

THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL EXAMINING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING

Senior Series Editor: Patrick Blessinger,
St John's University and Higher Education
Teaching and Learning Association, USA

Associate Series Editor: Enakshi Sengupta,
Higher Education Teaching and
Learning Association, USA

Published Volumes:

- Volume 23 University–Community Partnerships for Promoting Social Responsibility in Higher Education – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger and Craig Mahoney
- Volume 24 Leadership Strategies for Promoting Social Responsibility in Higher Education – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger and Craig Mahoney
- Volume 25 Integrating Community Service into Curriculum: International Perspectives on Humanizing Education – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger and Mandla Makhanya
- Volume 26 International Perspectives on Improving Student Engagement: Advances in Library Practices in Higher Education – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger and Milton D. Cox
- Volume 27 Improving Classroom Engagement and International Development Programs: International Perspectives on Humanizing Higher Education – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger and Mandla Makhanya
- Volume 28 Cultural Competence in Higher Education – Edited by Tiffany Puckett, and Nancy Lind
- Volume 29 Designing Effective Library Learning Spaces in Higher Education – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger and Mandla S. Makhanya
- Volume 30 Developing and Supporting Multiculturalism and Leadership Development – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger and Mandla S. Makhanya
- Volume 31 Faculty and Student Research in Practicing Academic Freedom – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta and Patrick Blessinger
- Volume 32 International Perspectives on Policies, Practices & Pedagogies for Promoting Social Responsibility in Higher Education – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger and Craig Mahoney
- Volume 33 International Perspectives on the Role of Technology in Humanizing Higher Education – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger and Mandla S. Makhanya
- Volume 34 Humanizing Higher Education through Innovative Approaches for Teaching and Learning – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger and Mandla S. Makhanya
- Volume 35 Humanizing Higher Education through Innovative Approaches for Teaching and Learning
- Volume 36 Integrating Research-based Learning across the Curriculum
- Volume 37 International Perspectives in Social Justice Programs at the Institutional and Community Level

INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND
LEARNING VOLUME 38

THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL EXAMINING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICES

EDITED BY

ENAKSHI SENGUPTA

*International Higher Education Teaching and Learning
Association, USA*

PATRICK BLESSINGER

*International Higher Education Teaching and Learning
Association, USA*

ANDREW SSEMWANGA

Family Enterprise Support Initiative (FESI), Uganda

and

BARBARA COZZA

St John's University, USA

Created in partnership with the
International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association



**Higher Education
Teaching & Learning**

<https://www.hetl.org/>



**emerald
PUBLISHING**

United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2021

Copyright © 2021 Emerald Publishing Limited

Reprints and permissions service

Contact: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83982-175-2 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-83982-174-5 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-83909-880-2 (Epub)

ISSN: 2055-3641 (Series)



ISOQAR certified
Management System,
awarded to Emerald
for adherence to
Environmental
standard
ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

CONTENTS

<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Series Editors' Introduction</i>	<i>ix</i>

PART I ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

Chapter 1 Introduction to the Role of External Examining in Higher Education – Challenges and Best Practices <i>Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger, Andrew Ssemwanga and Barbara Cozza</i>	<i>1</i>
Chapter 2 Acting as External Examiners in the UK: Going Beyond Quality Assurance <i>Amudha Poobalan, Padam Simkhada and Edwin van Teijlingen</i>	<i>13</i>
Chapter 3 Promoting Access to External Examining Roles Through Professional Development <i>Helen Kay and Juliet Hinrichsen</i>	<i>25</i>
Chapter 4 Authentic Assessments and the External Examiner <i>Mikhaila Burgess and Helen Phillips</i>	<i>43</i>
Chapter 5 Is There such a Thing as “Comparableness”? The Challenges Facing the EEs of Higher-Education Courses Delivered within Further-Education Institutions <i>Sarah Cooper and Sara Pearman</i>	<i>61</i>

PART II CHALLENGES AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Chapter 6 A Study of the Effectiveness of the External Examining System of Postgraduate (MBA) Dissertations and the Mismatch Between Expectations and Practice <i>Deepanjana Varshney</i>	<i>77</i>
---	-----------

