

Last Updated: July 2021

Working with External Examiners – Guidance for Programme Teams

1. Why Do Programmes Need External Examiners?

External examining provides one of the principal means of maintaining academic standards and the University considers the arrangements for external examining to be an integral part of its quality assurance and enhancement processes. The University is, therefore, committed to ensuring the presence of (at least one) independent and appropriately qualified external voice for each University award.

External Examiners (EEs) at Roehampton contribute to ensuring and enhancing the academic integrity, inherent fairness and currency of its awards. The University seeks to facilitate this process through a coherent framework, enabling Externals to comment freely, and in detail, on all major issues associated with setting and maintaining the academic standards of its awards, and with the assessment processes which determine who shall receive them.

It should be noted that (as this document explains below), despite their title of Examiner, Externals do not act as markers and do not adjudicate on individual student marks.

2. How Does a Programme Appoint a New External Examiner?

External Examiners are nominated by the Programme Board and are approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), acting with the delegated authority of the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee. The process of appointment is as follows:

- External Examiner candidate (nominee) must sign the [eligibility form](#) and provide a CV;
- Programme Convener must complete the [nomination form](#);
- the nomination form must be signed by the Dean of School/Faculty.

Once the nomination has been signed off at school/faculty level and all of the above-mentioned collated, these should be sent to the Academic Office who seek institutional approval from the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education).

Consideration of the suitability of proposed External Examiners is determined by evidence of the following criteria:

- a) knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
- b) competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof;
- c) relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate;
- d) competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures;
- e) sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers;

- f) familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed;
- g) fluency in English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that External Examiners are provided with the information to make their judgements);
- h) meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies;
- i) awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula;
- j) competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience;

Consideration of the suitability of proposed External Examiners is further informed by:

- k) concern that individuals should not be over-extended by their external examining duties. (A nominee who already holds two or more similar appointments at first degree level will not normally be appointed);
- l) that the individual is not a member of a governing body or committee of the appointing institution or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the appointing institution or one of its collaborative partners;
- m) that an appointment would not establish a close reciprocal external examining arrangement, for example between programmes teams (or their equivalents) or between departments (or their equivalents);
- n) that the individual is not someone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study;
- o) that the individual has, or has had within the last five years, no close professional link with the programme or department to which s/he is to be attached, or any close personal connection with staff or students;
- p) that he/she has not held appointment as External Examiner for the same programme within the previous five years;
- q) that the outgoing External Examiner is not succeeded by a colleague from the Examiner's home department and institution;
- r) that no other External Examiner from the same department of the same institution has been appointed on the programme of study;
- s) that the individual has not been significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme(s) or modules in question.

In order to ensure that nominations meet points k) to s) above, a register of the external examining commitments of the University academic staff is maintained regularly.

Once approved, External Examiners are appointed for a period of four years. In the first year of tenure, Externals receive a general induction which is organised by the Academic Office (currently this is provided online through pre-recorded video presentations). Part of this induction is also an informal meeting with the Programme Convener which may include other members of the team (this is currently taking place over online, for example via Microsoft Teams or Zoom).

It should be noted that, in accordance with the current Home Office regulations, the University is required to obtain proof of each External's right to work in the UK. This is our legal obligation and is overseen by the Human Resources Department.

The University will consider prematurely terminating an External Examiner's contract if:

- their report has not been completed within the specified time;
- they have not attended the minimum number of examination boards per year without good reason;
- if the appointment is subsequently found to be in breach of clauses f) and g) above.

The decision to terminate an External Examiner's contract will be taken by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee on behalf of Senate. The matter should be raised by the Chair of the Programme Examinations Board with the Dean of School/Faculty in the first instance.

3. What Is Expected of External Examiners?

The principal role of every External Examiner at Roehampton is to sustain the academic integrity of the University's approved awards by testing the robustness of the assessment processes, ascertaining that students are treated fairly within these processes, and by reporting systematically and objectively to the University.

External Examiners are required to make a set of core judgements which will assist the examining team in:

- verifying by reference to acceptable indicators (for example, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and subject benchmark statements) that the academic standard set for each award is appropriate to its level;
- confirming that, in measuring the standard of student achievement in each award, broad comparability with other institutions offering an award at the same level is achieved;
- determining that congruence between the stated learning outcomes of each programme and its assessment methods is maintained;
- ensuring that all aspects of the assessment process are conducted fairly, consistently and accurately in accordance with programme and university regulations.

