

External Examiner Guidance

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1 External examining at the University of Westminster

The University has about 250 external examiners. Most are from other HE institutions, but a large number are practitioners.

The main purposes of external examining are:

- to verify that standards are appropriate for the award or award elements which the external examiner has been appointed to examine;
- to assist in the comparison of academic standards across higher education awards and award elements;
- to ensure that assessment processes are fair and are fairly operated and are in line with the Academic Regulations.

2 Formal structure of Assessment – framework and assessment calendar

Courses conform to a common modular framework. There are normally two semesters each academic year. Progression and Award Board normally take place in May/June, with additional postgraduate boards in the autumn. A referral/deferral board may also be required in July.

Full details of the University's modular frameworks (postgraduate and undergraduate) are published in the Handbook of Academic Regulations.

External examiners are generally appointed to moderate either undergraduate work (Levels 5 & 6) or postgraduate work (Level 7). Some External Examiners will also be appointed to discrete programmes at levels 3 & 4, e.g. Certificate of Higher Education courses and Collaborative partner courses.

External Examiners are expected to moderate every assessment from each of their allocated modules.

3 Process of nomination

The nomination of external examiners to a Subject Area, and to the role of Chief External Examiner, is the responsibility of the Head of College which hosts the awards.

All such appointments require the approval of the member of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group with responsibility for Academic Quality.

Normally, a team of external examiners is identified by subject, with responsibility for a group of modules, or a course scheme.

Continuity between teams of external examiners is planned to ensure overlap between external examiner appointments, so that a course team does not have to appoint an entirely new team of external examiners for a given academic year.

4 Induction

The Quality and Standards Office will provide introductory information along with the letter of appointment. This will include a brief online induction to the University regulations and processes.

The Course Leader or main contact in the School which hosts the subject/course provides the

up- to-date Course Handbook and arranges a visit to the School to meet the teaching team and provide an induction to the curriculum and practical processes.

5 Particular Guidance

- A member of staff from the School which hosts the modules will provide full briefing on awards.
- External examiners will receive definitive course documents and, where appropriate, any course specific regulations.
- External examiners may be invited to attend an external moderation meeting as an observer prior to formal involvement in assessment at the University.

6 Formal structure of Assessment

The University operates a single tier assessment Board structure: module results for all modules grouped in a subject area are considered at an external moderation meeting which may be conducted physically at the University, or, by agreement between the team and its Subject Area external examiners, virtually. These are commonly referred to as **Subject Area Meetings**. The meetings are the University's expected forum for a holistic discussion of the curriculum, feedback and moderation processes. Subject Area meetings also enable a group of External Examiners in the same team to meet as a group at least once a year. The Subject Area meeting normally take place towards the end of the teaching year ahead of the Progression and Assessment Board.

The accumulated module results of individual students are forwarded to the **Progression and Award Board** which grants awards and considers progression and exclusion issues. The board is however not permitted to change moderated marks.

7 Role of a Subject Area External Examiner

- External examiners are nominated for appointment to specific named Subject Areas and given responsibility for specified modules.
- The subject specialist external examiner's primary role is that of independent oversight of the assessment process. They should provide an overview of the consistency and appropriateness of standards set by internal examiners in relation to the learning objectives and syllabus of a given module.
- These judgements are made in the context of knowledge of standards applied in comparable courses elsewhere and levels of student attainment in previous years.
- External examiners also attest that assessment regulations have been fairly applied ensuring parity of judgement for all students taking a module, and comment on the assessment process and procedures.
- The external examiner should not offer assessment judgements in individual cases or arbitrate in cases of difference of judgement between internal assessors.
- The external examiner has the right to receive and moderate the full range of marks awarded by internal examiners.
- Where an external examiner feels that, on the basis of the sample they have seen, work has been over or under-marked, they should advise that all the marks for that paper be adjusted

by a given margin. So, the whole group will be altered: plus, or minus X%.

- Where an external examiner perceives that marking is inconsistent, they should advise that the work of all students in the group be marked and moderated by a third internal marker.
- Although judgements are normally made on the basis of samples of work, subject specialist external examiners have the right to receive any piece of assessed module work within their remit.
- Comment on assessment and module outcome data, including any outliers.
- Provide an annual report summarising the assessment process.