Chapter 7 External Examining the Professional Doctorate as Distinct from the Traditional PhD: Differentiating and Developing Policy and Practice <i>Dionisia Tzavara and Victoria L. O'Donnell</i>	95
Chapter 8 External Examining Policies at the University of Mauritius <i>Fareeda Khodabocus and Henri Li Kam Wah</i>	123
Chapter 9 Benchmarking: A Comparative Case Study Analysis of Quality Assurance Across the Private and University Sector in the UK <i>Kay Maddox-Daines</i>	139
Chapter 10 Building without a Foundation: Efforts in Higher Education to Meet External Examiners Requirements in the Absence of Statewide Data <i>Megan Schramm-Possinger, Lisa E. Johnson and Beth G. Costner</i>	159
<i>About the Authors</i>	173
<i>Name Index</i>	181
<i>Subject Index</i>	187

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

<i>Patrick Blessinger</i>	International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association, New York, USA
<i>Mikhaila Burgess</i>	Noroff School of Technology and Digital Media, Norway
<i>Sarah Cooper</i>	York St John University, York, UK
<i>Beth G. Costner</i>	Winthrop University in Rock Hill, USA
<i>Barbara Cozza</i>	St John's University, New York, USA
<i>Juliet Hinrichsen</i>	Independent Educational Consultant, Derbyshire, UK
<i>Lisa E. Johnson</i>	Winthrop University in Rock Hill, USA
<i>Helen Kay</i>	Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK
<i>Fareeda Khodabocus</i>	University of Mauritius, Moka, Mauritius
<i>Henri Li Kam Wah</i>	University of Mauritius, Moka, Mauritius
<i>Kay Maddox-Daines</i>	University of Suffolk, Ipswich, UK
<i>Victoria L. O'Donnell</i>	Laureate Online Education, Netherlands & University of Liverpool, UK
<i>Sara Pearman</i>	UCR Rotherham, Rotherham, UK
<i>Helen Phillips</i>	Cardiff University, Cardiff, Wales
<i>Amudha Poobalan</i>	University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, UK
<i>Megan Schramm-Possinger</i>	Winthrop University in Rock Hill, USA
<i>Enakshi Sengupta</i>	International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association, New York, USA
<i>Padam Simkhada</i>	University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, UK
<i>Andrew Ssemwanga</i>	Family Enterprise Support Initiative, Kampala, Uganda
<i>Edwin van Teijlingen</i>	Bournemouth University, Dorset, UK

*Dionisia Tzavara*Laureate Online Education, Netherlands &
University of Liverpool, UK*Deepanjana Varshney*City University College of Ajman, United
Arab Emirates

SERIES EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this series is to publish current research and scholarship on innovative teaching and learning practices in higher education. The series is developed around the premise that teaching and learning is more effective when instructors and students are actively and meaningfully engaged in the teaching-learning process.

The main objectives of this series are to:

- 1) present how innovative teaching and learning practices are being used in higher education institutions around the world across a wide variety of disciplines and countries,
- 2) present the latest models, theories, concepts, paradigms, and frameworks that educators should consider when adopting, implementing, assessing, and evaluating innovative teaching and learning practices, and
- 3) consider the implications of theory and practice on policy, strategy, and leadership.

This series will appeal to anyone in higher education who is involved in the teaching and learning process from any discipline, institutional type, or nationality. The volumes in this series will focus on a variety of authentic case studies and other empirical research that illustrates how educators from around the world are using innovative approaches to create more effective and meaningful learning environments.

Innovation teaching and learning is any approach, strategy, method, practice or means that has been shown to improve, enhance, or transform the teaching-learning environment. Innovation involves doing things differently or in a novel way in order to improve outcomes. In short, Innovation is positive change. With respect to teaching and learning, innovation is the implementation of new or improved educational practices that result in improved educational and learning outcomes. This innovation can be any positive change related to teaching, curriculum, assessment, technology, or other tools, programs, policies, or processes that leads to improved educational and learning outcomes. Innovation can occur in institutional development, program development, professional development, or learning development.

The volumes in this series will not only highlight the benefits and theoretical frameworks of such innovations through authentic case studies and other empirical research but also look at the challenges and contexts associated with implementing and assessing innovative teaching and learning practices. The volumes represent all disciplines from a wide range of national, cultural, and organizational contexts. The volumes in this series will explore a wide variety of teaching and learning topics such as active learning, integrative learning, transformative

learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, meaningful learning, blended learning, creative learning, experiential learning, lifelong and lifewide learning, global learning, learning assessment and analytics, student research, faculty and student learning communities, as well as other topics.

