

External Examiner Thematic Analysis

Steven Bettles

Background

1. An initial overview of the findings reported in this paper was reported to the Committee at its meeting on 13 March 2019. Some of the contents of the paper from 13 March 2019 are included here again, alongside further commentary and analysis. The findings were reported to the osteopathic educational institutions at a meeting between the GOsC executive and the osteopathic educational institutions held on 29 April 2019, and the discussions from that meeting are also referenced in this paper.
2. The Policy Advisory Committee, at its meeting of 15 March 2018, observed that it places high reliance on external examiner views on osteopathic educational institutions in ensuring that standards are comparable across the osteopathic sector. However, it has little information about the appointment of external examiners, the information they consider, and the role played by the external examiner in order to take a view about the weight that could be placed on the judgement about comparability of standards. The Committee noted that the requirements of the institutions or the validating universities could differ significantly and wanted to explore further the implications for this in terms of the assurance provided about standards to take into account as part of their general approach to quality assurance.
3. As was outlined at the Committee's meeting in March 2018, it therefore agreed to request further information about the external examiner roles including information about how they are appointed by the particular validating University or institution, to inform its judgment about how standards are met by each institution. The approach and questions were discussed with the osteopathic educational institutions at their meeting in April 2018 and were subsequently approved by the Committee at its meeting in June 2018.
 - Q1: Summary of institution or validating university procedures for the appointment of external examiners, the length of their appointment, what they do and the nature and extent of contact throughout the year.
 - Q2: What are the strengths of the external examiner system from your perspective?
 - Q3: What are the weaknesses of the external examiner system from your perspective?
4. Each osteopathic educational institution was subsequently asked a set of questions which ran alongside, but was not a part of the annual report review process. These questions included:

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Q4: How would you improve the system or provide better assurance about delivery of the Osteopathic Practice Standards?

5. Responses from the osteopathic educational institutions were received, and are collated in the table included as the appendix to this paper. In some cases, a number of supporting documents were provided by the osteopathic educational institution to evidence and support their response, and these are available to Committee members on request to Steven Bettles (sbattles@osteopathy.org.uk). As outlined in paragraph 1 above, This paper reports in more detail on the findings of the review

Discussion

6. The four key questions outlined above will be discussed separately here:

Q1: Summary of institution or validating university procedures for the appointment of external examiners, the length of their appointment, what they do and the nature and extent of contact throughout the year.

7. As was mentioned in the preliminary report to the Committee on 13 March 2019, the context of the nine osteopathic educational institutions varies. Some programmes are taught within universities, some in single subject institutions, with a mix of full time and part time pathways to gain a 'recognised qualification' (RQ) and with differing validation or franchise arrangements with universities. One osteopathy-specific institution has taught degree awarding powers, and one is specifically aimed at medical practitioners, providing a shortened course taking into account prior medical training and has no oversight from any validating body.
8. Despite the variety in context, there are many similarities between the appointment of external examiners and their roles in terms of quality assurance. For most institutions, these reflect the standard requirements of the university or institution (in the case of those courses which are run within universities offering multiple subjects) or the validating university where the osteopathic educational institution is a partner college. For educational institutions with a separate validating university, the appointment and management of the external is, to a large extent, down to the university's policies and processes.
9. Typically, there are eligibility requirements for potential external examiners set out within the relevant policy (qualified to an appropriate level and with appropriate experience in higher education, no current or former links to the institution or other conflicts of interest). One institution reported a particularly strict recruitment criteria, with the validating university requiring that even osteopathic external examiners hold a PhD, be published internationally and be a practicing clinician, which diminishes the field of potential external examiners considerably.
10. Some institutions have osteopathic and non-osteopathic external examiners. The former will tend to oversee osteopathic or clinical education and the latter areas

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that may not be exclusively osteopathic, such as research dissertations. Some institutions will have externals for specific modules, and some may have external examiners who follow a cohort through the programme from year to year. A four year tenure for external examiners is typical.

11. The role of the external examiner is broadly consistent between the institutions. This would typically include:

- Attending exam or progression boards.
- Review assessments, model answers and the marking of these to ensure consistency.
- Comment and advise on programme design, assessment processes, pedagogy and academic issues where appropriate.
- Provide an annual report to the institution.
- To visit the institution a minimum number of times each year (in the case of externals relating to practical or clinical assessments, in particular, though not all practical assessments may be sampled by observation every year).
- To recognise and promote innovative practice.

Q2: What are the strengths of the external examiner system from your perspective?

12. There is some degree of consistency between the responses to this question. Most report it useful to have an external examiner to provide the role of 'a critical friend', generating objective views drawing on their academic experience. An effective external examiner provides assurance of academic standards and assessment processes. There are some very positive comments around the role of the external examiner and the confidence and assurance that having an external viewpoint brings.

13. One institution specifically cites the external examiner's role in providing an objective assessment based upon an understanding of the Osteopathic Practice Standards, and says that the external examiner reporting requirements allow them to comment on the OPS throughout 'as it is not too prescriptive'. Another states how the external examiner role is deeply embedded in their quality maintenance and enhancement process, and cites the clear benefits to having such external scrutiny of the various stages of assessment and maintenance of standards.

Q3: What are the weaknesses of the external examiner system from your perspective?

14. A number of responses cite the limited pool of potential external examiners in osteopathy, particularly in the case of the institution whose validator requires externals to hold a PhD. This is a challenge in a small profession with only a few educational institutions to choose from. One suggested potential mentoring of

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newer external examiners to support their development. Indeed, perhaps this is something we could facilitate as part of the Association of Educators in Osteopathy Steering Group in conjunction with the Council of Osteopathic Educational Institutions (COEI).

