

Quality Assurance of GEMD Assessments: External Examiners System

Introduction

1. This document sets out the procedures and general responsibilities for a system of External Examining to be implemented in the GEMD programme from the academic year 2022-23.

2022-23 is the planned first year in which the GEMD programme will be delivered. Whilst the associated assessments become increasingly more high-risk as students progress towards becoming qualified physicians, since the programme leads to a vocational award it is prudent to implement the External Examiner system from Year 1 onwards.

2. A system of External Examining shall provide a level of external scrutiny and assurance that the standard of the assessments is appropriate to the level at which the students should be competent. Further, the system ensures that the assessments are consistent and equitable across all sites that deliver GEMD assessments, and enables the Medical School to maintain quality standards of the award that it will confer.
3. As a vocational programme, the GEMD students are required to demonstrate, at the point of graduation, that they have achieved the standards required for entry to practise Medicine.
4. The World Federation for Medical Education's Basic Medical Education Global Standards for Quality Improvement (2015) previously had a basic standard that "a medical school must ensure that assessments are open to scrutiny by external expertise", and more specifically to denote quality standards, that medical schools "should encourage the use of external examiners". Whilst this has been removed in the 2020 iteration of the Global Standards, we believe it is key to maintain external scrutiny to ensure that feedback is not solely internal and that peers from medical education maintain input.

Regulations regarding the Assessment of the Programme

5. The Programme Regulations require, with regard to the assessment of the programme, that programme regulations and a scheme of assessment are approved and published. The Programme Regulations and a Scheme of Assessment form part of the programme's primary documentation, which are subject to review and evaluation by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CyQAA).
6. Both the Programme Regulations and the Scheme of Assessment are required to be formally approved by the management and monitoring committee responsible for the programme, that is, the GEMD Programme Committee.
7. The Programme Regulations (paragraph 6.2.4) state that a system for External Examining be implemented for the programme. It stipulates that the Examinations Boards shall have at least one External Examiner.

8. Responsibility for ensuring that assessment is reliable, valid and at the appropriate level remains with the academic staff, the programme's governing committees (i.e. the GEMD Programme Committee) and the Board of Examiners to which they are accountable.
9. Responsibility for the approval of External Examiners rests with the Executive Dean. The Programme Committee, on behalf of the Executive Dean, carries out detailed scrutiny of External Examiner nominations.

Role Expectations

10. The role of External Examiners shall be based on that set out in The Higher Education Academy's publication, *A Handbook for External Examining*, namely to "be experienced higher education teachers who offer an independent assessment of academic standards and the quality of assessment to the appointing institution".
11. The role includes:
 - "Ensuring that degrees awarded in similar subjects are comparable in standard across higher education institutions;
 - Ensuring that students are dealt with fairly in the system of assessment and classification."

Silver, Stennant and Williams (1995)
12. Specifically, the role of the External Examiner is to advise on:
 - whether the threshold standards set by the institution are appropriate for its awards by reference to, where relevant, the expectations of professional registering bodies, published national subject benchmarks and national qualifications frameworks (where these exist);
 - the standards of the awards achieved by students, and on the comparability of those standards with those of similar programmes in other higher education institutions of good standing;
 - the extent to which the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended learning outcomes of the programme and has been conducted in line with the Medical School's policies and regulations;
 - the approach to 'fitness to practise';
 - good practice and innovation that they have identified in relation to learning, teaching and assessment;
 - opportunities to enhance the quality of learning opportunities provided to students.
13. The Medical School welcomes any advice on opportunities to improve, and these will be taken into consideration when reviewing and revising any plans for development with regard to teaching, learning and assessment. For example, if the External Examiner(s) feels specific areas of the curriculum, including the clinical placement experience, require enhancement (to ensure achievement of learning outcomes, as evidenced by appropriate assessment), this will be taken into account as part of the internal quality assurance approach of the School.
14. External Examiners shall also be invited to offer advice on all areas of assessment, in general and more specifically including, but not limited to:
 - arrangements for internal moderation;

