



GUIDANCE FOR EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

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1. Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to act as an external examiner for Queen Mary University of London. Queen Mary fully appreciates the commitment that you have shown in agreeing to undertake this role, and we will do everything that we can to support you. Queen Mary believes that external examiners play a vital role in the proper management of academic standards, and in ensuring rigorous and fair assessment processes.

This *Guidance* provides generic information relating to your role, and a broad outline of the activities in which external examiners are likely to be involved. Examination boards may also - by mutual agreement - ask you to act in an advisory role (for example, on the redevelopment of curricula), but such activities are not covered in detail in this document. The *Guidance* should be read alongside the more detailed information sent to you by your Subject Examination Board (SEB).

2. Responsibilities of External Examiners

The formal line of responsibility for external examiners is to the Principal; your annual report will be addressed to the Principal (though sent to the Head of Academic Quality and Standards), and you have the right to submit a confidential report to the Principal at any time.

External examiners have a key role in quality assurance:

- External examiners' primary duty is to ensure that the standard of the degree is consistent with those awarded across the UK university system in that discipline.
- External examiners have a key responsibility to ensure that all candidates are treated fairly, and that decisions in relation to individual students are taken after due deliberation;
- External examiners are asked to review the examination process, and to comment on its operation. The reports of external examiners are also a key source of information in the monitoring of modules and programmes of study;
- Because of their experience of assessment procedures at other institutions, external examiners are in a position to offer valuable advice and counsel to examination boards and programme / module organisers.

3. Appointment of External Examiners

External examiners do not normally operate in isolation, but as a panel with collective responsibility for ensuring the standards of the qualification. Therefore, your appointment will have been made in the context of the whole panel of external examiners for the programme / modules and award for which you have been appointed.

Queen Mary has appointment criteria in place for the appointment of external examiners. Your nomination will have been requested by the Chair of the Examination Board, reviewed by the Directorate of Governance and Legal Services and approved by the relevant Faculty Dean for Education (in consultation with the Vice-Principal (Education), where required).

4. Period of appointment

Your appointment will normally run from 1 September in the year of appointment to 31 December four years later. This will enable you to be involved in assessment processes from the start of the academic cycle, and to continue in office to consider reviews, further assessment, resits, etc.

If you wish to resign before the expiry of your period of office, please write formally to the Principal, addressed to the Head of Academic Quality and Standards, giving sufficient notice for the appointment of a replacement.

The termination of an external examiner's appointment by Queen Mary before the expiry of the term of office is rare but can be made by a formal recommendation to the Vice-Principal (Education) from the Chair of the Examination Board or the Director of Governance and Legal Services, with support from the appropriate Dean for Education. The Vice-Principal shall take the final decision. Reasons for termination of an appointment include failure to perform the duties of an external examiner (including non-attendance at board meetings and non-submission of reports), and breakdown in the relationship with Queen Mary.

5. Briefing

5.1 By Directorate of Governance and Legal Services

On appointment, the Directorate will send you a letter of appointment at the start of your term together with:

- a copy of the last report of the previous external examiner, and (where applicable) the response from the examination board:
- an External Examiner's Agreement, which forms the contract between Queen Mary and external examiners:
- a personal details form (required for payment purposes).

We would be grateful if you could complete the personal details form, and return this with a signed copy of the Agreement Form to the email provided in the appointment letter.

The appointment letter also includes the URL of Queen Mary's external examiner resource page: <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/governance-and-legal-services/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/> This page includes the following:

- Queen Mary's *Guidance for External Examiners* (this document):
- a template for your annual report (updated annually):
- Queen Mary's *Academic Regulations*:
- Queen Mary's *Assessment Handbook*, which contains details of our assessment processes:
- Expenses claim form template.

You are encouraged to use this web page to access guidelines, regulations and templates, as this ensures that you always have the most up to date version of each document. The Directorate of Governance and Legal Services ensures that this page always provides the most recent version of each document.

The Directorate of Governance and Legal Services will post 'red pen' versions of the *Academic Regulations* and *Assessment Handbook* each year, which will highlight any major changes to Queen Mary's policies and procedures.

5.2 By the Subject Examination Board

The detailed role of each external will vary according to the discipline, the customs, practices and needs of individual examination boards, and the distribution of responsibilities across each team of examiners. As a new external examiner, you will be carefully briefed by the Chair of the examination board as soon as possible after your appointment has been confirmed.

