

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER NEWSLETTER - JULY 2026

Welcome to the edition of our EE Newsletter, thank you to all who provided such lovely feedback on our first newsletter. If there is anything you would like included in future versions – please get in touch!

*Thank you, Shona & Steph*

Included in this quarter's update:

### Reminders/Useful links

[External Examiners Handbook](#)

[External Examiners section on our website](#)

[externalexaminers@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@cumbria.ac.uk)

We always appreciate hearing from you and would be happy to help with any queries or feedback at any time.

### Annual Report Template review and words from the External Examiner team

As we approach the final months of the academic year, we are reviewing our Annual Report templates and would welcome feedback from External Examiners.

If you are interested in providing feedback, please complete the feedback form [External Examiners Annual Report Template Feedback](#) by the 15th of May. If you would like a copy of the current template(s) please contact [externalexaminers@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@cumbria.ac.uk) and we will share a copy with you.

We are particularly keen to understand whether the questions asked enable you to provide meaningful feedback that can effectively inform our programmes and support improvements to current processes. Your input will help shape how External Examiner feedback is used for reporting purposes and to drive meaningful change.

Once the templates have been updated, we will refresh the relevant webpages and issue the Annual Report and Claim templates via email. Our intention is to distribute the Undergraduate (UG) templates in June, with Postgraduate (PG) templates following in September.

Please note that submission deadlines remain **31 July for UG** and **31 October for PG**. Dates for collaborative provision will be confirmed separately.

### IT Updates

The University has again successfully secured Cyber Essentials certification, valid until March 2027. As a result of the recertification process, some External Examiners may have temporarily lost access to certain IT systems. IT Services have contacted all affected users directly; however, we would like to take this opportunity to remind colleagues to check that they have access to all relevant systems. If you experience any issues, please contact [itservicedesk@support.cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:itservicedesk@support.cumbria.ac.uk) as soon as possible.

Promptly ensuring access will help avoid any delays to the processing of student marks and prevent potential disadvantage to students.

Thank you for your continued support and understanding. While we recognise that security processes can sometimes be frustrating, they remain essential. We are here to support you, alongside our IT Services team.

### **Volunteers Needed**

The University has been in discussions with a third-party provider that offers an enterprise browser, which may help address some of the challenges colleagues experience when accessing University systems and services from non-UoC devices.

We are seeking volunteers to participate in a pilot of this browser. We will take guidance on suitable timings, particularly in relation to marking and other workload pressures.

If you are interested in taking part, please let us know by emailing [externalexaminers@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@cumbria.ac.uk). The pilot is likely to begin in a couple of weeks and will be managed by our IT team.

Your feedback as external users will be essential in helping us determine whether this is a viable solution for wider use.

### **Some words from our Assessments Team**

The Module Confirmation Process will be running from 3/6/26 to 16/6/26 to confirm marks for students who are ready for award, and from 18/6/26 to 8/7/26 to confirm marks for students who will be progressing into 2026/7 academic year. This is not an exhaustive list of dates for all our programmes' modules. Should you have any queries please contact the relevant academic staff with whom you liaise.

You should be contacted by the relevant academic staff to arrange moderation of module marks in the run up to this period and will also receive an email from the assessment team detailing the modules being presented to each of the boards for which you are the subject external examiner. Some of you may have already received this email as we are currently preparing for the Summer MCPs.

Thank you, Assessment Team

### **Some words from our Collaborative Provision Team**

External Examiners working with collaborative provision are reminded that student work and marks are held by partner institutions and will not be accessible via ICON in the same way as for University of Cumbria-delivered programmes. We recommend that External Examiners liaise directly with partner programme teams to arrange timely access to samples of assessed work and marking. To support consistency and clarity, please note that an assessment template is available within each Microsoft Teams site for every partner, which should be used when requesting and reviewing assessment materials. To ensure a smooth process, please confirm timelines for moderation and boards in advance with the partner

programme lead, University of Cumbria programme lead, and relevant assessment contacts. Early engagement will help avoid delays and ensure all requirements are met effectively.

## An article from current external examiner - Rayhan Abdullah Zakaria

### **Building Academic Judgement and Assessment Literacy: A Conversation Between Colleagues**

**By: Rayhan Abdullah Zakaria (External Examiner)**

*"Congratulations on becoming an External Examiner."*

That's how I opened the conversation with Abdullah, a colleague who had just secured his first appointment. He was enthusiastic—but cautious.

*"I understand the regulations,"* he said,

*"but how do I actually develop academic judgement? How do I know I'm making the right call?"*

It's a fair question. Academic judgement and assessment literacy aren't automatic. They are developed deliberately through exposure, reflection, and practice.

Here's what I shared with him.

#### **1. Develop Standards Fluency**

Before you evaluate marking, you need a clear sense of what sector standards actually look like. In the UK context, this means being familiar with level descriptors and benchmark statements shaped by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

But reading guidance documents isn't enough. You develop standards fluency by reviewing real scripts, examining borderline cases, and participating in standardisation exercises at your own institution. If your university offers assessment literacy workshops, attend them. Even experienced academics benefit from recalibration.

*"Think of it as tuning your academic ear,"* I told him.

#### **2. Strengthen Assessment Literacy**

Assessment literacy goes beyond understanding a marking rubric. It involves grasping concepts like constructive alignment, validity, reliability, and moderation.

At your home institution, volunteer to moderate across modules, sit on assessment panels, or review redesigned assessments. Exposure to varied marking practices sharpens your discernment. Over time, you start recognising inconsistencies or overly generous grading patterns more intuitively. Academic judgement grows from seeing assessment from multiple angles.

#### **3. Practise Proportionate Judgement**

New External Examiners sometimes worry about either missing problems or over-intervening. The key is proportionality.

Ask yourself: Is this an isolated anomaly or a systemic issue?

Does this difference reflect academic interpretation or misalignment with standards?

Discuss anonymised scenarios with experienced colleagues at your own university. Reflection builds confidence. Not every variation is a red flag—but patterns require attention.

*"Your role is to safeguard standards,"* I reminded him, *"not to rewrite marking."*

#### **4. Refine Diplomatic Communication**

How you raise concerns matters as much as what you raise. External Examiners work with programme teams, administrators, and board chairs. Clear, constructive, evidence-based communication maintains trust.

You can develop this skill by chairing internal meetings, presenting moderation summaries, or requesting feedback on how you frame critique. Diplomacy does not mean avoiding challenge—it means delivering it professionally. Enhancement works best when relationships are preserved.

### **5. Build Governance Awareness**

Finally, understand the broader quality assurance framework—progression rules, classification regulations, mitigation policies. Academic judgement is stronger when it's grounded in procedural awareness.

Ask your quality office for briefings if needed. Attend governance updates. Knowing how decisions flow through institutional structures strengthens your confidence at exam boards.

A few months later, Abdullah messaged me after his first board. There had been a borderline classification case. He reviewed the evidence, checked consistency, and asked a measured question about feedback alignment. He didn't overturn marks—but he reinforced clarity.

At the end of the meeting, the Chair commended his thoughtful contribution and noted that his input strengthened confidence in the process.

That's academic judgement in action. It isn't dramatic. It isn't confrontational.

It is calm, proportionate, informed—and valuable.

And like any professional skill, it is built through practice, reflection, and a commitment to getting better each time you sit at the table.