15. Others cite that though the external examiner's view can be helpful, it is a personal view, and though informed by their experience, this can be varied. It's possible that the views of successive externals may vary over the same issue, which can be problematic. One response mentioned that some externals are slow to respond, or non-responsive when contacted, though there was not any indication of how this situation would be managed. One indicated that deadlines for externals can be difficult to meet as they are determined by the validating university's teaching calendar which differs from that of the institution itself.
16. At the meeting between GOsC executive and the Council for Osteopathic Education Institutions on 29 April 2019, this area was discussed further. One institution pointed out that it is quite difficult to get rid of a poor external examiner. The point was made again that the external, though appointed in accordance with a specific process and subject to strict eligibility requirements, still gives a personal view. The institution is compelled to respond, even if they feel that the external's view is misplaced. This raises questions around the management of externals that are felt to be underperforming. From the Committee's viewpoint, this is likely to be evident in the institution's response to the external examiner, which should be included within annual monitoring requirements.

Q4: How would you improve the system or provide better assurance about delivery of the Osteopathic Practice Standards.

17. In relation to the delivery of the Osteopathic Practice Standards, some respondents say that this is not a specific part of the external examiner's role, though some also suggest that externals who are osteopaths are thus '*fully conversed with the OPS*'. Others suggest that no assumptions should be made about the familiarity of the externals with the OPS. Several mention enhancing the process by implementing training for external examiners regarding assurance of the OPS.
18. Some suggest that as their programme's learning outcomes are directly linked to the OPS, as are assessment criteria, then this is sufficient and explicit for the external examiner to see, and one states that the current system is appropriate in terms of delivering the OPS. One mentioned that delivery of the OPS might apply specifically in relation to proposed changes to the curriculum and assessment.
19. At the meeting with the Osteopathic Educational Institutions on 29 April, the issue of assurance around delivery of the OPS was discussed. One institution echoed some of the comments in the written responses and questioned whether the external examiner role was more an academic/educational one, rather than

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to assure delivery of professional standards. As such, the external would look at academic processes and standards, for example, and offer comparison of these with sectoral norms. They also provide a sense check and assurance to the institution (and/or its validator) regarding marking, and progression rates, for example, as outlined above. It was explained that the Committee's role is to ensure that the OPS are effectively delivered within the recognised qualification (RQ) programmes, and that the external examiners' comments as disclosed within the annual monitoring process of each institution contribute to the Committee's views on this.

20. It was queried why, in the absence of substantial changes to an RQ programme, such constant assurance from external examiners is needed in relation to delivery of the OPS. If the RQ visitors' report indicates that standards are adequately reflected and delivered within an RQ programme, and no substantial changes have taken place (which would have to be reported under the general conditions in any case) is this not enough? It was pointed out, though, that there can be a difference between what's written within programme documentation, and what happens in actuality, and that an initial RQ visitors' report does not necessarily, of itself, give ongoing assurance. The external examiner can, therefore, play a part in identifying where such discrepancies might arise. There was a general feeling, though, that in most cases, a light-touch should be appropriate with risk-based responses to particular issues which might arise through the course of an RQ programme. One suggested that where an examiner raises something which may be of concern in relation to delivery of the OPS, then the OEI should be asked to reflect on this. There was general agreement to this amongst the educational institutions, though an institution's response to an external examiner's comments are likely to be reflective, in any event.
21. It was pointed out again, that for institutions with a separate validating body, the external examiner is appointed by the validating University, and not the institution itself. There is therefore limited scope to amend the expectations of the external examiner role.

Other issues

22. One of the osteopathic educational institutions interpreted the question around external examiners to refer to an external assessor of students undertaking their final clinical competence assessments. Some of the comments in this context resonate with what others have said in terms of availability of those able to undertake such roles and centralised training of some sort. However, there is a distinction in our view of an external examiner as a quality assurance role, and one who actually assesses students. The institution in question is in the process of updating its policy in this respect so as to better reflect sectoral norms in relation to the external examiner role.

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Final comments

23. The Committee wished to understand better how external examiners can contribute to the assurance of osteopathic educational standards, and to its judgment as to whether the Osteopathic Practice Standards are effectively delivered with the RQ programmes of Osteopathic Educational Institutions. This review has considered the role of the external examiner, and explored the views of the educational institutions regarding the appointment of externals, the strengths and weaknesses of the process, and how this might be improved.
24. The potential tensions outlined above between the Committee's need to understand how the external examiner provides assurance of the delivery of the Osteopathic Practice Standards, and the educational institutions' perception of this as academic/educational role may not actually be in conflict. The external examiner is one component in the process of ensuring that a course is delivered appropriately. The typical aspects of the external examiner role are outlined in paragraph 11 above. An initial Recognised Qualification visit leading to successful awarding of RQ status provides the initial assurance that the practice standards are (or will be) effectively delivered within the programme. The general conditions which apply to all RQ programmes require educational institutions to inform the GOsC of changes to, or issues arising with, their programmes or institutions which might affect the delivery of standards. The external examiner provides an objective layer of externality to help ensure that academic standards are maintained, and to make a comparison with sectoral norms. Ensuring that this is the case, that assessments are effectively and appropriately set and marked, and that students progress largely as expected, forms the environment within which learning outcomes (which are mapped to the OPS) are delivered. Anything which falls short of these expectations should be raised by the external, and responded to by the institution, irrespective of their familiarity with the OPS.
25. The analysis of the annual reports from educational institutions by the QAA provides a further level of scrutiny of the external examiner's comments, which may raise further queries for exploration with the institution.
26. One of the very common themes arising from the review is the fact that eligible osteopathic external examiners are in limited supply. The profession is relatively small, and it can be hard to find suitable externals, particularly when validators' requirements include osteopathic PhD qualified academics and clinicians. Even osteopaths who work in education may have a fairly limited understanding of broader quality assurance issues and the opportunities that might exist for them in quality assurance roles. It is hoped that the planned formation of an Association for Educators in Osteopathy might help to raise awareness of these, and start to develop a greater pool of applicants for quality assurance roles.

