Guidelines for the quality assurance of examinations, grading, grading arrangements and the appointment of examiners at NHH

1. BACKGROUND

Pursuant to the Act of 1 April 2005 relating to Universities and University Colleges section 3-9, NHH shall ensure that students' knowledge and skills are tested and assessed in an impartial and academically sound manner. Assessments shall also safeguard the academic standards of the institution and the study programme in question. An external evaluation shall be made of the assessment or the assessment arrangements.

1.1 The objective of the guidelines

- To ensure that students enjoy due process protection in connection with the assessment of their knowledge and skills.
- To contribute to the quality assurance of the school's study programmes.
- To create a common framework for grading and the use of examiners at NHH.

1.2 Limitations

These guidelines do not concern the examiner's professional responsibility or information about how grading is carried out etc., nor the remuneration of examiners. Reference is otherwise made to the Regulations for examinations at NHH (full-time programmes) and more specific provisions relating thereto.

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF EXAMINATIONS, GRADING AND USE OF THE GRADE SCALE

2.1 Quality assurance of examination questions and the execution of examinations

The professor must ensure that the examination questions are prepared and, if applicable, that guidance is given to examiners, by the deadline stipulated by the person responsible for administering examinations in the department. All examination questions must be reviewed and approved by two members of the academic staff before the set of examination question papers is submitted to the Section for Timetabling and Exams at the Office of Student and Academic Affairs.

If the examination questions are in Norwegian, they must be available in both forms of Norwegian, unless all the candidates have chosen the same form of the language in advance, cf. Regulations for examinations at NHH (full-time programmes) section 7 and Forskrift om målform i eksamensoppgaver (Regulations relating to the form of Norwegian used in examination questions – in Norwegian only) (laid down by the Ministry of Culture) section 2.

If the examination questions are very comprehensive, or if terminology is lacking or unknown, so that there is a risk of misunderstandings, the department may, in accordance with the Regulations relating to the form of Norwegian in examination questions section 3, apply for exemption from the requirement that the examination questions must be available in both forms of Norwegian. Exemptions can be granted for individual examinations or for a period of up to five years.

Applications for exemption from the requirement that examination questions must be available in both forms of Norwegian must be submitted to the Office of Student and Academic Affairs no later
than four months before the examination in question is to be held. The Programme Board responsible for the relevant programme makes a decision in the case. Applications for exemptions must state the grounds, and previous examination question papers must be enclosed.

Candidates can appeal a decision regarding exemption to the Programme Board that made the decision. If the board upholds its decision, the case can be brought before the Appeals Committee. Decisions made by the Appeals Committee can then be appealed to the Ministry.

The professor must ensure that information about permitted aids is provided on the front page of the examination question paper, and that students are informed via the appropriate channels well in advance of the examination about the aids they can use during the examination. The information must be unambiguous, consistent and available to everyone, and it must also be in accordance with the information subsequently given in the examination question paper. The professor should inform students early in the semester that the list of aids is not necessarily final, and that they must check it immediately before the day of the examination.

In order to prevent any formal errors in the execution of the examination, the professor must be available to answer questions during the examination, so that any errors (errors or omissions in the wording of the examination questions) or points that are unclear are avoided or quickly rectified. The professor must be available to be contacted/sent for by the person responsible for administering examinations throughout the examination. If it is not possible for the professor to be available during the examination, the department must ensure that a stand-in is available. Information about this shall be given to the Section for Timetabling and Exams at the Office of Student and Academic Affairs.

If additional information is given during the examination that may have a bearing on the examination result, such information must be given to all the candidates. This applies to both supervised written examinations and unsupervised forms of assessment.

2.2 Anonymisation of the candidates
The candidates' grades shall be based on academic merit alone. Candidates shall be anonymised as far as practically possible.

In cases where anonymisation is not practically possible, the department should use other means to prevent personal factors from having a bearing on the grade awarded, e.g. by appointing a member of the academic staff who has not been a supervisor as examiner. An exception applies to independent work in the master's degree programme where the supervisor is normally an internal examiner.