At the start of tenure, External Examiners receive the [External Examiner Handbook](#) which provides a concise introduction to Roehampton, outlines their role as well as the relevant processes and procedures. Programme teams may wish to refer to this document.

Externals on all taught programmes undertake the following main duties at Levels 5, 6 and 7 (these do not apply at Level 4 except on Foundation Degree programmes):

- a) comment on all assignment briefs (both examination and coursework);
- b) moderate a representative sample of internally marked work of a previously agreed size and in accordance with the University's assessment procedures – this can be carried out in batches, through mid-year moderation, or at the end of the assessment cycle;
- c) attend a minimum of two Programme Examinations Boards per academic year (including the main board – June for U/G programmes, September/October for P/G programmes);
- d) observe students in their practice where appropriate – for initial teacher training placements and Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) placements this is conducted in line with the requirements of the professional and regulatory bodies (for NMC programmes this includes practice visits to review and comment on practice assessment documentation and meet with students, practice supervisors and practice assessors). Observation of students also extends to viewing performances in the areas of dance and theatre;
- e) confirm agreement with the recommendations of the Programme Examinations Board by signing the mark sheets presented at the board – if Externals do not agree with the recommendations, they should inform the University's Academic Registrar of the reasons;
- f) annually report on standards of student performance and how they compare with the sector, the fairness of assessment methods, equity of treatment for students, the accuracy and consistency of internal marking (the Roehampton report template is used for this);
- g) contribute to the ongoing development and enhancement of the provision through feedback and dialogue with the team;
- h) scrutinize documentation related to recognition of prior learning (NMC programmes only).

The most extensive of these tasks is that of the moderation of assessments which requires advance planning by the programme team and is covered in section 8.

It should be noted that with the exception of Initial Teacher Training and Nursing programmes, or if requested by the Chair of the Examinations Board to attend viva voce examinations, External Examiners at Roehampton do not meet with students.

4. What Is Expected of Programme Conveners?

Programme Conveners manage the relationship with the External Examiner(s) and work closely with the Programme Administrators to ensure that the External receives all the relevant information (at any time of the year) in a timely manner and in an appropriate format to allow them to carry out their role.

Working with Externals should be seen as an ongoing dialogue as part of which the External is promptly consulted on matters requiring their input and informed of any changes to the agreed timelines that may impact on their role.

Programme Conveners nominate the External Examiner (in consultation with the Programme Board) and meet with Externals informally at the annual induction event (this may take place online, for example via Microsoft Teams or Zoom).

Programme Conveners oversee the planning of the examination schedule, including allocating appropriate modules to the External Examiner's workload (typically no more than ten), identifying dates of examinations boards, assessment deadlines and marking and moderation timelines (in accordance with the University time frames set by Registry). These activities should take place at the start of the academic year and should be agreed with the External (see 6. below).

Programme Conveners facilitate the EE familiarization with the programme-specific content of Moodle.

Programme Conveners formally respond to EE reports and refer to both the EE report and response as part of the evidence base documentation for the Student Education Plan (SEP).

A detailed list of tasks is available in the table on pp.8-10 of this document.

5. What Is Expected of Programme Administrators?

Programme Administrators support the Programme Conveners in working with the External Examiners and typically act as the first point of contact for any queries and for sending out information.

Once a nomination has been approved, the External Examiner will receive a letter of appointment from the Academic Office which will list the types of documentation to be supplied to them by the Programme Administrator (in agreement with the Programme Convener). This includes:

- the link to the [University's Taught Degree Regulations](#);
- the link to the appropriate programme on [Programme Details](#);
- programme and module handbooks or outlines (may be made available through Moodle links);
- the marking criteria for all modules and components of modules.

Programme Administrators can access the [SharePoint](#) site for the list of current Externals on and their email contact details. The site includes templates for the Programme Administrators' communication with EEs. These provide the recommended wording for contacting EEs at crucial points in an academic year (see 7. below).

Programme Administrators enrol Externals on Moodle early on in the academic year and confirm the module allocations to the Academic Office. They also make the moderation sample available to Externals – in consultation with the Programme Convener – and support PCs on EE queries about navigating Moodle.

