Guidance on External Academic Audit

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Background

1. It is IET policy that all Higher Education Providers (HEPs) offering IET accredited programmes must operate an external academic audit system. In the UK, external academic audit is provided through the "External Examiner" system; in other countries an alternative independent audit mechanism may exist or there may currently be no equivalent. This note is primarily for the benefit of institutions which do not traditionally have an external academic auditor type role or equivalent. It is for guidance and is not intended to fully specify the role of academic auditors. It is normal practice for accreditation panels to review the external academic audit reports as part of the accreditation visit activity.

2. Institutions appoint as academic auditors people drawn from higher education, industry and the engineering profession. Those appointed are normally highly qualified and experienced in the subject or specialism to which the appointment relates. They are external to, and therefore independent of, the appointing institution, albeit contracted by the institution to apply and monitor the institution's published assessment and examination rules and regulations.

3. To avoid any potential conflicts of interests, no external academic auditor should simultaneously hold any other paid or unpaid role at the same HEP and should not be appointed it they have previously worked at the HEP within the last 10 years.

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4. It is expected that the external academic auditors visit the HEP at least once per year; ideally at the same time as other external academic auditors for cognate programmes. At least, one member of this panel of auditors should have experience of accreditation by a Washington Accord signatory. This experience need not be as an accreditor; it could be a senior academic whose programmes are accredited.

5. Awarding institutions expect their external academic auditors to provide informative comment and recommendations upon whether:

   a) The degree-awarding body is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with any relevant national or international regulations for higher education qualifications, and ideally guidance on Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes (AHEP) provided by Engineering Council (UK) or the equivalent[1].

   b) The assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the degree awarding body's policies and regulations.

   c) The academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other Higher Education Institutions of which the external academic auditors have experience.

6. Awarding institutions also expect their external academic auditors to provide informative comment and recommendations on:

   a) good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment observed by the external examiners;

   b) opportunities to enhance the quality of learning opportunities provided to students;

   Proposed changes to the existing modules or programmes for which they have responsibility.

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7. The university retains responsibility for the standards of its awards, and for the assessment of its students. External academic auditors act as a form of quality control to this process and are asked to report annually to the university President/Vice Chancellor or their nominee on the standards of awards and the appropriateness of procedures used to determine progression and awards.

8. The principal role of an external academic auditor is to ensure that:

   a) the assessment package (including all types of coursework and examinations that it includes) is appropriate to the programme component and the level and offers the students a chance to demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes. External academic auditors must have detailed oversight of all modules that contribute to the overall degree classification and be involved in the moderation of all assessments (coursework and examination papers) that contribute more than 30% to the overall module mark;

   b) the assessment processes for each element of assessment are rigorous, sound, fairly operated and in line with the university's policies and regulations;

   c) that academic standards set for the university's awards, or part thereof, are appropriate and comparable with those in (some) other higher education institutions;

   d) that the overall process for deciding awards is fair, consistent, and appropriately administered, usually through attendance at assessment boards.

9. To fulfil their role and to obtain evidence on which to base their judgements, external academic auditors are normally asked to consider:

   a) the form and content of the assessment tasks that are used to assess students

   b) a sample of students' work that contributes to the final award, including project reports, examinations and coursework, for each programme for which they have responsibility

   c) any processes used to decide final awards and progression through the programme.

10. External Academic Auditors should satisfy themselves that the marking of assessment tasks is at a consistent and appropriate standard. This is normally achieved by considering a sample of work across all modules, representing a range of student abilities. The emphasis is on gaining confidence in the standards and procedures adopted by the marking team. Particular attention should be paid to modules that contribute directly to the final programme Learning Outcomes, especially individual and group projects.

11. External academic auditors are not responsible for the assessment of individual students.

Note: This document is reviewed and updated regularly. Please ensure you have the most up to date version of this guidance, available via the IET website. For international institutions seeking further guidance on requirements for external academic auditors please contact accreditation@theiet.org.

[1] In the case of IET accredited programmes, this would include, but may not be limited to, any IET Accreditation requirements set following an accreditation visit.

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