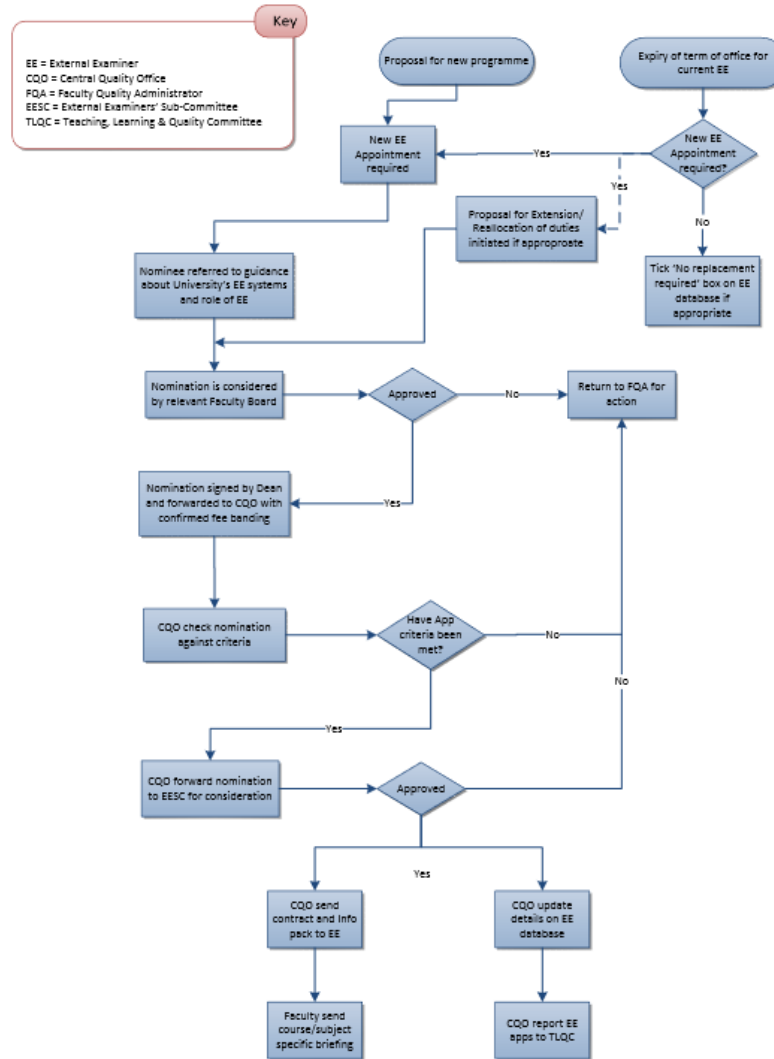
Recommendation: To consider the outcomes of the review of the role of external examiners within osteopathic education.

Appendix: External examiner review Osteopathic Educational Institution (OEI) responses

(Responses are anonymised, but OEIs are numbered so an institution’s responses to all four questions can be seen).

Question	Responses	Commentary
<p>Q1: Summary of institution or validating university procedures for the appointment of external examiners, length of appointment, what they do and nature and extent of the contact throughout the year.</p>	<p>OEI#1</p> <p>See AQF section 11 attached</p> <p>THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS</p> <p>11.3.1 External Examiners are members of, and attend, Boards of Examiners and are expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Ensure that the standards of the ---’s awards are consistent with those elsewhere in the sector, and that the --- is examining the qualities typically found in students across the sector at any specific stage of their course; b) Moderate the standard of work carried out by students to consistent standards to ensure that grades awarded are similar to those that would apply in other comparable higher education institutions and are in line with current best practice in the discipline concerned; c) Witness (by attendance at Boards of Examiners) the fair and consistent application of the ----'s regulations for dealing with students’ assessments, progression from one stage to another and the determination of students’ awards; d) Endorse the outcomes of the assessments they have been appointed to scrutinise; e) Comment and give advice on course design, pedagogy and assessment processes; f) Produce a written report which will include a commentary and judgements on the validity, reliability and integrity of the assessment process and the standards of student attainment. 	<p>The response referred to the separate AQF framework. We’ve lifted out the role of the external examiner from this, but it is an extensive document which sets out the full processes and expectations of the role.</p>

	<p>11.3.2 Depending on the requirements of a particular subject or course, External Examiners may be called upon to undertake the observation of clinical practice, practical examinations or viva voce examinations.</p> <p>11.3.3 External Examiners have the right to comment on any matter at the Board of Examiners, although the ultimate responsibility for making recommendations as to the award of degrees rests with the relevant Board of Examiners as a whole.</p> <p>11.3.4 The Board of Examiners is not ultimately required to defer to the judgement of External Examiners in taking decisions but, where the Board of Examiners chooses to disregard the views of an External Examiner, the reasons for the Board’s decision shall be recorded in the minutes of the meeting and reported to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education).</p>	
	<p>OEI#2</p> <p>Please see attached flow diagram Length varies depending if they are already an external for the University, as the length of appointment will only last as long as the first appointment.</p>	<p>Further details were supplied, including appointment flow chart and External Examiner policies and procedures document.</p>



Our External examiners are offered all written assessments to comment on and all model answers. The osteopathic external also takes part in moderation of our Final clinical competency assessment. They review all research work (protocols and papers), they have available all written examinations for them to review and