2.3 Quality assurance of grading and the awarding of grades
The examiners in each subject area must have a common understanding of how the grading scale is to be used. The professor must also ensure that the examiners are informed about the applicable course description, curriculum and, if applicable, guidance for examiners.

Every semester, the Programme Boards review the grade statistics and appeals statistics for the preceding semester. These reports form the basis for quality assurance and are among the topics raised during regular discussions between the deans and heads of department.

3. STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS RELATING TO THE USE OF EXAMINERS
3.1 The Act relating to Universities and University Colleges
Pursuant to section 3-9 of the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges, there must be an external evaluation of the assessment or assessment arrangements.

3.2 NHH’s requirements for the use of examiners
NHH always uses two examiners, at least one of whom is external, for a substantial part of the assessment in a subject and always when grading written school-based examinations. If the form of assessment in a subject consists of several elements, the department can decide to only use internal examiner(s) in the assessment of elements other than the school-based examinations. The Programme Boards can grant exemptions on application from the department.

A minimum of two examiners are normally used during oral examinations, at least one of whom should normally be an external examiner.

Two examiners are always required to grade independent work/theses and in connection with appeals relating to examination results. Pursuant to section 3-9 of the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges, at least one of them must be an external examiner.

The departments can otherwise decide how external participation in the assessment is to take place, whether by external participation in the individual assessment or external evaluation of the assessment arrangements.

4. APPOINTMENT OF EXAMINERS, REQUIREMENTS OF EXAMINERS
4.1 Internal examiner
Internal examiners are normally members of the academic staff at NHH. An internal examiner can, for example, be the professor in the subject in question.

4.2 External examiner
External examiners are examiners who are not employees of NHH. External parties are not excluded from serving as examiners if they have held guest lectures etc. of a very limited scope, however. Employees on the fringe of NHH, e.g. in limited companies owned by NHH, can be used as external examiners. In special circumstances, a member of the academic staff employed in an Adjunct Professor position at NHH can be used as an external examiner if it is not possible to find other qualified examiners.

4.3 Examiners’ qualifications
Examiners in subjects at bachelor and master's degree level must have qualifications corresponding to at least a master's degree in the field. Examiners in subjects at PhD level must have a PhD/doctoral degree or corresponding competence that qualifies him/her to be appointed to a permanent academic position in the field.
4.4 Appointment of examiners
Pursuant to section 16 of the Regulations for examinations at NHH (full-time programmes), the departments have been delegated authority to appoint examiners.

Examiners must be appointed well in advance of examinations. The person appointed as examiner is also appointed as examiner in the event of a new or deferred examination.

A different examination commission than the original one will be used in connection with appeals relating to examination results. The examiner in appeal cases is normally appointed at the same time as the examiner for the ordinary examination.

External examiners must familiarise themselves with:
- The Regulations for examinations at NHH (full-time programmes)
- The national description of grades
- These guidelines

5. GRADING PROCEDURES

5.1 Guidelines for awarding grades
The examiners shall grade examination answers independently of each other and jointly determine the grade.

If sheets of rough paper have been submitted as part of the examination answer papers, the examiners must decide how it is to be weighted in each case. If a student has been given an opportunity to write out a final copy of the examination answers on a PC, grading shall nonetheless largely be based on the examination answer papers submitted at the examination venue.

When an external examiner is used to assess examination answers, and the internal and external examiner fail to reach an agreement on the assessment, a third examiner shall be brought in, who must also be external. The grade shall then be jointly determined by the three examiners, if necessary by majority decision.

5.2 Practical matters
Both examiners are responsible for ensuring that the examination answers are graded and that lists of grades are submitted to the Office of Student and Academic Affairs by the stipulated deadline. The deadlines for announcing grades are regulated by law, and it is very important that the deadlines are met. If grading is delayed due to illness or other unforeseen circumstances, the Section for Timetabling and Exams must be notified.

