The framework for qualifications of the European higher education area \(FQ-EHEA\)](#)

Although the University of Oxford does not credit rate its courses, it believes that its master's courses carry at least the same minimum credit equivalent as other master's courses credited within the English framework. This is set out in the QAA Higher Education Credit Framework for England [Academic credit in higher education in England - an introduction](#) . This document gives a taught master's course a minimum credit rating of 180 credits and an equivalence with the ECTS credit ranges from the FQ-EHEA of a minimum of 60 ECTS and more typically a credit range of 90 - 120 ECTS.

### ANNEXE

*Extract from the **Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ), 2008***

*Descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 7: Master's degree*

The descriptor provided for this level of the framework is for any master's degree which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor can also be used as a reference point for other level 7 qualifications, including postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas.

#### **Master's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:**

- a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice

- a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship
- originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
  - to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
  - to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

**Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:**

- deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level
- continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

**And holders will have:**

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
  - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
  - decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations
  - the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

39 Much of the study undertaken for master's degrees will have been at, or informed by, the forefront of an academic or professional discipline. Students will have shown originality in the application of knowledge, and they will understand how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research. They will be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, and they will show originality in tackling and solving problems. They will have the qualities needed for employment in circumstances requiring sound judgement, personal responsibility and initiative in complex and unpredictable professional environments.

40 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).

41 Master's degrees are often distinguished from other qualifications at this 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.

42 Some master's degrees, for example in science, engineering and mathematics, comprise an integrated programme of study spanning several levels where the outcomes are normally achieved through study equivalent to four full-time academic years. While the final outcomes of the qualifications themselves meet the expectations of the descriptor for a higher

education qualification at level 7 in full, such qualifications are often termed 'integrated master's' as an acknowledgement of the additional period of study at lower levels (which typically meets the expectations of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 6).

## **ANNEXE J UK-wide criteria for appointing external examiners**

**(taken from UK Quality Code - section 7 - External Examining)**

### **Indicator 5**

Institutions apply the following UK-wide set of criteria for appointing external examiners and make every effort to ensure that their external examiners are competent to undertake the responsibilities defined by the institution.

Institutions use the criteria to ensure that potential conflicts of interest are identified and resolved prior to appointing external examiners or as soon as they arise.

### **Person specification**

a. Institutions appoint external examiners who can show appropriate evidence of the following:

- i) knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality
- ii) competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof
- iii) relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate
- iv) competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures
- v) sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers
- vi) familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed
- vii) fluency in English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that external examiners are provided with the information to make their judgements)
- viii) meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies
- ix) awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula
- x) competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

### **Conflicts of interest**

b. Institutions do not appoint as external examiners anyone in the following categories or circumstances:

- i) a member of a governing body or committee of the appointing institution or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the appointing institution or one of its collaborative partners
- ii) anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study
- iii) anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study
- iv) anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study
- v) anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme(s) or modules in question
- vi) former staff or students of the institution unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s)
- vii) a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution
- viii) the succession of an external examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home department and institution
- ix) the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution.

### **Terms of office**

- c. The duration of an external examiner's appointment will normally be for four years, with an exceptional extension of one year to ensure continuity.
- d. An external examiner may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.
- e. External examiners normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time.