The Chair's briefing should cover the following:

- general information on the School/subject area, including information provided to students, such as the Student/Programme Handbook and the regulations for the programme(s) of study under your review:
- the names of other external examiners on the Subject Examination Board, and the modules/programmes of study for which you will be responsible:
- the relevant programme specification(s), together with each module syllabus and assessment patterns:
- the relevant marking criteria, used by the Subject Examination Board in assessing individual pieces of work (whether scripts, projects, coursework, etc) – for example, process for marking and moderation and where seen exams/or module answers are provided:
- a 'calendar' of events over the coming year, including when/what work will be submitted to you for review and the deadline for its return, the Subject Exam Board meeting dates, and dates on which you are required to attend additional meetings (for example, to examine projects, to oversee presentations or OSCEs).

6. Core duties of external examiners

External examiners have the following core duties:

General

- i. to comment on the assessments for each module for which they are responsible:
 - a. the extent to which the assessments cover the syllabus:
 - b. whether they enable candidates to demonstrate achievement of the stated learning outcomes:
- ii. in consultation with the SEB Chair, to approve at least 50% of assessment question papers/tasks.
- iii. to comment on marking schemes, assessment criteria and model answers:
- iv. to confirm whether or not the standard of marking is satisfactory by scrutinising a sample of examination scripts for each module and, if necessary, a sample of in-course assessment:
- v. to comment on the standards of achievement of candidates and the comparability of this achievement to standards elsewhere:
- vi. to comment on the standards of proposed awards and their comparability to similar awards elsewhere:
- vii. to make known any causes for concern in relation to academic standards achieved by candidates, the standards of modules and the standards of awards to be made:
- viii. to advise the Subject Examination Board on appropriate actions where the marks for a module are significantly outside the normal pattern, and to confirm recommendations by markers for actions where the marks for a module are significantly outside the normal pattern:
- ix. to attend – or conduct - oral examinations, where applicable:

- x. to attend meetings of the Subject Examination Board, and participate fully in decision making;
- xi. to endorse results and progression decisions, and recommendations for award;
- xii. to attend meetings of the Degree Examination Board, where they choose;
- xiii. to submit a full report, including an optional confidential report to the Principal;
- xiv. to perform any other duties requested by the Senate or the Degree Examination Board, following appropriate consultation over the nature of those duties.

By agreement with the Subject Examination Board and in consultation with the relevant school(s), external examiners may also carry out other duties including:

- the approval of project topics and essay titles;
- interviewing students about their programme of study and experiences;
- informal comment on proposed curriculum changes;
- comment on proposed changes to assessment methods.

As an external examiner, you will also have a less tangible role in encouraging good practice and advising the examination board on dealing with difficult problems.

7. Review and approval of set assessment

Assessments are proposed and approved as part of the Queen Mary module approval process, and these details (including reassessment information) are communicated to students at the start of the academic year. The SEB will seek your approval on questions/solutions and model answers used as part of this assessment.

You will be asked to review 50% of assessment design prior to their release to students, and the Chair of the SEB Chair will confirm which module assessments will require your approval and outline a timetable for communication as part of their briefing with you. Where the examination counts for 50% or more of a module's assessment, this will require your approval.

In reviewing assessment question papers/tasks, you must satisfy yourself that the assessment:

- is appropriate to the level of the module;
- is an appropriate means of testing the stated learning outcomes of the module;
- covers the full range of the syllabus, or that stated in the module outline;
- is fair – i.e. that some candidates will not be at an advantage other than by virtue of their academic ability and commitment.

7.1 Approval of Examination Papers

The examination board is responsible for overseeing the production and agreement of examination papers, and this is delegated to a small sub-committee of examiners known as the Scrutiny Sub-board. Examination papers (including marking schemes, assessment criteria, and model answers) are prepared by internal examiners in accordance with Queen Mary's approved minimum standards and template. These are then reviewed by the Scrutiny Sub-board, prior to being sent to you for review and approval (or otherwise). Examination papers for all sittings of examinations must be set, scrutinised, and approved in accordance with the approved procedure. You should review and approve all examination papers, including resit papers, even where individual questions may have been agreed separately in the past.

The draft question paper should be accompanied by model answers or, where this would be inappropriate (for example, in question papers that require essay-based answers), by an indication of the length, style and content of the desired answer (a 'skeleton answer').

You are asked to comment on the individual papers and the SEB Chair will respond to any comments or amendments you recommend. If you are unable to agree an examination paper this will be reported to the Chair of the Degree Examination Board and the Head of Academic Quality and Standards. The Chair of the Degree Examination Board will decide whether or paper can be approved, or if amendments should be made. The decision will be based upon consideration of your objections and the viewpoint brought forward by the exam board setting the paper.

