



**Senate**

<b>Paper title</b>	<b>Report of the External Member of the Degree Examination Boards</b>
<b>Outcome requested</b>	<p>The Senate is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>consider</b> the report of the External Member of the Degree Examination Boards.</li> <li>• <b>consider</b> the discussions and actions set by the Education Quality and Standards Board, which considered this report in September 2025.</li> <li>• <b>endorse</b> the actions set by the EQSB and agree any additional actions to address the points raised.</li> </ul>
<b>Points to note and further information</b>	<p><b>Background</b> Roscoe Hastings, Director of Teaching Excellence and Enhancement at the University of Exeter and Chair of the Russell Group Quality Assurance and Enhancement Special Interest Group, serves as External Member to Queen Mary’s Degree Examination Boards (DEBs). His role parallels that of an external examiner but focuses on institutional-level scrutiny of process, regulation, equity, consistency, and compliance with the Office for Students’ Conditions of Registration—particularly the B Conditions, including a focus on credible outcomes sector-recognised standards.</p> <p>This year’s report builds on the 2023–24 findings, which prompted Senate-level consideration of classification distributions and progression-related attrition. The External Member’s continued engagement provides valuable longitudinal insight into Queen Mary’s academic standards and regulatory alignment.</p> <p><b>Executive summary</b> This paper summarises the key findings and recommendations from the 2024–25 report of the external member of the DEBs. The report affirms the overall robustness of Queen Mary’s academic quality and standards, while highlighting significant academic concerns in the School of Electronic Engineering and Computer Sciences (EECS). It also identifies operational challenges, particularly around IT systems, and offers constructive recommendations to enhance governance, assessment integrity, and institutional oversight.</p> <p><b>Overall assurance of academic standards</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progression and award processes are sound and aligned with sector norms.</li> <li>• Results documentation was clear and supported effective decision-making.</li> <li>• Improvements since last year were noted in the number and detail of discussions on consistency of outcomes and approach for different programmes leading to the same awards.</li> </ul> <p><b>Electronic Engineering and Computer Science results</b></p>

- Awarding anomalies: Persistently high First Class rates (also flagged in his 2023–24 report) present a concern and are significantly out of line with the sector.
- Governance gaps: EECS’ results could not be considered at the DEB; report that EECS had declined an offer of external review.
- 2025 DEB: EECS’ results were not viewed as credible by the DEB or the External Member; subsequent reviews and adjustments were conducted following the board meeting, which the External Member endorsed as a first step on a roadmap to change.

*Recommended actions:*

- Conduct a fundamental review of EECS curriculum and assessment design.
- Ensure assessments for 2025/26 are robust and appropriately challenging.
- Reconsider whether external review is appropriate and ensure Faculty-level oversight.
- Monitor post-scaling outcomes and report progress to Senate and EQSB through the Degree Outcomes Statement.

*EQSB:*

- The EQSB noted its own independent concerns, and its agreement with the comments made.
- The Board agreed that the Vice-Principal (Education) would set action points, as follows, and formally communicate these to the School (this letter was sent on 25 September 2025):
  - A formal review of the School’s provision and procedures chaired by the Vice-Principal (Education) and including an assessment and report from an external reviewer.
  - Strengthened oversight by, and engagement with, the Faculty Education team.
  - Production of an action plan by the School to address the outputs of the review and the Faculty discussions.
  - Immediate actions to address assessment design and standard-setting for the 2025-26 academic year.

**IT infrastructure**

- Multiple IT disruptions delayed exam report availability in the run-up to the DEBs due to SITS updates and outages and other issues, creating significant issues for staff and placing the Boards at risk.

*Recommended actions:*

- Transfer ownership of SEB/DEB reporting tools from IT Services to Registry Services.
- Establish clear contact points, escalation routes and accountability for IT failures.
- Schedule future upgrades outside critical academic periods.

*EQSB:*

- The EQSB set an action to write to IT Services to seek action and assurances on all of the points outlined above.

**Data-driven consistency and governance**

- DEBs engaged in meaningful analysis of classification distributions and completion rates.
- External Member encouraged increased data ownership and longitudinal scrutiny at school/SEB level for individual programmes and modules in addition to the University-level analysis provided by DGLS.