	<p>for the coursework it is 20% of all course works (all grades) and all refers which have been double marked and moderated.</p> <p>The externals were also involved in reviewing our assessments when we changed assessments and modules. They also involved in any minor modifications which are required, we discuss any changes with them and then they support those decisions, if they agree.</p> <p>They attend the July board and then at least one external examiner (as we have 2) attend the refer board. They are offered to view all assessments and all completed assessments even if they are not attending the refer board. They are invited to all programme committee meetings where they meet faculty and students.</p>	
	<p>OEI#3</p> <p>Various attachments were included to answer this question. The following are from these, though the full policies and procedures document is available:</p> <p>Module External Examiners - Module external examiners are appointed for their specialist subject knowledge and have responsibility for ensuring the standard of the modules to which they are assigned. A single module external examiner is normally appointed to each module. Where greater flexibility is required, or for large modules (e.g. project/dissertations), a school may assign multiple examiners to a module. In this situation, one examiner will be identified as the principal module external examiner. The principal module external examiner will normally be responsible for approving assessment briefs and amendments to modules.</p> <p>Award External Examiners - Award external examiners provide feedback on the overall standard of the award; its coherence; and the extent that the outcomes are aligned with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements. Award external examiners are appointed from among</p>	<p>Again, further details were supplied, including full policies and procedures of the current validating university.</p>

	<p>module external examiners. An award examiner will be appointed to all awards of the university. Where a course is delivered at multiple locations (e.g. at the university and one or more partner institutes), separate award external examiners may be appointed to the course at each location.</p> <p>The validator’s policy includes: This is the validating university’s External Examiner policy and procedure document. It includes the principles of external examining as follows: “External examiners assist the university in maintaining the academic standards of its awards, providing essential feedback on whether</p> <p>2.1.1. The university is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements.</p> <p>2.1.2. The assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the award(s) and is conducted in line with the degree awarding body’s policies and regulations.</p> <p>2.1.3. The academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK degree-awarding bodies of which the external examiners have experience.</p> <p>2.2. External examiners are expected to provide informative comment and recommendations on:</p> <p>2.2.1. Good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment.</p> <p>2.2.2. Opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students.”</p> <p>The OEI has summarised the policies further as follows:</p>	
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	<p>The [institution] have one External Examiner who has the following responsibilities which are a combination of module and award responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To maintain oversight and comment on the academic standards of the module(s) to which they are appointed, confirming that: • Module content remains current • Module outcomes are aligned with relevant qualification descriptors set out in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications • Modules are aligned with relevant subject benchmark statements • The standards of the modules are commensurate with standards at other higher education institutions with which they are familiar • Professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements are being met • To judge the overall standard of student performance on modules to which • To comment on the form and content of examination papers, coursework and other assessments that count towards the outcome of the module (summative) in order to ensure that all students will be assessed fairly in relation to the module content and regulations and in such a way that examiners will be able to judge whether the students have fulfilled the module outcomes and reached the required standard. • To scrutinise a sample of examination scripts and summative coursework covering the range of marks awarded and verify the standard of marking. • To monitor arrangements for live assessments, including performances and presentations. The minimum requirement is that external examiners are provided with detailed assessment records that clearly demonstrate how the assessment criteria has been applied to each assessment and the rationale for the mark awarded. 	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To monitor and report on the internal moderation of assessment results (in accordance with the procedure outlined in the university's Assessment Policy and Procedures). • To provide feedback on examples of good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment and to make recommendations regarding opportunities to enhance the quality of learning opportunities provided to students. • To contribute, in line with their overall remit, to the production of confirmed module results to be presented at first sit award boards. • To review all failed assessments prior to a re-sit board. • To produce an annual report • To comment on and approve changes to existing modules and the design of new modules on request. <p>External examiners have a four-year tenure. They undergo an induction that is held at the University at the start of their tenure and thereafter they attend assessment boards either in person or remotely.</p>	
	<p>OEI#4</p> <p>The data provided relates to the University of ----- as to date all of our experience of external examiners relates to that University. Once the Institution has agreed upon its favoured candidate (Programme Committee, Quality & Standards Committee, Academic Board) a nomination form (attached) is completed and submitted to the University together with a copy of the CV of the candidate plus a copy of their passport. This is then considered by the Faculty of Science and Engineering Quality and Standards Committee of the University. Appointments are for four years.</p> <p>The external examiner will:</p>	

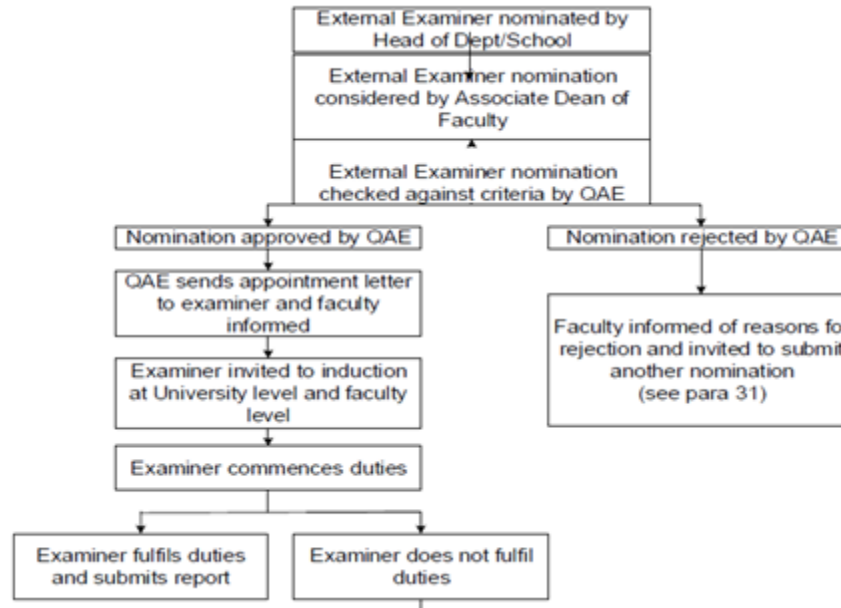
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – review and comment on all summative assessments (first sit and resit) for the modules for which that external is responsible (this will be done remotely); – to meet with the University and with the institution to meet staff and students. This can be on the occasion of the Exam Board or in addition to that. For example we have had occasions when we want to clarify an external’s report so we have arranged a meeting with involved staff; – Externals are invited to final exam boards (first sit and resit) and can also attend those meetings at which overall statistical analysis of student profiles is considered. On the occasion of the exam boards, the external will also review samples of student work. – Externals are also invited to comment on any curricular changes and in particular the whole curriculum on the occasion of a revalidation. – In general terms the external will visit the institution around three times per year – each visit lasting at least half a day. 	
	<p>OEI#5</p> <p>way of introducing what is described in the following paragraphs it is necessary to explain that the “internal examiner” we describe is not a member of faculty and is not involved in teaching at the -----, and the only contact with students is in an assessment role. The person is recruited from the EE pool by the ----- and is involved in all the assessments throughout the course other than the two written assessments.</p> <p>The college appoints a new External Examiner every two years so as to gain a wider range of opinion of the college’s exam processes and product as assessed by FCCA. The EE is selected by recommendation by our “internal examiner” (described above.) They are known to have acted as EE’s at other OEIs. The aim is to ensure comparability with other OEIs in relation to OPS.</p>	