This series brings together distinguished scholars and educational practitioners from around the world to disseminate the latest knowledge on innovative teaching and learning scholarship and practices. The authors offer a range of disciplinary perspectives from different cultural contexts. This series provides a unique and valuable resource for instructors, administrators, and anyone interested in improving and transforming teaching and learning.

Patrick Blessinger
*Founder, Executive Director, and Chief Research Scientist,
International HETL Association*

Enakshi Sengupta
Associate Editor, International HETL Association

PART I

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL EXAMINING IN HIGHER EDUCATION – CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICES

Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger,
Andrew Ssemwanga and Barbara Cozza

ABSTRACT

Using an external examiner in an institution is not a new phenomenon; the evidence of having an outsider to scrutinize the quality control process has been prevalent since the 1800s. However, the concept has undergone considerable changes and has been subjected to mounting criticism and validity of the process. There are several challenges that are faced by institutions in recruiting and defining the role of external examiners and the assumption that they are assessment literate. Universities are engaged in safeguarding the procedure, and at the same time, enhancing the quality standards. Researchers have been collaborating to create best practices and working on key developments that would ensure that degree standards are maintained in higher education. There is no “one size fits all” guidelines, but hiring an external examiner with the view to safeguarding academic quality is the prevalent norm across the globe. The book on the role of external examiners put forth such challenges and best practices by academia in various parts of the world. Authors have written about how to mitigate disadvantages and how to create opportunities without compromising the quality assurance process. International standards have been discussed with the view to make external examining a rigorous process that is fair, reliable and consistent.

Keywords: External examiners; quality assurance; higher education; standards; benchmarking; assessment; standards; universities; accountability

EXTERNAL EXAMINING – ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Recent years have seen a massification of higher education around the world and an increasing demand for accountability and auditing of the existing system to enhance the quality control of external examining along with other educational paradigms. This has also led to a complexity in the existing practices in universities (Gaunt, 1999). Constant change has resulted in multi-faceted role of the external examiners and an increased scrutiny about their scope of work and the procedures implemented by them toward increasing the quality of the underlying practices. Researchers have been engaged in exploring the various facets of this concept and practice although, such engagement has been scanty and doesn't instill confidence in the findings revealed to date (Cuthbert, 2003; Orr, 2007).

Issues such as the effectiveness of external examiners, the impact created by them, consistency, reliability, comparability, and the overall contribution of such a practice toward enhancement of higher education still remains debatable (Brooks, 2012; Murphy, 2006). The various interpretations of external examination standards provided by academics are mainly due to lack of agreement among examiners (Medland, 2015). The evaluations tend to overlook the substance that is being evaluated and the processes involved (Harvey, 2002). The new UK Quality Code for Higher Education (QAA, 2012) “appears to signal a tentative downgrading of the external examiner as the prime guardian of standards and a subtle transformation in official views of the role” (Bloxham & Price, 2015, p. 196).

Medland (2015) proposed two general areas of expertise that an external examiner should engage in: their subject expertise and their assessment expertise. However, expertise in the subject is often the most compelling criteria in involving an external examiner in the institution. Some of the criteria laid down by guidelines and principles for appointing external examiners are competence, experience, qualifications, and sufficient standing, credibility and their breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command respect of colleagues (Finch Review, 2011, p. 14) Orr (2007) argues that assessment to be “co-constructed in communities of practice and standards [that] are socially constructed, relative, provisional and contested” (Orr, 2007, p. 647). Such arguments highlight the need to be “situationally contingent” and embedded in local cultures (Shay, 2005, p. 669) and being unfamiliar with such concepts will limit the capabilities of the examiners. Bloxham and Boyd (2012) further stated that

there is an obligation to ensure that examiners are sufficiently experienced, alert to the vagaries of professional judgment and conscious of developments in good assessment practice – in other words, that they are assessment literate. (p. 631)

However, the system which still lacks development and is mainly based on assumptions raises doubt “that the average external examiner has the ‘assessment literacy’ to be aware of the complex influences on their standards and judgement processes” (Bloxham & Price, 2015, p. 12).

Generally, external examiners are appointed by institutions to offer an independent assessment of the academic standard and practices that are currently prevalent in the institution. External examiners are meant to exercise check and balance of the quality standards in practice. The role and scope of work are limited to reviewing of exam scripts, as a second or third examiner to thesis or assignments and at times being involved in an informal engagement to discuss and assess the examination board. External examiners rarely meet with the students, unless when they are defending their thesis. Their interaction is limited to the staff members in collegiate discussion and working toward enhancing the standard of the institution of higher education. External examiners have adopted the role of being a critical friend who is capable of identifying the weakness and strength of the prevalent system and promote good practices.