- the relationship between assessment and learning outcomes;
 - the clarity of assessment criteria and marking schemes;
 - the information given to students about assessment;
 - arrangements for feedback to students;
 - the operation of Board of Examiners meetings.
15. As an exception, and where other internal approaches have not been able to resolve a situation, an External Examiner may be asked to settle a case where internal examiners are unable to reach agreement.
 16. External Examiners are expected to observe the Medical School's policies on data protection and on equal opportunities, at all times.
 17. External Examiners must maintain confidentiality in respect to all examination papers. The contents must not be disclosed other than to members of the Board of Examiners or personnel of the Medical School who deal with the papers.
 18. External Examiners must not communicate with a candidate about any aspect of the assessment process, or about the performance of the candidate, unless authorised to do so by the Board of Examiners or in the context of an oral examination.
 19. External Examiners' views will not have precedence over those of others who are involved in assessments and therefore, the Board of Examiners shall not be obligated to accept the External Examiners' advice. Nonetheless, in their role as an expert advisor, the Board of Examiners would be expected to be able to explain why the guidance of the External Examiner was not heeded.
 20. Since the Medical School has policies and procedures in relation to the following, the External Examiners may be expected to advise on the application of these procedures:
 - Requests for reasonable adjustment based on a student's learning or physical disability;
 - Evidence of mitigating circumstances;
 - Student appeals against the decisions of the Board of Examiners;
 - Instances of assessment irregularity and/or academic misconduct;
 - Instances that bring into question the fitness to study or practise of a student.
 21. In such an instance where a student appeal relating to a decision of the Examinations Board is upheld, the External Examiner(s) shall be involved in discussions around the proposed change of decision.

Expected Responsibilities

22. The following sets out the responsibilities of the role of External Examiner. The list is not exhaustive and, where required and following negotiation, modification to the list may take place, so long as it does not prevent the External Examiner from being able to fulfil the role.
23. An External Examiner will normally:

- review and confirm that draft examination papers assess the learning outcomes, or a subset of the learning outcomes, for the course or programme;
 - review and confirm that draft examination papers are clearly worded and provide a basis for assessing the standards required to be achieved by students;
 - review and confirm that the assessment criteria provided explain how different levels of achievement by students will be rewarded through the allocation of marks, and whether marking schemes explain how marks are allocated to a piece of assessed work;
 - assess whether the marks awarded and pass/fail judgements are commensurate with programme norms (taking into account internationally recognised thresholds);
 - check the consistency between internal markers;
 - participate in oral and practical examinations should participation be a requirement of the scheme of assessment;
 - attend meetings of the Board of Examiners (It is the responsibility of the Chair of the Board to ensure that External Examiners are invited to attend Board meetings and are notified of the dates of meetings in a timely manner);
 - on occasion, be asked to sign a pass list. The signature of the External Examiner confirms that assessment processes have been carried out in accordance with the policy and regulations of the Medical School;
 - review and confirm whether programme regulations, concerning assessment in particular, are suitable for their intended purpose, clearly understood and consistently and fairly applied;
 - submit an annual report at the agreed time and to an agreed format (see Appendix 1).
24. Where courses include internal moderation, and selective sampling of student work for that purpose, External Examiners shall not be expected to amend the marks of the sample scripts provided. The External Examiner's role shall be to review the accuracy and fairness of marking. They shall be expected to comment on the effectiveness of the approach to internal moderation that has been applied.
25. If minor problems are identified with marking, the External Examiner will usually ask for these problems to be addressed before the next scheduling of the assessment. From time to time, an External Examiner may decide that there is a more substantial problem, for example notably harsh or lenient marking, where more immediate action is needed. In this circumstance the External Examiner may ask to see a larger sample to consider the extent of the problem. In consultation with the Programme Director or Assessment Lead, the External Examiner may ask for student work to be remarked or re-moderated (with or without prior adjustment of the assessment criteria). The External Examiner may alternatively recommend the scaling up or down of marks for a cohort. In this instance, the External Examiner and the Programme Director or Assessment Lead will then make a recommendation to the Board of Examiners for discussion and approval.
26. If an External Examiner is unwilling to sign a pass list, the reasons shall be recorded in the minutes of the Board of Examiners meeting. The External Examiner shall also be asked to record fully the basis for any concerns in their report to the Executive Dean. In addition, the Chair of the Board of Examiners will refer the matter to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs who will

decide whether the assessment decisions taken by the Board are to be processed with or without follow up action. In the event of any delay, the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs will authorise any communication with students affected by the delay.