*Recommended actions:*

- Embed classification analysis into Programme Review and Degree Outcomes Statement (UG and PGT).
- Formalise DEB–SEB feedback mechanisms to inform governance decisions made by other committees and groups.
- Celebrate and disseminate good practices (eg the Geography SEB’s use of PowerBI analysis for modules).

*EQSB:*

- The EQSB welcomed these comments, which aligned with Queen Mary’s own priorities. Programme Review would in future include explicit instructions to move beyond consideration of outcomes at school/institute-level and to increase analysis of individual programme outcomes.

**Progression, attrition, and student support**

- Concerns from the 2023–24 report regarding high levels of student attrition due to exhausted progression attempts should be revisited at the late-summer DEB.

*Recommended actions:*

- Investigate patterns of withdrawal and non-progression.
- Use demographic data (e.g. Home/International split) to inform targeted support.
- Explore the opportunity to engage the External Member in reviewing the Student Learning and Engagement Policy.

*EQSB:*

- The EQSB noted that in 2024 the External Member had attended the late-summer Degree Examination Boards (DEBs) whereas in 2025 he had attended the main, July, DEBs. Few students are deregistered in July, as they generally have a resit attempt remaining. Nonetheless, the EQSB – which met on the same day as the late summer DEBs – was pleased to learn that attrition and NEtP levels were reported to be considerably lower than in 2024.
- The EQSB supported the External Member’s proposal to complete additional analysis to determine whether non-progressing students shared common features that could be supported and acted upon, and tasked Faculty Education teams with completing this work.

**Foundation programmes**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High number of distinctions on foundation programmes flagged.</li> <li>• Consider whether there is the correct level of progression/consistency in the curriculum and in marking/feedback norms between foundation and first year modules (such that the first year is not a shock to students used to receiving high grades).</li> </ul> <p><i>Recommended action:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track progression and performance of Foundation students across UG levels.</li> </ul> <p><i>EQSB:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The EQSB was satisfied – with the benefit of access to the results of the late-summer DEBs – that this was not of concern, though it would be monitored. The late-summer 2025 DEBs saw fewer students progressing on integrated foundation programmes despite alongside a substantial increase since 2024 in student numbers. This was attributed to the work undertaken by Science and Engineering to fully redesign the programme.</li> </ul> <p><b>External dependencies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awarding complications for year abroad and intercollegiate modules noted where marks were routinely late, and were outside Queen Mary’s control.</li> </ul> <p><i>EQSB:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While difficult to address directly, the Board agreed that - where partner institutions routinely failed to provide timely results - it would be right to discuss whether they remained appropriate destinations of study.</li> </ul> <p><b>Conclusion</b></p> <p>The report affirms Queen Mary’s overall academic standards while highlighting issues in EECS that require urgent and strategic attention. The prioritised actions outlined above span assessment integrity, IT infrastructure, progression support, and governance reform. The External Member’s continued engagement and endorsement of institutional efforts provide a strong foundation for sustained quality enhancement.</p>
<p><b>Questions to consider</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does the report, and the EQSB actions, provide the Senate with sufficient assurance that Queen Mary’s academic governance structures are fit for purpose and resilient to emerging risks?</li> <li>2. What does the report reveal about the strength and consistency of governance across Schools and Faculties, and where might Senate need to intervene or escalate oversight?</li> <li>3. Is Queen Mary making best use of data and longitudinal insight to inform strategic decisions about student outcomes, progression, and equity?</li> <li>4. Does the Senate agree with the recommended actions? How, when, and with what priority should these be implemented? Are the lines of accountability appropriate for each of them?</li> </ol>

