

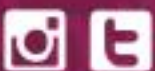


# UQAIB

## Good Practice Guide



[www.khda.gov.ae](http://www.khda.gov.ae)



External Evaluation of  
Standards of Student  
Achievement

### What is the purpose of this guide?

This guide is intended to inform institutions about the ways in which the External Evaluation of Standards of Student Achievement could be developed in the Dubai context. The guide does not expand the scope of the UQAIB requirements and addresses an issue already contained in the *UQAIB Quality Assurance Manual*. It is not prescriptive and provides exemplar options to suit different circumstances that can be adapted by each institution to meet their individual requirements.

### Introduction

External Evaluation of Standards of Student Achievement is also known as external moderation. It is the process of comparing the grades for student work across similar programmes within different institutions in a given jurisdiction.

External moderation of student work is not the same as external accreditation, quality assurance or quality audit, as it is specifically about the level of student academic standards.

Three alternative approaches are outlined below, although institutions may have alternative strategies.

#### 1. National examinations

Where examinations are nationally set, taken by all students (irrespective of the institution at which they study) and graded centrally either by professional markers using clearly specified criteria or via a computerised system (such as in multiple-choice questions) then the external moderation process is in effect built in, as there is no need to compare one institution with another for consistency of standards.

However, research suggests that this is not necessarily the best form of assessment of learning. It restricts the assessment mode to that of examination, which advantages some students over others and is usually a poor form of assessing understanding. It also assumes that the published curricula that are being examined are interpreted in the same way across the jurisdiction.

Nationally set and graded examinations sometimes occur in professional areas, such as law, accountancy, medicine or architecture but are relatively rare outside such areas. Where they are used in professional areas it is usually in addition to the degree qualification and are additional assessments to gain entry to the profession rather than as contributing to the final degree award.

### 2. External examining

Some countries have a process of external examining, which, while not perfect, is a relatively simple and useful way of aligning standards across institutions. This process involves an assessor from a similar subject area in another university assessing the work of students. The actual process varies depending on the academic subject area, the number of students on the programme, the qualification being assessed and the range of a student work that is assessed towards the final award.

#### For example:

- for a PhD, the external examiner would normally read and evaluate the PhD dissertation.
- for an MA in Performing Art, the external examiner would be in the audience of a live concert where the performing art student is performing.
- for a bachelor degree programme with 100 students, where students are assessed by examination and coursework, the external examiner may take a sample of examination papers and evaluate whether the marks match the expectation the examiner would have of student work in the examiner's own institution or any other institution of which the examiner has knowledge. The external examiner in such a circumstance may also look at coursework but that would depend on available resources. The evaluation of a sample would then suggest whether the grading in the institution is too high, too low, or matching expectation. Grades would then be adjusted accordingly for all the students, not just the sample.

Most external examiner systems require input of additional resources and goodwill across the higher education system resulting in academics providing their services usually for a nominal remuneration.

Where the external examiner system does not exist in a country, the HEP Home could introduce it for the Dubai Branch.

### 3. Grade-point averages

Moderated grade-point average scores or other statistical comparisons of aggregate scores are also options. These require fewer resources, for example, than external examining.

However, statistical comparisons of aggregate scores only partially deal with the issue of external moderation of standards. The process, for example, might compare the distribution of grade-point averages of students in one institution to students in another institution studying similar subjects. What this shows, though, is far from clear. It may demonstrate that one institution grades more severely than another; but the same results could be

interpreted as one institution has better students than another or that one institution has easier assessment tasks than the other.

### **Overall**

In short, external moderation of student work is harder to achieve than internal moderation (see UQAIB Good Practice Guide, "Assessment and Moderation of Student Work") because some means needs to be devised to compare the student academic standards with those of other institutions in the same jurisdiction (as the home HEP, in the case of branch campuses).

In essence, academic judgement is required to compare the outputs of students on a programme in one institution with the outputs of students on similar programmes at other institutions.

### **Example resources**

The United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has a UK Quality Code for Higher Education and Chapter B7 is on External Examining. This document is available online at:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Pages/Quality-Code-Chapter-B7.aspx#.VjiauITpa68>