Criteria for appointment

27. The Medical School has adopted the following criteria for appointing External Examiners. It is similar to those which are long-established in UK higher education. External Examiners shall be expected to show evidence of:
- Relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience, where appropriate;
 - Competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof;
 - Familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed;
 - Competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures;
 - 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;
 - Fluency in English;
 - Meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies;
 - Awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula;
 - Competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.
28. The following conflicts of interest would preclude an appointment:
- Member of a governing body or committee of UNIC or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of UNic or one of its collaborative partners;
 - Anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study;
 - Anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study;
 - Anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study;
 - 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 (or courses within);
 - Former staff or students of the Medical School unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the External Examiner have completed their programme(s);
 - A reciprocal arrangement involving related programmes at another institution within Cyprus;
 - The succession of an External Examiner from an institution by a colleague from the same department in the same institution;
 - The appointment of more than one External Examiner from the same department of the same institution.

29. The conflict of interest criteria pertaining to departmental memberships will be applied flexibly. Departments and divisions vary in size and complexity from one institution to another. Many institutions have large academic divisions or departments that include several operationally discrete academic disciplines and staff within these divisions may have very little direct contact with each other. Where this is the case, a conflict of interest may not arise even if a potential External Examiner is from the same department as an outgoing or current external.
30. Staff preparing an External Examiner nomination (and the committees considering the nomination) will need to consider the extent of any contact with an outgoing or current External Examiner from the same department and confirm explicitly that any contact with others from the same department does not amount to a conflict of interest.

Period of Appointment

31. An External Examiner will not serve on a Board for more than five consecutive years although the Executive Dean can approve an extension to this period of appointment. An External Examiner will not be eligible for reappointment until a period of five years has lapsed. External Examiners should remain available after the end of their period of appointment in order to assist the Board of Examiners in dealing with any subsequent reviews of the decisions of the Board.
32. External Examiners should not normally hold more than two External Examiner appointments at any one time.

Appointment Process

33. External Examiners shall be appointed as part of an annual process by which the membership of the Examinations Board is approved by the Executive Dean (or if an External Examiner resigns partway through an academic year, when a replacement has been identified). The member of Registry staff that has administrative responsibility for the Board oversees this process.

Nomination

34. External Examiner nomination forms shall be made available (see appendices 3 and 4). The Executive Dean nominates members of the Board of Examiners.
35. Before a nomination is submitted to the monitoring committee, the External Examiner should be asked if, in principle, they are prepared to take up the appointment by the Executive Dean. At this time, the External Examiner should receive sufficient information, including this document, about the role to determine whether they will be able to carry out the role. The External Examiner will be asked to provide a CV, and to confirm that they meet the criteria for approval specified in paragraphs 27 to 29.

Scrutiny

36. Detailed scrutiny of External Examiner nominations shall be carried out by the Programme Committee on behalf of the Executive Dean. This responsibility may be delegated to a sub-group of the Programme Committee, for example the Assessment Committee, as long as the membership has sufficient experience and expertise to reach a balanced and independent

judgement about the nomination. Nominations are considered on the basis of the nomination form provided by Registry and on the basis of a CV.

37. The Programme Committee will take into account the appointment criteria laid down by the institution as part of its scrutiny of the nomination.
38. The Programme Committee formally proposes the appointment of the External Examiner to the Executive Dean. If, in making this proposal, the committee has set aside any of the usual appointment criteria, this must be made clear to the Executive Dean.