As part of the examination board arrangements, Programme Administrators book accommodation for External Examiners (details of the process are available on [SharePoint](#)).

External Examiner reports and the corresponding responses are routinely made available to students and Programme Administrators publish these (in PDF format) on Moodle.

A detailed list of tasks is available in the table on pp.8-10 of this document.

6. What is the Role of the Academic Office?

The Academic Office oversees the appointment process for new External Examiners and keeps the definitive record of existing appointments across all departments. It issues formal letters of appointment and sets the remuneration arrangements. It organises the induction event for new EEs to which Programme Conveners are also invited.

The Academic Office requests Moodle accounts for External Examiners and advises on any general queries to do with the EE role such as the length of tenure, the expectations and duties of Externals and reporting requirements.

The Academic Office also analyses the annual EE reports and circulates them internally as well as processes the External Examiners' expenses and fees forms.

7. Which Are the Key "EE" Points and Actions?

To ensure that the External Examiner is in a position to carry out their role effectively and efficiently, it is important that programmes communicate with them at the appropriate points in the year so that an annual plan can be devised at the start and executed throughout the cycle.

I. Beginning of each assessment cycle:

- 1) *agree the interim (mid-year) and main (end-of-year) examinations board dates with the External Examiner – note that Externals are expected to attend two boards per year but are entitled to attend all boards (if more than two) so should routinely be invited to each examinations board;*
- 2) *confirm which modules the External will have responsibility for;*
- 3) *agree timelines of external moderation for each module.*

II. When examination papers and titles of major coursework/assignments have been set:

- 4) *ask the External for comment and consider feedback prior to publishing to students.*

III. After marking and moderation have been done internally (on modules or components):

- 5) *enable the External to carry out moderation within previously agreed timelines;*
- 6) *consider any informal feedback;*
- 7) *ensure arrangements are in place for the External to attend the examinations board.*

IV. At the examinations board:

- 8) *ensure that the External is provided with an agenda (in advance) and the relevant paperwork;*
 - 9) *invite oral feedback from the External at the meeting;*
 - 10) *ask the External to sign mark sheets for transmission to the Awards and Progression Board.*
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8. What Does External Moderation Involve?

Moderation of assessment is a process in two stages – internal and external – by which the University assures itself that any work undertaken by students is set and assessed in a consistent and fair manner, to ensure parity of standards and that the level of student achievement reflects the required academic standards comparable to programmes at the University and nationally.

External moderation is conducted after the internal process and, as indicated above, the role of the External Examiner is to review the transparency, consistency and appropriateness of the marking and internal moderation processes.

Identifying the timelines for external moderation forms part of setting the annual examination schedule for each programme, i.e. allocating each module to an appropriate examinations board, devising the marking and internal moderation time frames for each module and allowing sufficient time for the External to review the work (in consultation with them).

External moderation concerns Levels, 5, 6 and 7 (at Level 4 moderation only applies on Foundation Degree programmes) and is conducted through a representative sample as outlined in the [Assessment Procedures](#) and as agreed between the Programme Convener and the External Examiner. The External has the right to request to see all scripts, course work and other assessment materials at Levels 5, 6 and 7 if required as well as at Level 4 (but the latter would be for information only).

External moderation is done online (through Turnitin and Moodle) although some EEs may prefer to visit the University and review the work on-site. While external moderation often takes place at the end of an academic cycle, it may be useful to note that for any modules (or components of modules) that have been completed, that is, internally marked and moderated earlier in the year – for example autumn or “A” modules – external moderation can be scheduled mid-year or as soon as the assessed work is available. It is good practice to plan for this with the External at the start of the year.

** Externals may occasionally lose/forget their Moodle password. In such cases they can be referred to the IT Service Desk (020 8392 6000); they will need to provide their name and email address details to the operator. Obtaining a new password in this way should be a quick and streamlined process.

9. What Do Externals Do at the Examinations Board?

At the Programme Examinations Board, External Examiners receive composite lists of all marks contributing to a module mark and all module marks.

The External Examiner has the right to advise the Programme Examinations Board that adjustment to sets of marks (either across all classification categories or in a particular classification band) is required but individual marks will not normally be changed. It should be noted that the final responsibility for the approval of module marks rests with the Programme Examinations Board.