	<p>The college requires the EE taking part in FCCA to mark the students' knowledge and skills with the "internal examiner."The course director provides a marking schedule with clear criteria to assist in the marking process. The format of the FCCA exam at ---- -- involves 4 elements.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Real patients, one new and one follow up. 2) A case history role play using an experienced actor 3) An ergonomic assessment and exercise prescription with role player and 4) a technique assessment on an examiner who is an osteopath. <p>It is proposed to ask the EE in future to inspect and comment on the other course assessments: five clinical and two written exams.</p> <p>The EE has no prior knowledge of students.</p>	
	<p>OEI#6</p> <p>The appointment is a University appointment, and is conducted according to their regulations. The University has a well developed and extensive handbook approved by Senate regarding External Examining. It is framed around the relevant QAA Quality Code chapter B7: External Examining. New appointees are invited to an induction and training day at the University during the first semester. Appointments are usually for 52 months (which allows a concluding period at the end of a 4 year cycle). EEs are given a selection of modules to oversee. The LSO currently has two EEs (at one time we had 3). The workload is split, with the medical / science modules being overseen by an academic who is not an osteopath; and the osteopathic modules overseen by an osteopath with HE experience. EEs also have an induction at the -----, where they are introduced to the curriculum, the modules, the assessment schedule and the Course Team. For non-osteopathic appointees, some time is taken to familiarise them with the profession, professional regulation and the Osteopathic Practice Standards. EEs are provided with the Course Specification Forms,</p>	

	<p>Academic Regulations, and relevant Module Guides. All assessments (eg question papers and answer guides) must be approved before implementation. All moderated scripts must be reviewed for all components of a module. Practical exams may be observed, or a video may be provided for later viewing. It is up to the EE to determine their frequency of attendance. Due to the extensive number of modules and assessments, it is not usual for all practical type assessments to be sampled by observation every year, although the assessment paperwork is fully scrutinised. Experienced EEs will normally plan out what they will attend, taking in a full range over the course of their tenure. The Final Clinical Competency Assessment is usually sampled every year.</p>	
	<p>OEI#7</p> <p>As with all universities in the UK, ----- is responsible for the quality of the education it provides and for the academic standards of the awards it offers. The role of the External Examiner is to ensure that it maintains nationally and internationally comparable academic standards; it is crucial, therefore, to the University's quality assurance procedures. External Examiners also assist the University by advising on good practice in teaching, learning and assessment.</p> <p>Appointments</p> <p>External Examiner appointments are made on the authority of Academic Board. External Examiners are normally appointed for four academic years.</p> <p>External Examiners are responsible for a defined list of modules in the M.Ost programme.</p> <p>Deans or Directors of School are responsible for ensuring that every module offered by their Faculty is assigned to an External Examiner. Progression and Award Board (PAB) External Examiners oversee a range of awards, in line with the University's two-tier system of Assessment Boards. External Examiners are responsible for assuring the overall standards of the University's awards, and</p>	<p>The described process is fairly typical and consistent with other HEIs. Handbook includes:</p> <p><i>The Role of External Examiners</i></p> <p><i>1.3.1 The primary role of External Examiners at the University is one of quality assurance and the confirmation of standards, ensuring procedures and processes are in place that will assure appropriate outcomes. The role is achieved by sampling and commenting upon the evidence of the operation of those procedures and processes in the expectation that such comment will be acted upon.</i></p> <p><i>1.3.2 Specifically the University requires its External Examiners, in their expert judgement, to report on;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• whether or not it is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements;</i>

	<p>do not contribute to the assessment process by acting as second markers.</p> <p>Reporting</p> <p>External Examiners normally report annually, by way of a standard report form which is sent to them immediately before the Assessment Boards. They are expected to report within four weeks of the date of the Boards, so that their findings can be discussed at the beginning of the following academic session. Responses to reports are prepared and signed off by Deans of Faculty, to be returned to External Examiners: a follow-up response is also sent immediately prior to the following Boards. The findings of External Examiners also contribute to the annual monitoring process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>the extent to which its assessment processes measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the provision for which the External Examiner is responsible and is conducted in line with its policies and regulations;</i> • <i>whether or not the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which the External Examiner has experience;</i> • <i>good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment;</i> • <i>opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students.</i> <p><i>1.3.3 External Examiners are also expected to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>confirm that sufficient evidence was received to enable their role to be fulfilled or provide details to the contrary;</i> • <i>state whether issues raised in the previous report(s) have been, or are being, addressed to their satisfaction;</i> • <i>address any issues as specifically required by any relevant professional body;</i> • <i>give an overview of their term of office in their final report.</i> <p><i>1.3.4 External Examiners are not engaged in the capacity of second markers, nor are they expected to routinely fix or alter marks. Moreover, External Examiners cannot alter the decisions of properly constituted Progression and Award Boards or Module Assessment Boards in relation to individual students after those Boards have</i></p>
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		<p><i>Handbook for External Examiners and Moderators 2018-19, version 3.10: Page 5 of 29 concluded their business. In any case of disagreement that cannot be otherwise resolved, the decision of the External Examiner is final, but the External Examiner must provide the Board with a clear statement of the reasoning behind it, which will be recorded in the minutes of the Board.</i></p> <p>It's not quite clear how many externals they have at this stage.</p>
	<p>OEI#8</p> <p><u>The Role of the External Examiner</u></p> <p>The role of the External Examiner includes, amongst other duties, consideration of examination papers and assessment questions and review and moderation of items of assessment, including examination scripts, course assignments, projects or dissertations. External Examiners are expected to submit a full and frank report to the University, summarising the standard of questions, the standard of the examination process, the conduct of the examination process and the quality of the students.</p>	<p>A summary of the OEI's processes has been supplied.</p> <p>The role has been shown in this table, but further duties and responsibilities are set out separately. This appears consistent with others.</p>
	<p>OEI#9</p> <p>The University utilises criteria that are informed by the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B7: External Examining. (Appendix 1. External Examiners 2018/19)</p> <p>Flow chart showing the process for appointing external examiners taken from Appendix 1.</p>	<p>The processes outlined here are consistent with those across the sector.</p>