Termination of an Appointment

39. The appointment of an External Examiner may be terminated by the Executive Dean if the Examinations Board decides that the responsibilities of the appointment have not or can no longer be fulfilled. Grounds for termination may include:
 - not carrying out the responsibilities attached to the role;
 - exceeding the authority of an External Examiner;
 - persistent non-attendance at boards;
 - persistent non-submission of reports or the submission of inadequate reports;
 - refusal to work within the Programme Regulations;
 - a change in the circumstances of the External Examiner that might bring about a conflict of interests.
40. Informal steps will usually be taken to resolve difficulties. If these steps are unsuccessful, the chair of the Programme Committee will, after taking the advice of the Executive Dean, submit a written report. The report will explain the nature of difficulty, the steps taken to resolve that difficulty, and why it has now become necessary to ask the Executive Dean to terminate the appointment.
41. If the Executive Dean decides that the appointment should be terminated, the External Examiner shall receive a letter of explanation from the Registrar.

Notification of appointment

42. Following the approval of the appointment by the Executive Dean, the External Examiner will receive formal notification of the appointment on behalf of the Registrar. This notification will normally be accompanied by:
 - Programme Regulations;
 - this document (External Examiners System GEMD);
 - Programme Handbook (or equivalent);
 - Scheme of Assessment;
 - Script Viewing Policy;
 - dates of Board of Examiners meetings (if not available, a date for when to expect these to be finalised);
 - reports submitted by previous External Examiners, where available, and the responses to those reports;
 - details of the fee payable to External Examiners.

- Details of any international standards and guidelines that may be used by the School, e.g. the GMC's publications on professionalism.
43. External Examiners will be asked to confirm that they accept the appointment and accept the terms and conditions that apply to the appointment.
 44. Institutions are expected to include the name, position and institution of their External Examiners in the programme information provided to students. This may be through information published on Moodle or in the programme handbook (also available on Moodle, and provided to students upon entry to the programme and annually thereafter). In the notification of appointment letter, it will be made clear to newly appointed External Examiners that some personal data is available to students.
 45. Guidance shall be prepared for students to explain why this information is being provided and shall emphasise that students should not make contact with External Examiners. An unauthorised approach to an External Examiner by a student will be considered under the procedure for investigating academic misconduct.

Induction

46. The Medical School shall provide a generic induction for External Examiners. The purpose of the induction shall be to explain the general principles on which the External Examiner system is based and to outline the roles and responsibilities that define the role. Responsibility for organising the induction rests with the Registrar.
47. It is the responsibility of the Chair of the Board of Examiners, or their nominee, to ensure that the External Examiner receives detailed preparation for the role. The preparation, which may be provided formally or informally, shall cover the following areas:
 - the role of the External Examiner and the responsibilities and functions attached to the role;
 - the aims and objectives of the programme;
 - the assessment rationale, schedule and methods for the programme;
 - the regulatory framework for the programme (including those regulations concerned with progression and awards, with opportunities for repeat assessments, with compensation (where it exists) and with failure);
 - the procedural framework for the programme (including arrangements for the internal moderation of marks, for developing assessment criteria and marking schemes);
 - the relationship with other External Examiners appointed to the programme, where applicable;
 - the volume of assessed work to be received by the External Examiner and the level of scrutiny afforded to that work. Where a sample of work is to be received, the means by which the sample is selected should be agreed;
 - the conduct of Board of Examiners meetings;
 - the dates on which the External Examiner is expected to attend Board of Examiners meetings and, where necessary, other meetings;
 - the format of External Examiner reports and the time at which those reports will be expected to be submitted.

48. In addition to the contents of the induction, an External Examiner will have access to the information needed to fulfil the External Examiner role, and the functions attached to that role, effectively. This information may include:
- Opportunities to meet with students on the GEMD programme;
 - Opportunities to meet with internal examiners and staff involved in the teaching of the GEMD programme;
 - Opportunities to visit clinical and practice placement sites during assessment delivery.