Various quality control bodies are now assessing the role of the external examiners and a review in the UK assessed the effectiveness of appointing external examiners and discussing to what extent they can be used effectively in safeguarding the academic quality standard and suggest possible changes to make the system more robust in nature (Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), 2015). One of the main recommendations of the review which was undertaken by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) concerned the need “to professionalize external examining ... so that those conducting the role are skilled and knowledgeable about assessment and the assurance of academic and quality standards” (HEFCE, 2015, pp. 92–93). The review further emphasized the ways that the system could calibrate the existing standards, the subject or even the discipline so that they are at par with the academic benchmark. Such accomplishment cannot be worked alone and needs constant support from the other institutional staff and further stated that “development of staff for the role, clear reward and recognition for the role, appropriate resourcing including time, and effective use of examiner knowledge and experience” (HEFCE, 2015, p. 95).

The induction of newly appointed external examiners is an important component to map the expectations and goals of an institution. A handbook or a code of practice helps in inducting the newly appointed individual in familiarizing with the institutional information, regulation of the assessment and characteristics involved in the curriculum design.

Advance HE (2019) have advocated certain paradigms that can be covered in the induction program (p. 5) as stated below:

- the validation history of the program being held
- emphasis on the design and delivery characteristics of the program as outlined in the program specification
- conducting an assessment of the regulation including detailed explanation of institutional policy with particular focus on condonation and/or compensation, resits, retakes and other mechanisms used to enhance student progression

- provision for arrangements and reasonable adjustments to assessment procedures for students with disabilities
- clearly stating the marking and moderation protocols (question and assignment setting; model answers; double marking; blind marking; moderation)
- dissemination of information on sampling and selection of student work to provide the evidence base for ensuring smooth functioning of the system
- enlisting the entire examination procedures and requirements for attending examination boards, including dates for board meetings
- granting access to recent external examiner reports and minutes of examination boards
- creating an annual report of the external examiner and how it is used effectively by the institution
- ensuring contact protocols and details for key staff members.

External examiners look for professional recognition that comes with their appointment and at the same time, they get the opportunity of exposure to alternative ideas and practices which in turn enhances their credibility and status as an academic. Quality Code's Advice and Guidance on External Expertise states that higher education providers "ensure that external experts are given sufficient and timely evidence and training to enable them to carry out their responsibilities" (p. 5). Induction sessions, regular meetings, and annual events helps external examiners to gain experience and at times mentor new external examiners. Assessment literacy has been associated with teacher's training (DeLuca & Klinger, 2010). However, some academics are of the opinion that assessment literacy is still in its infancy and lacks adequate research findings to support the practice (Price, Carroll, O'Donovan, & Rust, 2011). Smith, Worsfold, Davies, Fisher, and McPhail (2013) is of the opinion that assessment literacy in students requires awareness from the examiners of the purposes and processes involved in assessment and is involved in learning trajectory, as well as the ability of an individual to evaluate personal responses to assessment tasks. The concept has been further defined as:

[an] understanding of the rules surrounding assessment in [the] course context ... use of assessment tasks to monitor or further learning, and ability to work with the guidelines on standards in their context to produce work of a predictable standard. (Smith et al., 2013, p. 46)

CONCLUSION

In most institutions, it is assumed that the senior academic staff will work as external examiners and appointment in such a post indicates seniority in candidate's curriculum vitae. The challenge lies in giving formal recognition to the teaching staff to become an external examiner and in most cases, often, it is not a criterion that is equated with the promotion or some kind of incentive for the academics. Institutions often fail to recognize the responsibilities and role of a senior academic working as an external examiner as a demonstration of their capability and commitment toward higher education. The post of an external examiner demands long and well-established relationships from the awarding institution and recognition to their contribution for quality enhancement of the institution.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

“Acting as External Examiners in the UK: Going Beyond Quality Assurance,” by Amudha Poobalan, Padam Simkhada and Edwin van Teijlingen, describes the traditional role of the external examiners in UK universities or more formally Higher Education Institutions as that of quality assurance. Typically, an experienced academic who is not affiliated with the Higher Education Institution (i.e., someone from another university) is invited to act as an external examiner for a particular course or a module. The external examiner’s primary role is to provide impartial and independent advice to ensure academic standards are upheld for a degree program; and that the degree is comparable with similar programs across the country and that the achievements of students are also comparable with students on courses at other universities. This primary role makes external examiners highly valued people in UK universities, and as a result, their views are nearly always taken seriously. Over and above this recognized primary role of quality assurance, external examiners can also be engaged by the host university in other ways. These additional roles or tasks of the external examiner can help enhance teaching and learning in higher education. This chapter will reflect on the range of roles, including the ones that go beyond quality assurance.