At ----- we have 2 external examiners for our RQ programmes and a separate external examiner for the MSc Osteopathy. Both external examiners are expected to attend the Module and Programme assessment boards, the modules that they are responsible for are identified by the Head of Osteopathy in conjunction with the ----- Liaison officer.

External examiners undertake activities in the following areas:

Consultation on draft assessments (coursework briefs and examination papers)- External examiners are invited to comment on all assessment briefs prior to publishing them to students.

The audit of assessed work- This includes all written work and practical work, where the external examiner does not attend practical assessments these are recorded and sent to the external examiner for review. The audit of work can occur throughout the year and in particular prior to the assessment boards.

Responsibility for agreeing marks and grades- The University expects external examiners, in their independent auditor role, to

	<p>advise the University on whether the standards set are appropriate, that the conclusions reached by internal examiners are fair and equitable, and that approved procedures have been followed.</p> <p>Assessment Boards- External examiners are required to attend the module assessment board(s) relating to their responsibilities, a sub-set of external examiners are required to attend the programme assessment board.</p> <p>Verification of the recommendations of assessment boards- The agreed final recommendations of an assessment board are the collective, consensus views of the board members, including the external examiners.</p> <p>Subsequent to auditing the assessed work and attending the assessment boards, external examiners submit their report to the Quality Assurance and enhancement team at ----- University, for flow chart see Appendix 1 page 6 of 15. All external examiners, as part of their contract with the University, are required to submit an annual report. The University has adopted a standard report format that must be completed on-line. In addition to responses to key questions about standards, processes and procedures, external examiners are given the opportunity to write unrestricted commentaries on any matters arising from their audit. They are also asked to detail any areas of good practice and/or recommendations for enhancement. The University requires that external examiners should be provided with feedback following discussion of their reports by the field team. This feedback should consist of an itemised response to the report using the University's response template.</p> <p>External examiners are not involved in curricula or assessment but an external examiner can comment on curricula and assessment within their annual report.</p> <p>The external examiners review 10% or a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 30 sample scripts for each element of assessment within a module.</p>	
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	<p>All external examiners are invited to the module assessment board but only a subset of examiners normally attend the programme assessment board.</p>	
<p>Q2: What are the strengths of the external examiner system from your perspective?</p>	<p>OEI#1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> External assurance of assessment processes and academic standards. 	<p>These responses are all fairly consistent in setting out the positives of external examiners – the objective outside view of an institution, and the role as a ‘critical friend’.</p>
	<p>OEI#2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows an external individual to assess the quality of the work of the students, and the quality of the work of the module leaders/markers. Identifies good and bad practice. Have an external view of education from, in some cases, a non-osteopathic viewpoint. 	
	<p>OEI#3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing the role of a critical friend. This is invaluable in gaining an objective perspective of elements of the curriculum and assessment. Being able to send written exams and their model answers for external examiner opinion and comment. Overviewing top, middle, bottom and fail scripts to ensure moderated written exams are marked fairly to ensure parity across both sites of the College. Providing an unbiased opinion on student issues at assessment boards. 	
	<p>OEI#4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provision of an external and objective view from an expert in the area who is able to provide the assurance that the processes being followed and the standards being applied conform with sector norms. 	

	<p>OEI#5</p> <p>Our external examiners mark the students at the ____ for FCCA. In line with assessment good-practice, examiners observe all students and mark the consultation from beginning to end with no breaks. This ensures that all information is gathered from consultation, and follows the practice used in medical undergraduate and post graduate assessments.</p> <p>The internal marker and EE are required to mark independently and not confer marks until the whole exam is finished. There is a process for borderline and failing candidates.</p> <p>This process ensure EE and internal markers are independent, and with the EE having no knowledge of students reduces bias to a minimum. We think this is unique to LCOM.</p> <p>Having an EE pool should help to maintain standard of achievement across all schools. (but see Q3 comments)</p> <p>EEs overviewing and commenting on the whole program can advise on standards, level of achievement and fairness. They can advise on whether the assessments are appropriate for the intended outcomes and OPS.</p>	<p>In this context, the OEI is referring to EEs which, in fact, fulfil the role of an external assessor, actually contributing to the clinical assessment of students.</p> <p>In seeking feedback on assessment processes etc, there is some conflation between the role of External Examiner from a QA perspective, and an External Assessor. This process is under review within the institution, and a move to a more standard model of external examining is planned.</p>
	<p>OEI#6</p> <p>The EE set up is deeply embedded in the quality maintenance and enhancement process. There are clear benefits to having external scrutiny of the various stages of assessment, and in the maintenance of standards. The opportunities to discuss student, modular and curricular issues are very welcome. It engenders confidence in the outcomes when EEs can compare our provision with other HE providers.</p>	<p>This is consistent with others and highlights the benefits of EEs as a 'critical friend', able to offer objective opinion on assessments and standards.</p>
	<p>OEI#7</p>	<p>The institution seem satisfied with the rigour of the process.</p>