External Examiner Reports

49. The External Examiner will receive an External Examiner Report Form, usually from the Registrar. Report Forms shall be, ordinarily, distributed at the last Board of Examiners meeting of an academic year (or sent to those External Examiner(s) who are unable to attend the meeting). External Examiners can, if they prefer, submit a narrative report provided the report covers the same broad areas as the form. External Examiner forms are provided electronically; External Examiners are asked to submit forms electronically to facilitate their distribution and, should it be a requirement, to professional bodies.
50. The External Examiner report is expected to reflect the independent and objective nature of the External Examiner's role. It is crucial that the content is evidence-based and robust. The Report is expected to reflect the comments and judgements provided during the Board of Examiners meeting(s) and it is regarded as inappropriate if serious new issues are raised in the report that have not been previously raised during the visit/meeting.
51. The wording used throughout should be accessible to the different audiences that will receive the Report, i.e. staff, students, senior management of the programme and of the Medical School, and external bodies such as the higher education quality assurance authority in Cyprus, CyQAA.
52. The report shall be submitted formally to the Executive Dean. Reports will usually be submitted shortly after the final Board of Examiners meeting for that year.
53. The nature of the response to the External Examiner report will depend on the nature of the issues raised therein. The different types of response that shall be provided are set out in Appendix 2.
54. Under the General Data Protection Regulations (in force from May 2018), a student may submit a Subject Access Request to receive all data held by UNIC about the student. In this context, written comments made by an External Examiner, for example on an examination script, may be disclosed to the student. Similarly, oral comments relating to individual candidates that are recorded in Board of Examiners minutes may be disclosed to the student. External Examiners should therefore ensure that their published contributions are accurate factual statements and reasonably held opinions.

55. An External Examiner may ask for the contents of their report to be read in confidence. Where this is the case, the Executive Dean will discuss with the External Examiner how the institution can respond to the matters raised in the report whilst maintaining its confidentiality.
56. A summary of the External Examiners' annual reports shall be made available to the GEMD Programme Committee and Assessment Committee, with the exception of any confidential reports made directly to the Executive Dean. Reports may be discussed at Assessment Committee or Programme Committee meetings (the latter includes student Curriculum Representatives) to allow curriculum representatives the opportunity to be involved in the consideration of issues raised by External Examiners and the preparation of the response to those issues.
57. At the end of the External Examiner's period of appointment, the External Examiner can, if they choose, submit an overview report that summarises the issues that have arisen throughout the External Examiner's period of appointment.
58. External Examiners' reports will be used for specified internal purposes and any other use or publication of the report is the sole responsibility of the Medical School. In accepting the appointment, the Medical School understands that the External Examiner consents to these uses of the report.

Monitoring and Evaluation of the External Examiner System

59. The following quality assurance mechanisms shall be used to review the effectiveness of the External Examiner System:
- The sharing of the External Examiner Reports alongside a summary of issues raised (identifying where the reports converge/diverge). (At such time that there are multiple External Examiners, the production of one annual report summarising any issues raised in the reports, to be completed by the Assessment Lead, can supersede the sharing of all External Examiner Reports);
 - Confirmation, from the Registrar, that reports have been received and responses issued.
 - Analysis of data held by Registry that emerges from relevant student procedures (such as academic appeals, requests for discretionary attempts at examinations, fitness to study and practise procedures, allegations of academic misconduct and the consideration of special needs in examinations). Responsibility for the production of this report rests with the Registrar.
 - Assessment issues emerging from any annual monitoring and periodic review of the programme.

Publications

60. The following were used in defining the above External Examiner Scheme
- Higher Education Academy: A Handbook for External Examining
<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/external-examining>
 - Quality Assurance Agency (UK): Quality Code
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

- World Federation for Medical Education: Basic Medical Education Global Standards
<http://wfme.org/standards/bme/>
- SGUL Quality Manual (available from the office of the Director of Quality Assurance).
<https://www.sgul.ac.uk/about-us/governance/quality-assurance/quality-manual>
(Kind permission was received in advance of its use)

Forms / Procedural notes

61. The following shall be made available from the Medical School's Registry:
- External Examiner Report Form (Appendix 1)
 - Procedure for responding to External Examiner reports (Appendix 2)
 - External Examiner Nomination Form (to be completed by nominee) (Appendix 3)
 - External Examiner Nomination Form (to be completed by member of staff submitting the nomination) (Appendix 4)