The External is required to sign the mark sheets for transmission to the Awards and Progression Board (as is the Chair of the Board). As outcomes of the Programme Examinations Board typically include decisions on re-sits, Externals are not required to attend re-sit boards or undertake moderation duties.

In cases where the External is not present at the board, alternative arrangements should be made for their formal confirmation of the marks.

An External Examiner has the right not to sign a mark sheet and in such circumstances should inform the University's Academic Registrar in writing of the reasons.

10. What Happens After the Examinations Board?

Following the Board, the External Examiner is asked to complete their [annual report](#) within four weeks of the meeting and submit it to the Academic Office. The Programme Convener is then expected to provide a [response](#) in accordance with the University's [guidelines](#).

EE reports are circulated internally and are considered at programme, school/faculty and University levels. They are a vital part of the annual monitoring process and subsequently form part of the documentation prepared for Student Education Plans.

The receipt of the annual report prompts the payment of the Externals' fee which is processed by the Academic Office.

11. Timeline of Main External Examining Tasks

Time	Action	Responsibility
September	Identify dates of interim and main programme examinations boards for the assessment cycle ahead and agree them with external examiner.	Programme Convener in liaison with Programme Administrator
	Notify Academic Registry of the agreed dates of examinations boards for the assessment cycle.	Programme Administrator
	Send examinations board invitations to external examiner, make any accommodation arrangements.	Programme Administrator
	Agree which modules each external examiner on the programme will moderate during the assessment cycle.	Programme Convener
	On the basis of the dates of the examinations boards and the submission dates (as published to students), plan the schedule for marking, internal and external moderation for assignments on all modules, in accordance with University Assessment Procedures. Agree the schedule with the external examiner.	Programme Convener in liaison with Programme Administrator
	Provide access to the relevant Moodle pages to each external examiner, ensuring they have the required details for modules they will be moderating. Share the agreed list of modules and the confirmed schedule of marking, internal and external moderation with the external examiner and the Academic Office.	Programme Administrator
Late September/Early October	Compile proposed assessment tasks and the corresponding assessment criteria on all A and autumn components of Y modules.	Programme Convener
	Make proposed assessment tasks and the corresponding assessment criteria available to external examiner for consideration and comment.	Programme Administrator
Early-Mid January	Create a representative sample of marked and internally moderated student work on all A modules and completed components of Y modules in accordance with University Assessment Procedures.	Programme Convener
	Make the sample available to external examiner for mid-year moderation in preparation for the interim examinations board.	Programme Administrator
	Send the relevant paperwork for the upcoming interim UG/PG examinations board to external examiner and ensure appropriate meeting arrangements are in place.	Programme Administrator
	Compile proposed assessment tasks and the corresponding assessment criteria on S and remaining components of Y modules.	Programme Convener

Time	Action	Responsibility
	Make proposed assessment tasks and the corresponding assessment criteria available to external examiner for consideration and comment.	Programme Administrator
Late January/February	Invite external examiner oral feedback at the examinations board.	Chair of Examinations Board
	Ask external examiner to sign the examinations board marksheets.	Chair of Examinations Board
	Record external examiner oral feedback in the formal minutes of the examinations board.	Programme Administrator
March/April	If so agreed with external examiner, continue to create representative samples of marked and internally moderated student work on S and Y modules in accordance with University Assessment Procedures.	Programme Convener
	Make the samples available to external examiner for mid-year moderation in preparation for the main examinations board.	Programme Administrator
Late May/June*	Send the relevant paperwork for the upcoming main UG examinations board to external examiner and ensure appropriate meeting arrangements are in place.	Programme Administrator
	Invite external examiner oral feedback at main UG examinations board and remind the external to produce annual report within four weeks of the date of the board.	Chair of Examinations Board
	Agree re-sit arrangements with external examiner and confirm delegated authority to the examinations board for the August re-sit meeting.	Chair of Examinations Board
	Ask external examiner to sign the examinations board marksheets.	Chair of Examinations Board
	Record external examiner oral feedback in the formal minutes of the examinations board.	Programme Administrator
July**	Respond to UG external examiner annual report.	Programme Convener
	Publish the EE report and response (pdf version) on Moodle and ensure that the External Examiner Moodle section is up-to-date.	Programme Administrator

* For PG programmes, this applies in October/November when the main PG examinations board takes place.

** For PG programmes, this applies after the main PG examinations board.