<b>Regulatory/statutory reference points</b>	OfS Condition B4: Requires credible, rigorous assessment and award processes including “credible outcomes”. OfS Condition B5: Requires alignment with sector-recognised standards.
<b>Strategy and risk</b>	The EQSB was asked to assess the potential for risk and to mitigate it.  In determining whether this was adequately the case, the Board should specifically consider the potential for risks linked to compliance with OfS Conditions of Registration B4 and B5 on credible degree outcomes and sector-recognised standards.
<b>Reporting/ consideration route for the paper</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• UG H&amp;SS Degree Examination Board (17 September 2025)</li><li>• UG S&amp;E Degree Examination Board (17 September 2025)</li><li>• Education Quality and Standards Board (17 September 2025)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• EQSB Assessment Sub-Board (30 September 2025)</li></ul></li><li>• Senate (16 October 2025)</li></ul>
<b>Authors</b>	Report: Roscoe Hastings, Director of Teaching Excellence and Enhancement (Exeter)  Coversheet: Simon Hayter, Head of Academic Quality and Standards



## **Report of the External Member of the Degree Examination Boards 2024-25**

Name: Roscoe Hastings

Institution: University of Exeter

DEBs attended: Humanities & Social Sciences DEB, 02 July 2025  
Science & Engineering DEB, 02 July 2025

Please submit your report to Alice de Havillan, Academic Quality and Standards Officer, at [qualityandstandards@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:qualityandstandards@qmul.ac.uk) within 30 days of the last Degree Examination Board meeting.

Your report is intended for internal use only and will contribute towards aspects of Queen Mary's annual reporting procedures. Your report may be made available to students; please do not include personal information, or identify any individual students.

If you would like to raise any issues of a sensitive nature directly with the Principal, please feel free to do so. The address is Principal, Queen Mary University of London, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS.

## 1. The award process

1.1 In your view, are the processes for the determination of progression and awards sound and fairly conducted and in line with national standards and expectations?

**YES** / **NO** (if 'no', please state the reasons they fall short)

Overall, yes. However, please see separate notes regarding Electronic Engineering and Computer Sciences (EECS) where I do believe that there are fundamental questions about awarding and progression which need to be considered.

1.2 Reflecting on OfS Condition B4 concerning the credibility of awards, please also comment on:

- particular strengths and weaknesses in the progression and award process;
- the scheme for progression and for the classification of the award;
- the use of discretion, within the permitted scope of Queen Mary's policy;
- the interpretation of regulations.

Overall, QMUL has a sound approach to its awarding process and the scheme for progression and classification of the award is in line with sector-recognised approaches. In addition, it is clear that there are effective processes in place for most academic units in considering the interpretation of the regulations and in using appropriate discretion, particularly around borderline cases. I found the results books that were provided to be clear and intuitive in supporting decision making and for providing particular focus to cases where further scrutiny or consideration may be required by the DEB.

I reviewed the proposals around changes to the Regulations and Assessment Handbook and believe that these are all in line with sector best practice.

## 2. Examination Board arrangements

2.1 Were you satisfied with the arrangements for, and conduct of, the Degree Examination Board meeting?

**YES** / **NO** (if 'no', please state the reasons they fall short)

A challenge for the Boards this year arose due to issues with the Exam Reports being available in order to prepare the information for the Boards. The issues were outlined including ownership of the reports being with IT, an update to SITS taking place during the mark entry period and a major IT incident occurring. It is clear that there needs to be a review of the procedures around these business critical arrangements with QMUL's IT department and to ensure that business critical processes like SEBs/DEBs are factored into prioritisation for support and resolution, that upgrades take place outside of these times etc.

2.2 Were you satisfied with the decisions and recommendations of the Degree Examination Board meeting?

**YES** / **NO** (if 'no', please state the reasons they fall short)

For the Humanities and Social Sciences DEB, yes. It was unfortunate that the Science and Engineering DEB was not able to approve the full results. However, the discussion about how to approach the awarding and classification for the EECS results outside of the meeting was both pragmatic and in line with a similar approach that I would have recommended at my institution if this scenario had occurred. I was kept updated following the meeting on the approach and decisions and was satisfied that the Chair's Action was appropriate.

2.3 Please also comment on:

- particular strengths and weaknesses in the examination board arrangements;
- the suitability of the examination board documentation;
- the opportunities provided to you to participate fully in the Degree Examination Board meeting.

The documentation that was provided was of an excellent quality and the meetings were well organised and chaired and I am grateful to Simon Hayter for the care in which the papers were prepared and shared despite some of the challenges arising due to IT issues in advance of the Boards. I was able to fully participate in the discussions.