	<p>It is a vigorous process that has been reviewed periodically. Very detailed training and information have been provided to the external examiners by ----- University.</p>	
	<p>OEI#8 The role provides external oversight on assessments, feedback and moderation to ensure it meets sector / University policy. The external examiner provide comment on good practice and can share sector best practice. Their input on curriculum development and programme changes are essential at ----- University for changes being approved by the college’s quality standards committee.</p>	<p>Consistent with positive comments above.</p>
	<p>OEI#9 We benefit from EEs observations of good practice at other institutions as our EE is always an Osteopath- part of the application assesses whether the EE meets the requirements of the professional body. EEs academic/professional qualifications allow for objective assessment based on an understanding of the professional requirements (OPS). The review of course documentation, assessment briefs and assessed work allows for EE’s to have an indirect input into curriculum development. The EE responsibilities recognise the need to respect patient confidentiality, dignity and modesty in keeping with the OPS. The EE report system allows the EE to comment on OPS throughout as it is not too prescriptive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having an Osteopath as an EE encourages sharing of good practice and collaboration. 	

<p>Q3: What are the weaknesses of the external examiner system from your perspective?</p>	<p>OEI#1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variability in ability/experience of External Examiners. • Occasionally limited or no response from External Examiners. • Limited pool of external examiners in osteopathy 	<p>Not dissimilar to other responses – issues around availability and experience of externals.</p> <p>The reference to occasional poor response, or even no response from EEs, is interesting, and surprising. Presumably there re ways of managing this, though this was not elaborated.</p>
	<p>OEI#2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None once the University have explained their processes and the Externals have received our documentation there has been no issues. The externals are also able to meet the faculty and student body should they wish which helps with dialogue. • One issue is the lack of osteopaths that can fulfil the role as identified by the University regulations 	<p>The issue around availability of osteopathic EEs is consistent with others.</p>
	<p>OEI#3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to other job commitments, can't familiarise themselves enough with the College, and therefore not all suggestions can be made applicable. 	<p>This sounds as though further support may be needed to ensure that EEs do understand the context of the OEI, to avoid suggestions being made that are not implementable.</p>
	<p>OEI#4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main weakness is that the view given by the external is just that – their view. It may not be reliable and the views of successive externals may differ wildly about the same issues. 	<p>This resonates with the point above – EE's personal views may vary, even in relation to the same issues, and may not be reliable.</p>
	<p>OEI#5</p> <p><u>There is no central body for osteopathic EE training:</u> The GOSC used to provide this. With reference to the code for higher education, External Examiner section: training is essential in ensuring same level of attainment is met in assessments. We understand that the objection to reinstating this by OEIs was that</p>	<p>Again, with this OEI there is a conflation or the QA aspect of externals, with an assessment role. Good point about centralised training for externals, but this seems to be in relation to clinical assessment, rather than QA.</p> <p>Each OEI is either a degree awarding body itself, or has a programme validated by a university, apart from this particular OEI, which may put some of these comments</p>

	<p>they design their own assessments. However, the training of EE is a separate issue from assessment design. Training EE is about ensuring that the standards EEs are assessing are the same, ie one of calibration</p> <p>All EEs should meet and take part in training in calibration and standardisation exercises. This in additionally may generate a source of assessment ideas and development for all OEI. In medical assessments both for undergraduate and post grad assessments the shared training and calibration of examiners is considered vital to ensure examiners assess to the same standard consistently.</p> <p>The EE role of sampling and validating throughout the whole course would appear to need Psychometric Assessment expert advice: As a result of the variation in student numbers, and level of prior knowledge and skills of students in different OEIs, this affects the type of calibration and standardisation tools that might be best to use. The use of psychometrics experts in validating whole programs and also in informing the EE's role is important. Some OEI who are part of universities may have access and input by psychometricians. ----- seeks advice from contacts in Royal College of General Practitioners.</p> <p>What to sample? How to sample it, and how the sampling demonstrates standards and quality assurance? How robust is the EE's opinion in supporting an OEI should there be a legal challenge if student should fails and appeals against the decision?</p> <p>EEs should be involved in a minimum amount of EE work per year to ensure their calibration is current.</p> <p>EEs report, that in their moderating roles in particular, there is no body for training. Neither are there support structures for them if they consider a student should fail. Although GOSC have stated in the past that EE or moderator should be able to make independent decisions, the lack of back up faced with OEI and/or university appeals and disagreement re decision lacks robustness. This ultimately could put at risk OPS and patient safety. Comparison is</p>	<p>in context. As mentioned above, a review of this process is underway in this case.</p>
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	<p>made with when the GOSC used to train EE; the GOSC was felt to be in a position to support and back up the EE.</p>	
	<p>OEI#6</p> <p>Our biggest problem is finding suitable candidates who are acceptable to our University. The rules stipulate an EE may not be from the same institution as the previous or concurrent post-holder, nor from the same institution as any other EE appointed to that DAP. They should not come from an institution with whom we have a reciprocal arrangement. They should hold a PhD, be internationally published, and (for osteopaths) be a practicing clinician. These criteria are virtually impossible to achieve in our small profession. We have, for the most part, been very fortunate in finding EEs who can help support our development. If however an EE does not fully engage, or lacks academic rigour, it can be problematic. They may also have little knowledge outside their own institution, so would be limited in their ability to vouch for the equivalence of standards across the sector.</p>	<p>This is a particularly challenging set of criteria. Others have pointed out the dearth of available EEs, but the additional requirement in this case that they hold a PhD, be published internationally and be a practicing clinician, really narrows the field for osteopathic EEs.</p>
	<p>OEI#7</p> <p>Not that I am aware of.</p>	<p>No further details provided here.</p>
	<p>OEI#8</p> <p>The number of external examiners available with the relevant experience and breath of exposure to the OEI sector, which can enable their ability to comment on good practice.</p> <p>The role as outlined by the University / Validating HEI focuses on QAA requirements and does not explicit require the external examiner to comment on delivery of the OPS</p>	<p>Similar point to that above regarding the availability of suitable candidates for the EE role.</p>
	<p>OEI#9</p> <p>As a collaborative partner the dissemination of information from [the University] can be slow or incomplete.</p>	<p>Similar to others – finding a suitable EE can be challenging. In this case, the process itself can take a long time.</p>