“Promoting Access to External Examining Roles Through Professional Development,” by Helen Kay and Juliet Hinrichsen, is about external examining activity as a recognized indicator of subject expertise and peer esteem. It also evidences understanding of quality assurance, course, and assessment design. As such it contributes to the enhancement of an academic CV and may impact on promotion and career prospects. Fair access to external examining opportunities is thus an equity issue for universities. In the context of race equality, where both staff and students of color in academia show consistently differential outcomes to their White counterparts, professional development can mitigate disadvantage, especially where it is focused on access to opportunity. Professional development for external examiners has been an underdeveloped area but the recent establishment in the UK of the Degree Standards Project has begun to address this. The authors propose that there is nevertheless a gap in provision to support academics who aspire to become external examiners but who have had no previous experience. This chapter describes an institutional initiative to promote access to initial external examining roles through professional development and reports on participant outcomes. Evaluation data suggest that an approach such as this can support obtaining a first appointment and may help to mitigate some of the barriers of access to external examiner roles for staff of color. The authors argue that the sector urgently needs to diversify the ethnicity of the external examiner pool in order to provide an essential critical lens which could impact on the equity of degree outcomes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students.

“Authentic Assessments and the External Examiner,” authored by Mikhaila Burgess and Helen Phillips, explores the key role of the external examiner which is to review student work submitted for assessment plus the feedback and grading undertaken on that work by academic staff. The aim of this is to ensure equitability between the assessments of individual students’ achievement and consistency and comparability across courses throughout the program and with commensurate

study levels and programs at other institutions, whilst safeguarding academic standards. The variety of assessment-types that an external examiner may review can be diverse. When the primary focus of the work being assessed is tangible, such as with written examinations or assignments, external examiners are able to view student achievements and assessor actions through a lens comparable to that of the original assessors. However, this process cannot adequately capture assessment-types where the only evidence is proxies to the original achievement. In this chapter, the authors explore the concept of authentic assessments, the benefits of incorporating them within study programs, identify challenges pertaining to their presence to holistic quality assurance processes in general, and the role of the external examiner in particular. The authors will demonstrate how adopting non-intrusive technologies for recording and verifying authentic assessment practices can strengthen the QA process for the benefit of all stakeholders. For illustration, a case study is employed to demonstrate how these challenges have been tackled regarding performance-based authentic assessments at an institution in Norway. The chapter concludes with a summary plus a call to arms for further research into how quality and consistency can be assured when authentic assessments are employed.

“Is There Such a Thing as ‘Comparableness’? The Challenges Facing the EEs of Higher-Education Courses Delivered Within Further-Education Institutions,” by Sarah Cooper and Sara Pearman, explores the numerous considerations that an external examiner (EE) of an undergraduate degree within a further-education (FE) college must be mindful. There may be the perception that one’s academic experience of lecturing within a university equips us with the knowledge to collaborate with colleagues within an FE institution. However, this is a valid point only to a certain point. There is a spectrum of contrasts between the higher education (HE) and FE environments, that are reflected within the comparisons that this chapter highlights between the teaching-and-learning experiences. If we think back to the original purpose of an EE (where Oxford scholars were invited by Durham University to provide external guidance in the nineteenth century), we can appreciate the key task of an EE and its aim: to assess the comparability of student achievement. The landscape of HE has changed considerably since then, and now undulates with numerous opportunities for learners to gain a HE qualification. It is this difficulty in assessing comparability that an EE of a HE courses within an FE environment must be willing to acknowledge. The fact that the student-and-learning experience varies wildly in HE and FE muddies the waters for the EE: how can comparableness be assessed?

“A Study of the Effectiveness of the External Examining System of Postgraduate (MBA) Dissertations and the Mismatch Between Expectations and Practice: Evidence from India,” authored by Deepanjana Varshney, explores external examining as one of the pivotal means for ensuring the monitoring of the guidelines and standards within private autonomous universities and institutes. External examiners are considered independent individuals who can provide unbiased, objective evaluation, and informed comment on the student’s quality of the project as compared to the standards. Hence, the role of the external examiner is vital and has a strong influence on institutional quality assurance.