It was encouraging to see this year improvement in how the DEB is meeting the particular scope of its remit concerning "matters of consistency across programmes leading to the same awards". Both Boards that I attended included excellent discussions on the classification distributions, completion rates and other data in relation to each Faculty. These discussions certainly highlighted some areas for further consideration within each Faculty. It would be helpful to consider how the DEBs will provide feedback from this discussion and consideration to the respective SEBs and, where appropriate, with appropriate institutional governance groups for further consideration and discussion.

### 3 Standard of student achievement

3.1 Reflecting on OfS condition B5 concerning recognised standards and awards, in your view, are the patterns of student achievement by degree classifications, comparable with similar programmes or subjects in other UK higher education institutions with which you are familiar.

**YES** / **NO** (if 'no', please state the reasons they fall short)

Overall, yes, with the exception of EECS where the Science and Engineering DEB was unable to approve the awards and classifications for the students at its meeting. The high number of First Class awards within this Department I would suggest is not similar with programmes or subjects

at other higher education institutions. During the meeting I provided the insight from an analogous Department at my own institution where the number of Firsts awarded was around 40% fewer than EECS.

3.2 Are there any other points on patterns of student achievement that you wish to direct to the attention of Queen Mary?

Overall, the standard of student achievement at QMUL is high as would be expected of an institution that is recruiting and admitting some of the most academically able students. However, there were a number of issues I wish to draw attention to.

A significant concern, which continues from my 2024 report, concerns the high number of First Class award classifications made within EECS with a Good Honours rate of 96% and First Class awards at 69%. This does feel to be out of step across the rest of the Science and Engineering DEB but also with others in the sector. This issue was raised in my report last year along with a suggestion that the Department review and develop an appropriate action plan and response to how it may address these concerns. It was suggested in the DEB that the Department had turned down an offer to secure an external reviewer to come in and support with this action plan. The University must now take action in order to ensure that assessments for the 2025/26 academic year are fit for purpose and are robust in challenging students performance. Longer term, there probably needs to be a fundamental review of the curriculum and assessment design within the School. I should note there was also no SEB report included in the pack of papers.

Within the Science and Engineering DEB I also made reference to the high number of 1<sup>st</sup> class/distinctions awarded to students on Foundation Programmes. I would recommend the University look at performance of students who progress to undergraduate programmes at QMUL across the UG programme to ensure that these students are not being set up to fail. It would be helpful to see consideration of this discussed at the DEB in July 2026.

It was encouraging to see fewer students leaving with an exit award or no award. I noted in my comments to the Board that the recent Immigration White Paper and the potential changes to continuation and completion targets for international students will need to continue to be kept under review. I am sure that QMUL is comfortably within the proposed changes but ensuring student success is critical for individual students, the financial sustainability of the institution and to the maintenance of the Tier 4 Licence.

A final point that I raised at both DEBs was a concern around students undertaking a Year Abroad or Intercollegiate units. There were a not insignificant number of students participating in one of these options where their award decision was not possible, or they were at risk of having to take an alternative award e.g., for YA students to not have their YA recognised which could be very challenging. QMUL may want to consider its approach in how to deal with these incidents, especially where control over another institution is not possible.

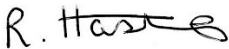
#### 4 Issues of procedure

If applicable, how did procedures/arrangements compare this year with previous years? Were suggestions made by you last year acted upon? If not applicable, please go to question 5.

No issues of procedure/arrangements.  
My suggestion around an increased focus on degree classifications data for consideration around consistency across Departments had been acted upon and improved the conversation.

#### 5 General comments

5.1 Are there any other further points that you wish to draw to the attention of Queen Mary?  
In particular, we would welcome your comments on any aspects of good practices that can be shared and disseminated internally.

Name: 

Date: 29/08/2025

Thank you for completing this report and for your contribution to assuring standards and quality at Queen Mary University of London. Please return your report to the Directorate of Governance and Legal Services - [qualityandstandards@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:qualityandstandards@qmul.ac.uk). You will receive acknowledgement of the receipt, and a response will be made by the Head of Quality.