7.2 Approval of In-course assessment

The same principles as above, will apply where other forms or assessment design require your approval before being released to students. You will be supplied with the associated marking schemes, marking criteria and/or model answers.

You are asked to comment on the individual papers/tasks and the SEB Chair will respond to any comments or amendments you recommend. If you are unable to agree an assessment, for whatever reason, this is reported to the Chair of the Degree Examination Board and the Head of Academic Quality and Standards. The Chair of the Degree Examination Board will decide whether the assessment can be approved or if amendments should be made. This decision is based on consideration of your objections and the viewpoint brought forward by the exam board setting the assessment.

8. Review of Assessment

You are not a marker, your role is to review the marking of internal examiners to ensure that this is consistent, of an appropriate standard and marked in accordance with our marking policies. For all programmes (except the MBBS) at least 50 percent of the assessed work for each module must be double marked/moderated in accordance with the Queen Mary Marking Policy. For the MBBS, different arrangements are in use whereby only short answer question scripts from resits are double marked. Where a module is assessed wholly by coursework, the elements selected for double marking/moderation must be the same for all students.

To moderate the marking of internal examiners, you have the right to examine any assessment. The selection of assignments to be sent to you is a matter to be agreed between yourself and the Chair of the examination board. However, you should have sufficient evidence to determine that internal marking and award recommendations are of an appropriate standard and are consistent. Sampling arrangements will therefore normally provide for you to see examples of the following:

- Assessments from the top, middle and bottom of the performance range, including failures:
- Module marking and moderation report, outlining the comments of the internal marker(s) and moderator:
- Module results report, detailing both the spread of marks for the module and individual elements of assessment:
- Module outline/handbook.

All assessment must be accompanied by the comments of the internal examiners. Evidence of double marking/moderation (in line with our Marking Policy) should be clear, and the marks of the two internal examiners easily distinguishable. If there has been disagreement between the two internal markers, the final agreed mark should be clearly identified for you, as will the method of resolution.

You do not have the power to change individual marks when reviewing a sample, as this would be unfair to the students not included in the sample. Where your review indicates the need for a significant alteration to the mark for an assessment, you should review the marks of the entire cohort to either confirm the marking or reject it as unsound. The relevant internal examiners have discretion on whether to remark all assessment, or to scale marks in relation to agreed benchmarks. Such rescaling should be reported to and endorsed by the assessing examination board.

You should not be asked to undertake:

- first or second marking;
- revision of the marks awarded for the assignment of an individual student.

9. Oral Examinations

Oral examinations are only used as an approved element of module assessment for taught programmes, with detailed marking schemes. Where oral assessments are used it is conducted by no fewer than two internal examiners; where an oral assessment is recorded, the second examiner may mark the recording rather (or in addition to) attending the examination.

Queen Mary does not use vivas/oral assessment to determine the recommended classification for borderline candidates up for award. Queen Mary uses a single borderline classification policy to award a higher classification than that indicated by the classification mark. This can be found in the Academic Regulations.

You are able to review any recorded oral assessments and will have access to marking trails for oral assessments. As above, you will not be asked to undertake any marking or revision of marks awarded by the internal marker(s).

10. Examination boards

Queen Mary operates a two-tiered system of examination boards. Subject Examination Boards (SEBs) consider marks and progression, and any circumstances that may have impacted upon these, and make recommendations for awards. Degree Examination Boards (DEBs) are award boards and approve awards and classifications, as well as ratifying other results achieved and progression decisions. The MBBS/BDS programme are unique in operating a combined SEB and DEB.

As an external examiner, you are required to attend the Subject Examination Board for the programme(s)/modules to which you have been appointed, and may attend the Degree Examination Board if you elect to do so. Exceptionally, where you are unable to attend the Subject Examination Board, the meeting may proceed in your absence on the understanding that you will provide comments of the candidates' performance prior to the meeting. These will be reported to the board, and you will be asked to endorse all recommendations and decisions.

It should not be necessary to make more than three visits to Queen Mary each year. Exceptions may be made where you are asked to be present at (e.g.) a resit board, OSCE.

Examination Boards expect to receive marks that have already been reviewed by external examiners except on rare occasions where the performance of one or more candidates raises an issue of policy upon which the whole board must decide. The Chair of the Subject Examination Board therefore has responsibility for ensuring that the marks and other information put before the board includes the comments of its external examiners. Some boards ask external examiners

to send their comments in writing a week before the board, while others organise preliminary board meetings at which all outstanding issues are resolved.

11. Debtors and alleged academic misconduct

Students flagged as having Fee debts will be considered by the examination board as in the usual manner. However, the official results of these students must be withheld until confirmation has been received that the debt has been cleared.