8 Attendance at the University

There is a general expectation that engagement with the Course Team is required. Subject Area External Examiners are generally expected to visit the University at least once a year to attend the Subject Area Meetings as required and formally agree marks.

- External examiners will be advised of scheduled external moderations events dates well in advance, and in particular of days when attendance at the University will be required.
- Wherever possible, provisional dates will be cross-checked before being finalized, to avoid a clash of assessment boards or other engagements.
- Attendance at the University is normally a condition of annual payment.

9 Assessment moderation

Prior to assessment, external examiners will be asked to agree:

- the form and content of all examination papers, and in-course assignments which contribute 30% or more to the module;
- the means by which coursework assessments shall be approved, in order to ensure that all students will be assessed fairly in relation to the module syllabus and regulations and in such a way that external examiners will be able to judge whether they have fulfilled the learning outcomes of the module and reached the required standard.

To ensure that marking is appropriate for the credit level of the assessment, external examiners will receive/view for comment a representative sample of internally marked work.

This sample would normally be between 10% and 25% of the total and would include work of students with the highest marks in the module, failure and borderline failure marks, and samples of work of students across the full range of marks.

Papers sent should be accompanied by:

- the module syllabus and the full schedule of assessment
- draft module leader's reports
- the tabulation of all marks for all students in each module
- a sample of oral examinations conducted by internal examiners.

10 Consultation on proposed course changes

External examiners may be asked to provide assurance that proposed changes to degree

courses are appropriate. Examples may include the introduction of a new module, changes to course outcomes and the change of the degree course structure.

11 Chief external examiners

- The role of a chief external examiner is to ensure the fair and equitable application of the University's regulations on credit accumulation, and the course-specific regulations for each award, in decisions on the award of qualifications to students.
- This includes decisions on the classification of awards and decisions on exclusions.
- Chief external examiners take part in all work of Progression and Award Boards including the award of intermediate awards, and discrete awards.
- Comment on degree outcome data
- Chief external examiners are expected to be familiar with University of Westminster procedures, and therefore, only existing external examiners are normally appointed as chief external examiners.
- Each Award Board should include no more than one chief external examiner.

12 Progression and Award Board

Chief external examiners are required to:

- Attend the Progression and Award Boards at the University or at its specified Partner institution to endorse decisions made by the Board for progression, final awards, exclusions and contribute to degree outcome discussions. Attendance is set by mutual agreement with the College Registry. Subsequent changes to the agreements must be made by mutual agreement normally no later than two months before the set dates of the Board;
- Submit an annual report in accordance with the standard format approved by Academic Council. These reports are used as part of the evidence base for a range of quality assurance activities within the University and it should be noted that the reports may be made available to students at the University through representative committees.

Chief external examiners may also be consulted on any significant proposed changes to course specific assessment regulations.

Guidance for Progression and Award Boards for Chiefs can be found on the External Examiner Portal.

13 Annual meetings for external examiners

The College which hosts the subject/course must ensure that all the external examiners as a team are provided with the opportunity to meet together as a group at least once a year, these are known as Subject Area Meetings.

14 Publication of external examiners' names in course information

The University includes the details of external examiners in the published Course Handbook to ensure the independent scrutiny of the assessment process is transparent to students.

Students are advised in accordance with guidance that external examiners cannot deal with students individually.

Therefore, if any student on the course for which you are an external examiner attempts to contact you, please let the Quality and Standards Office know so we can endeavour to resolve issues raised with the course team through our normal quality assurance processes.

15 The external examiner's annual report

All external examiners are required to submit an annual report at the end of each session – normally June for undergraduate provision and October for postgraduate provision. External examiners are required to use the External Examiners Portal to compose, store and send their annual report.

The Portal requires external examiners to indicate the date(s) on which they attended the University as attendance at the University on at least one occasion during the year is a requirement for payment of the fee. Fees cannot be paid until the annual report has been received.

