

Rhodes University Policy on External Examining for Exit Level Undergraduate Courses, Honours, and Coursework Components of Postgraduate Degrees

Policy Volume	Volume A - Academic Faculty & Students
Policy Chapter	A1 Teaching and Learning Policies
Responsible Committee/Unit/Division/Faculty	Senate Examinations Committee
Responsible Chairperson/Director/Manager	Registrar
Dates of First and Subsequent Council Approvals	2005; 2024
Review Cycle	5 years
Next Review Date	2029

POLICY PARTICULARS

Policy Title	Rhodes University Policy on External Examining
Policy Statement (State in a single paragraph the policy mandate and how this relates to the University Mission and Vision)	<p>Rhodes University views the use of external examiners as a valuable form of structured peer review, providing expert comment on curriculum design as well as on the assessment of student learning. As such, external examining is perceived to be central to the assurance and enhancement of quality in that it validates judgments concerning course design at departmental level, as well as the judgments of academic staff in their capacity as assessors.</p> <p>This policy needs to be read in conjunction with the Rhodes University Higher Degrees Guide, which provides more detailed guidance about examination procedures at the postgraduate level, with the Rhodes Policy on the Assessment of Student Learning and the Rhodes Policy on Curriculum Development and Review.</p> <p>The University is mindful that practices may vary across faculties with, for example, some faculties choosing to have more than exit level courses at the undergraduate level examined.</p>
Reason for Policy (What this policy aims to achieve)	<p>The main objective of this policy is to guide the University in the development of an external examining system which is rigorous, explicit, systematic, fair and professional by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identifying a number of roles to be played by external examiners. These are the roles of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ expert advisor on curriculum design; and ○ moderator of assessments; ▪ Specifying the requirements of each of these roles; ▪ Specifying how external examiners need to be supported by members of the University staff in their performance of these roles.
People affected by this Policy (e.g. All units of the University)	This policy applies to all exit-level courses including Honours and coursework components of postgraduate degrees at Rhodes University, all departments offering such courses and all individuals involved in designing or facilitating them.
Who should read this Policy (People who need to heed this policy to fulfil their duties)	All academic staff; Academic Administration staff in Registrar's Division
Website address/link for this Policy	University Policy website

RELATED DOCUMENTS FORMS AND TOOLS

Related Policies
Rhodes University Policy on Curriculum Design and Review Rhodes University Policy on the Assessment of Student Learning Rhodes University Higher Degrees Guide Rhodes University Examination Policy

Related Protocols
Examination process (Standard Operating Procedures SOPs) for Registrar's Division, Departments and Faculties

POLICY DEFINITIONS

TERM	DEFINITION
Assessment of Student Learning	The <i>assessment of student learning</i> is an inclusive term involving the design and development of an overall assessment strategy for a course or module, the design and development of assessment tasks (whether used for formative or summative purposes) within that strategy, the development of criteria against which student performance is judged, the judging of student performance against the criteria and the provision of feedback against these same criteria on tasks set for formative purposes.
External Examiner	An <i>external examiner</i> is a person not in the employ of Rhodes University who has the qualifications and experience to be able to act as an expert advisor on curriculum design and its mode of presentation, and/or as a moderator of the assessment of student learning and/or as the examiner of postgraduate theses.
Moderation	<i>Moderation</i> is understood to mean the process of providing comment on the extent to which the overall assessment strategy does indeed allow performance against learning outcomes to be judged, the validity of assessment criteria (in the sense that they are aligned with learning outcomes), and the validity of assessment tasks in terms of their potential to elicit evidence of students' performance against the learning outcomes.
Postgraduate	<i>Postgraduate</i> refers to any qualification or any learning programme leading to a qualification at level 8 or above on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework.

PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THIS POLICY

OVERVIEW
1. Ensure that individuals appointed to act as external examiners are suitably qualified and experienced.
2. Ensure that external examiners are subject to rigorous appointment processes.
3. Ensure that examiners' appointments are renewed periodically to allow for a wide range of perspectives and opinions on course design and the assessment of student learning.
4. Ensure that expert opinion is available to inform ongoing course design and review.
5. Ensure that all exit-level undergraduate courses, are externally examined. ¹
6. Ensure that Honours and coursework components of postgraduate degrees are subject to expert review.
7. Ensure that the assessment of all exit level courses in the undergraduate degree and all coursework components of postgraduate degrees is valid, reliable, fair and meets the requirements of the Rhodes University Policy on the Assessment of Student Learning.