Any expenses the examiner incurs in connection with the grading will be covered by NHH on the presentation of bills and receipts. Any examiners' meetings must be held at minimum expense.

When grading has been completed, the list of grades must be signed by both examiners and returned to the Office of Student and Academic Affairs. The external examiner must also return the original
examination answers. The internal examiner shall retain his/her set of examination answers in order to be able to explain the examination result if a student so requests.

Everyone who handles examination questions and examination answers is responsible for storing and shipping them in a responsible manner.

5.3 Duty of confidentiality
Examiners are subject to a duty of confidentiality pursuant to section 13 of the Public Administration Act. Discussions held among groups of examiners must be considered confidential. If a student sends a request for an explanation of the examination result, the explanation must concern the grade agreed by the examiners. Examiners who state the grounds for grades are not entitled to provide information about their own or others’ assessments that deviated from the final grade awarded. The examiner and the candidate are not entitled to discuss and reassess the grade in connection with discussing the grounds for the grade. Candidates who do not accept the grounds for the grade and the awarded grade must file a formal appeal and request that the examination grade be reassessed.

Examiners’ names are normally not announced until after the examination results are released.

6. ASSESSMENT OF IMPARTIALITY

6.1 Background
Doubts about impartiality should not lead to questions about whether a student’s grade has been achieved/awarded on the correct basis.

6.2 Assessment of partiality
A member of the academic staff will be deemed to be disqualified on grounds of partiality if there is a relationship between him/her and the student as described in section 6 of the Public Administration Act:

Section 6 (requirements as to impartiality)
A public official shall be disqualified from preparing the basis for a decision or from making any decision in an administrative case
a) if he himself is a party to the case;
b) if he is related by blood or by marriage to a party in direct line of ascent or descent, or collaterally as close as a sibling;
c) if he is or has been married or is engaged to a party, or is the foster parent or foster child of a party:

(...)
He is similarly disqualified if there are any other special circumstances which are apt to impair confidence in his impartiality; due regard shall inter alia be paid to whether the decision in the case may entail any special advantage, loss or inconvenience for him personally or for anyone with whom he has a close personal association.

(...) Disqualification on grounds of partiality applies both to grading examinations (’reach a decision’), correcting assignments that form the basis for course approval (’reach a decision’) and preparation of examination questions (’prepare the basis for a decision’).
Other connections/relationships than those mentioned above (e.g. close friendships, being colleagues etc.) can also be grounds for disqualification on grounds of partiality. This will have to be assessed by the academic member of staff, in consultation with the head of the department if relevant, cf. section 8 of the Public Administration Act.

Section 8 (decisions concerning the question of disqualification)

The official shall himself decide whether he is disqualified. He shall submit the question to his immediate superior for decision if a party so requests and this may be done without undue loss of time, or if the official himself otherwise finds reasons to do so (…)

The academic member of staff is obliged to notify the head of department if there is any doubt about his/her impartiality in relation to the student.

7. PROCEDURES IN THE EVENT OF SUSPECTED CHEATING/ATTEMPTED CHEATING

If, during the grading of examination answers, the examiners begin to suspect cheating/attempted cheating, they must immediately notify the Office of Student and Academic Affairs about the matter.

Based on the examiners’ description of findings in the examination answers, the Office of Student and Academic Affairs will assess whether there are grounds for accusing the student of cheating. In such case, the Office of Student and Academic Affairs will inform the student(s), prepare the case and send it to NHH’s Appeals Board for consideration.

The examiner will be asked to give a written account of why he/she suspects cheating/attempted cheating.

The examiner can decide in each case whether examination answers can be graded in the usual manner or whether grading (if applicable) should be postponed until after the Appeals Board has considered the case. If the examination answers are graded in the usual manner, the grade will normally not be announced and the candidate will not be informed of the result. The right to annul results is in any case not subject to a time limit (cf. the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges section 4-7, fourth paragraph), and the Appeals Board can therefore annul the result irrespective of whether the candidate has already been informed of the result.