Additional sections are required for external examiners with responsibility for collaborative provision to provide a clear indication that the standards of assessment at the partner institution are comparable with courses at the University or with HEIs with which they are familiar. A section on the Progression and Assessment Board process and degree outcomes is also included for Chief External Examiners.

[The External Examiners Portal](#)

16 Annual report questions

The Portal requires external examiners to respond to a series of questions on a sliding scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. This questionnaire is used as a thumbnail guide to all aspects of the provision. External examiners are expected to elaborate upon their responses in the subsequent section of their report.

As a guide to the scale of values, external examiners should be aware that where a “disagree” is indicated, this matter will normally be drawn to the immediate attention of the University.

The written section of the annual report form has been designed to encourage sequential consideration of the essential issues and to ensure quality and standards obligations are fulfilled.

The questions are as follows:

1. *Policies and Procedures*

- Please comment on the Quality of the information you received relating to your external examining role from the University.
- Are there any issues raised in previous reports that have not been resolved and could benefit from further consideration?

- Do you believe that you were sufficiently consulted about the composition of the assessments this session?
- Do you believe that you had sufficient access to the student assessment output, coursework and examinations, in order to make the required judgements?

2. *The Assessment*

- Please comment on the design and structure of assessments, particularly the correspondence between learning outcomes and assessment and how well these match the stated objectives and syllabus for the course or module.
- Please comment on the internal procedures for assessments and examinations and particularly on the effectiveness of moderation.
- Please comment on the nature and usefulness of the feedback provided to the students on their assessed work.
- If applicable, comment on any outliers at assessment or module level. This is to provide assurance that such outliers were appropriately considered in line with the expected criteria.

3. *Assessment Standards*

- Are the standards of student performance comparable with those you have experienced with similar programmes at other UK HE institutions?
- Please comment on the level of marking. Are the academic standards deployed appropriate for this level in this subject?
- Are the standards for the determination of awards comparable with those you have experienced with similar programmes in other UK HE institutions?

4. *Good Practice and Quality Enhancement*

- Please comment on areas of innovation and good practice you have witnessed in the assessment of this programme.

5. *Issues for Further Consideration*

- Please indicate if there are areas for further consideration and development or any other comments.

6. *End of Tenure Report*

- If this is the final report of your tenure as an external examiner, please cover any notable developments over the term of your appointment.

External Examiners for collaborative programmes will be asked to complete the following fields:

7. *Collaborative Programmes*

- Name of partner college/institution
- Title of awards
- Date of visit to partner
- Please confirm if the standards of assessment at the partner institution are comparable with courses at the University or with other HE institutions you are familiar with.

- Please comment on areas of innovation and good practice you have witnessed in the collaborative provision or in the collaborative relationship.
- Please comment on areas for further consideration and development with regard to the collaborative arrangements.

Chief External Examiners will be asked to complete a final section:

8. *Chief External Examiners Annual Report*

- Are the standards for the determination of awards comparable with those you have experienced with similar programmes in other UK HE institutions?
- Please comment on the following:
 - The overall performance of the candidates on each course.
 - The distribution of results across classifications.
 - The implication of results for the course design and assessment.
 - The conduct of assessment boards and procedures of the Progression and Award Board.

17 The function of the Annual Report in quality assurance

All reports are acknowledged automatically by the External Examiners Portal on receipt, and subsequently a written response is made from the Head of College, or nominee, addressing the substantive issues in each report and outlining actions to be taken as a result of the examiner's comments.

Reports form part of the documentary input to three exercises:

- the annual monitoring of all courses within each College to assess whether each is meeting its stated objectives and maintaining the standard of the award to which it leads;
- the annual review at the University of Westminster of all reports from the previous academic session, which seeks to identify common cross-institutional issues arising in assessment;
- Revalidation Panels undertaken when each subject area is considered for re-approval (this normally occurs every six years).

18 Response to report

The Head of College with academic responsibility for an Assessment Board or course is responsible for ensuring that a written reply is made to each report and that appropriate action is taken in response to the points raised by the external examiner. The task of writing responses may be delegated, e.g. to the Head of School or the Course Leader.