	<p>Deadlines can be difficult to meet as these are often determined by the [University] teaching calendar that does not necessarily correlate with [our] calendar.</p> <p>The process of appointing an EE can take too long.</p> <p>As we are a small profession it can be difficult to attract EE's from colleges that have not been involved with us before.</p> <p>There is no specific reference to reporting on professional body regulations within the EE report.</p> <p>The verbal discussions within the exam boards are often more useful than the report itself and could be better captured in the minutes.</p>	<p>Interesting point regarding no specific reference to reporting on Regulator's requirements (taking 'professional body' to mean the GOsC, rather than iO).</p> <p>Interesting, also, re exam board discussions and the capturing of these. How could these be better utilised to enhance quality of the programme?</p>
<p>Q4: How would you improve the system or provide better assurance about the delivery of the Osteopathic Practice Standards?</p>	<p>OEI#1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently there is little on OPS in the External Examiners' role – they are not there to ensure delivery of the OPS specifically. • However, as an enhancement, the OEIs could implement training for External Examiners regarding assurance of the OPS. 	<p>Similar comment to others around the role of the EEs in terms of delivery of the OPS – not explicit within the role, but maybe there's more that the OEIs can do to prepare EEs and potential EEs in this respect.</p>
	<p>OEI#2</p> <p>One of the External examiners is a registered osteopath and therefore is fully conversed with OPS. Out mapping document for the OPS is also available for the externals should they wish.</p>	<p>In this case the OEI equated an external being a registered osteopath with being 'fully conversant' with the OPS. Contrast with OEI#4 below.</p>
	<p>OEI#3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is difficult to comment on as the _____ is subject to the policies and procedures of [the validating] University. As it stands, the system at the University works well, and the _____ has been fortunate in having engaged and constructive external examiners. • The _____ has directly linked the OPS to the learning outcomes and to the marking criteria across all modules with a 	

	<p>variety of assessment styles, e.g. written and practical exams, presentations and essays.</p>	
	<p>OEI#4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No assumptions should be made about the familiarity of the external with the OPS. The institutional external examiner induction could with benefit be aided by a presentation from the GOsC. This could be followed up with two-way discussions so that all sides could be clear as to the essential nature of the OPS delivery. 	<p>Interesting that the OEI consider that no assumption can be made regarding the EEs familiarity with the OPS (contrast with OEI#2 above). Interesting suggestion, also, as to how this could be enhanced. Is this the role of the GOsc, or the OEI, though?</p>
	<p>OEI#5</p> <p>EE training outside OEIs, led by recognised psychometric experts on health care professional assessments.</p> <p>Recognised EE status for osteopathic schools maintained by GOSC.</p> <p>GOSC to consider helping fund EE training program as standards of OPS in qualifying osteopaths is crucial to regulator ensuring standards.</p> <p>To ensure robust support for EE and moderators to enable them to be free to make adverse decisions regarding students, OEIs and universities</p>	<p>This OEI does not have an external validating university or its own degree awarding powers, and this might explain the suggestion of a more centralised approach to the training of EEs (or assessors, in this case).</p>
	<p>OEI#6</p> <p>We would prefer not to be required to search for PhD level, published osteopaths. We would also like to be able to recruit osteopaths who are not currently embedded in an HE environment (but may have worked in HE in the recent past). However these decisions are not ours to make. It is unlikely to be reprised, but the old FCCA system of having a pool of GOsC trained examiners had significant merit – not simply by having a common ‘entrance test’ to the profession, but by having shared training opportunities and shared assessment experiences, which helped each school have clearer insight into what constituted meeting S2K (now OPS) and was, indeed, the ‘sector norm’.</p>	<p>A reiteration of the point above regarding the requirement of a PhD for EEs, even osteopathic ones.</p> <p>The reference to GOsC trained examiners is a familiar one. The central issue to this is the sharing of experiences and the common appreciation of what are sectoral norms. OEIs devise their own assessment programmes, and final clinical competence assessments are no longer stand-alone gateway entrance exams, but may vary between OEIs.</p>

	<p>OEI#7 I think the current system in place is appropriate to ensure the delivery of the OPS.</p>	<p>Slightly different nuance from some of the others here – how are the OPS effectively monitored and implemented?</p>
	<p>OEI#8 Creation of a list of External Examiners working in the OEI sector, which could be made available to OEIs to aid recruitment. Mentoring of new external examiners to support development and potentially increase number available. In relation to providing better assurances to the delivery of the OPS, this would be key when a programme is proposing changes to an assessment of curriculum. So on an ad-hoc basis rather than a routine / annual period. The rationale for this is that at RQ recognition, a programme’s curriculum is validated and therefore its delivery of the OPS checked. Subsequent changes would then be informed by external examiner comments. This could be reported in the respective GOsC RQ Annual report.</p>	<p>Some valid suggestions around development and support of new or potential externals.</p>
	<p>OEI#9 Having a specific section for reporting on professional body regulations. More guidance from professional body on the selection of EEs.</p>	<p>This touches on some of the other points here about a more central role in the training of EEs. Presumably, this refers to ‘professional body regulations’ in the context of delivery of the OPS. Unclear what else might be involved, if anything, other than Benchmark statement and GOPRE.</p>