¹ In a Bachelor's degree comprising 360 credits, this would mean 120 credits at level 7 are subject to external scrutiny.

DIRECTIVES FOR IMPLEMENTING THIS POLICY

Directive 1: External examiners will have expertise in the subject area of the course and may be required to be in attendance depending on the nature of the assessment.											
Directive 2: At a minimum, external examiners will normally be qualified at the master's level											
Directive 3: External examiners will normally be appointed for no more than three consecutive years (constitutes one term).											
Directive 4: The appointment of external examiners will be approved by Faculties.											
Directive 5: Normally, three years should have passed after leaving the university, before a former member of staff or student may be considered for appointment as an external examiner.											
Directive 6: External examiners will be responsible to faculties. Faculties may delegate this power to Deans.											
Directive 7: Course outlines listing for example i) learning outcomes, ii) assessment criteria iii) assessment tasks iv) learning materials and describing the pedagogical approach will be provided to external examiners upon appointment and upon revision. This will apply to all exit level courses.											
Directive 8: The moderation of examination results must be conceptualised as part of an overall course assessment system. This means that moderation needs to consider the achievements of students within the overall context of other assessments in the course. External examiners are therefore expected to comment upon the overall assessment strategy of the course and on the extent to which it is valid, reliable and fair.											
Directive 9: In some cases, fewer than 120 credits can be moderated (for example where the assessment includes an oral examination at which the external examiner cannot be present). In courses where this is the case, notice must be provided to Faculty Boards.											
Directive 10: Departments wishing to exceed the requirement that 120 credits of an undergraduate degree must be moderated must apply for permission to Faculty.											
Directive 11: The number of students in a class will determine the number of scripts to be moderated											
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Number of students who have written exam</th><th>Number of scripts to be reviewed</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>15 or fewer scripts</td><td>All scripts</td></tr> <tr> <td>16-100</td><td>A minimum of 15 scripts</td></tr> <tr> <td>101-200</td><td>A minimum of 15%</td></tr> <tr> <td>201+</td><td>The greater of 30 scripts or 10%</td></tr> </tbody> </table>		Number of students who have written exam	Number of scripts to be reviewed	15 or fewer scripts	All scripts	16-100	A minimum of 15 scripts	101-200	A minimum of 15%	201+	The greater of 30 scripts or 10%
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Directive 12: The selection of summative assessment sent to external examiners must represent a range of performance and ideally should include performance at the boundaries of different levels of classification (eg 1,2A, 2B etc) ²											
Directive 13: Alternative assessments for exit-level courses e.g. orals, practical exams, portfolios, continuous assessment assignments, online submissions need to be externally examined in line with Directives 1-10 and 12											

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITY

² 1 = 75 - 100% 2A = 70 - 74% 2B = 60 - 69% 3 = 50 - 59%

ROLE 1 External Examiner as expert on curricula	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External examiners may comment on:the course outcomes; • the extent to which pedagogical approaches are likely to support the attainment of outcomes; • the extent to which learning materials are likely to support the attainment of outcomes; • the overall assessment strategy of the course including formative assessment.
ROLE 2 External Examiner as moderators	<p>External examiners are required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comment on examination question papers, memoranda/rubric guidelines whilst still in draft form; • Scrutinise the examination scripts sent to them; • Write a report making comments on the assessment; • Identify cases where marks should be adjusted.
ROLE 3 Heads of Departments	<p>Heads of Departments are expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that external examiners are provided with all documentation necessary to act as reviewers or moderators; • Review external examiners' recommendations on marks with the lecturers responsible for a course and make a final decision on those marks; • Report to Deans on the moderation conducted in their departments. Such reports should identify any issues raised by external examiners and detail the actions which will be taken to address them; • Ensure that any comments made by the external examiner on the course or the assessment strategy are considered by the lecturer(s) responsible for the course; • Ensure that any issues raised by external examiners are acted upon.
ROLE 4 Deans	<p>Deans are required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a report to the Senate Committee on Teaching & Learning at the start of each year summarising the moderation that has taken place in their respective Faculties in the previous year.

POLICY REVIEW PROCEDURE

The Policy will be reviewed every FIVE years by the Senate Examinations Committee.
Route for Review: Senate Examinations Committee -> Faculties -> Senate->Council
Communication of the review process Senate Examinations Comm Minutes, Faculty Board Minutes, Senate Minutes