- Responses are normally sent to external examiners no later than the end of the term following the relevant Board meeting.
- Responses are considered as part of the College Annual Monitoring Process, through the College Teaching Committee. Responses may also be used by external bodies e.g. professional bodies and for external auditing by the Office for Students, Office of the Independent Adjudicator, Annual report to Academic Council

The University of Westminster's Quality and Standards undertakes a critical read to identify any general points, particularly on assessment procedures, issues of concern and to draw out aspects of good practice for dissemination. This process includes a read of responses. The conclusions may lead to recommendations to Academic Council for changes to policy, or guidelines on external examining.

19 Right to Work check

A Right to Work Verification will need to be completed with a member of staff; this is a procedural activity to comply to UKVI requirements. Further guidance on why we need this information and the process to complete the activity can be found on the [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website.

20 External examiner fees

The annual fee for involvement and attendance for Subject Area responsibilities is detailed in the letter of approval.

The fee is paid upon receipt of the annual report, in one single annual sum. Payment of the fee is conditional upon the external examiner attending the University at least once during the year and is payable only upon receipt of the annual report. For external examiners claiming the overseas fee, payment is conditional upon attendance at the partner institution.

Budgetary requirements specify that the external examiner's annual fee must be claimed within twelve months of the end of the session for which the fee is due.

The University pay fees directly into the external examiner's bank account. External examiners are requested to provide the relevant details at the time of appointment.

Expenses are paid upon receipt of a claim form along with supporting receipts. The form is available via the External Examiner Portal and should be submitted to the relevant Portal section upon completion, along with copies of the relevant receipts.

21 Expenses

The University will contribute to expenses incurred by external examiners when involved in the assessment of its students. Expenses can only be reimbursed on the submission of all relevant receipts.

Travel

- Externals are to use the means of transport which is most cost effective and, where possible, has the least impact on our carbon footprint.
- Public transport, wherever feasible, should be used in the first instance. Receipts should be obtained wherever possible.
- The reimbursement level for travel costs is based on the appropriate standard class National Rail train fare. However, it may be more convenient and economical for an examiner to travel by car from less accessible locations, or by plane when travelling especially long distances.
- For travel by car, the current mileage allowance will be paid by the Quality and Standards Office (please contact this department for info – contact details below).
- For travel by plane, please contact the Quality and Standards Office to secure approval for economy rate air tickets.

- Travel by taxi will not be reimbursed, because the University's sites are well-served by both bus and underground routes. Exceptional circumstances will be considered in consultation with the Quality and Standards Office.

Meals

- Reasonable allowances towards the cost of meals will be paid. Please note that this does not include the cost of any alcohol.
- The current University Allowances are:
 - Breakfast £7.00
 - Lunch £10.00
 - Evening Meal £20.00
- These rates represent the maximum amount that may be claimed. Prior authorisation from the relevant budget holder should be obtained for any exceptions. Itemised receipts must be provided as evidence of expenditure being incurred for the claim to be processed.

Accommodation

- When the assessment covers more than one day, or an examiner has to travel considerable distances, overnight accommodation may be necessary. The Quality and Standards Office holds accounts with two central London Hotels, and also two hotels at Harrow.
- If accommodation is required, please advise the University as early as possible. You should contact the College Office, or the Quality and Standards Office and a reservation will be made for you.

22 Financial Information for External Examiners Tax and National Insurance Deductions

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) requires the University to deduct tax under PAYE and also National Insurance from fees paid to external examiners. External examiners who are assessed under Schedule D should ask their own tax office to give authority to the University of Westminster's tax office for fees to be paid without the deduction of tax. External examiners who pay the maximum National Insurance in their main employment should obtain Form CA2700 from the Inland Revenue – NI Contributions Office for the deferment from National Insurance contributions.

Your National Insurance number should always be quoted when corresponding with the following departments:

- The address of the University's Tax Office is:
Pay As You Earn and Self-Assessment, HM Revenue and Custom, BX9 1AS, United Kingdom. Phone number: 0300 200 3300
- The address of the Inland Revenue – NI Contributions Office is:
National Insurance Contributions and Employer Office, HM Revenue and Customs, BX9 1AN, United Kingdom
Telephone: 0300 200 3500