Students who are undergoing investigation for alleged academic misconduct cannot be considered, even where the alleged misconduct concerns only one module, as the outcome of the investigation may affect other modules. The examination board should agree arrangements for determining these students' results upon resolution of the investigation; this will normally be by Chair's action.

12. Extenuating circumstances

It is the responsibility of students to submit extenuating circumstances claims using the online Mysis task. These shall be submitted as soon as possible, and no later than three working days before the meeting of the relevant SEB's Extenuating Circumstances sub-Board. All submissions must be accompanied by appropriate documentary evidence, such as medical certificates, death certificated or police reports. documentation. Queen Mary permits limited instances of self-certification, and these claims will be considered without the submission of documentary evidence.

Extenuating Circumstances sub-Boards consider claims in advance of the main SEB meeting. The sub-Board acts as a filter for the SEB, rejecting cases that are unsupported or irrelevant, making recommendations on clear-cut cases, and identifying cases that require consideration by the SEB (normally where classifications may be affected.) The sub-Board cannot act on behalf of the SEB, it can only make recommendations for consideration for approval by the full SEB. However, the full SEB will not normally consider individual cases in detail unless the sub-Boad is unable to make a clear recommendation.

13. Late Submission of Assessments

Queen Mary uses the following late work penalty for all programmes; For assessments other than examinations, for every period of 24 hours, or part thereof, that an assessment is late, 5% of the total marks available will be deducted (for example, -5 marks for an assessment marked out of 100). After seven calendar days (168 hours or more late) the mark will be reduced to zero and recorded as 0FL (zero, fail, late). For examinations, an immediate mark of 0FL (zero, fail, late) will be applied if a student submits after the end of the examination. (*Regulation 3.48, Academic Regulations 2024/25*)

Certain assessments may cease to be a valid measure of a module's learning outcomes prior to the seven working day cut-off - for example where feedback has been provided to the class - any submission made after this point would no longer be an accurate measure of attainment. In such cases, the late submission policy shall apply as normal up to the day on which feedback is given; at that point, a mark of zero (0FL) shall be applied, even if this is within seven working days of the deadline. Schools/Institutes make this clear to students in advance and you will also be notified of this when receiving module details.

A late work penalty may be removed where a student provides good reason for the late submission under the extenuating circumstances policy. A student must submit a formal claim with supporting evidence for the circumstances to be considered.

14. Students with Specific Learning Requirements

Students identified as having specific learning requirements are supported by the Disability and Dyslexia Service (DDS). The DDS will alert the SEB to any specific adjustments required i.e. additional time in written examinations. Assessments of students with declared specific learning differences (SpLDs) are marked in precisely the same manner as those of other students, although markers will be asked to consider the advice on the SpLD Cover Note provided by the DDS. It is the student's responsibility to attach the SpLD Cover Note to all assessment.

15. Classification for honours

Degrees that are classified, are based on a classification mark which is calculated in accordance with the relevant algorithm specified in the *Academic Regulations*. Subject Examination Boards do have a degree of discretion in determining the class of degree, within the permitted scope of Queen Mary's borderline classification policy (Regulation 2.115-2.117). Recommendations to apply the borderline policy must be detailed clearly in the minutes of the SEB meeting, as it may have to be defended on academic grounds should a candidate challenge a decision.

16. Views of external examiners

Examination board Chairs will ensure that you are invited to express your views, particularly on difficult and contentious cases, and these views will always carry a particular weight. In exceptional cases, where there are disagreements within the board, the final decision shall be reached by a majority vote; Chairs have a second and casting vote in the event of a tie. Where, however, an external examiner expresses grave concern that a particular decision would be improper (e.g. unfair to a candidate, or in violation of appropriate standards), the Chair must seek the views of all external examiners on the issue. The Board shall defer to the majority decision of the external examiners, and the substance of the discussions shall be recorded in the minutes.

17. External examiners' reports

Oral reports

After the examination board has completed its deliberations, you and your fellow external examiners will each be invited to give a brief oral report. This should cover:

- your opinion of the assessment process, including its fairness, accuracy, and efficiency:
- your opinion of the academic quality of the cohort(s) that have been examined:
- your opinion of the quality of teaching, as judged by the students' assessment:
- any recommendations to the examination board for improvements to the teaching or assessment processes:
- your opinion as to whether recommendations from previous years have been properly followed up.

Examination boards are normally very willing to respond to external examiners' comments. If, however, the Chair of the board fails to respond to any critical comments you have made in a positive manner, you should contact the Head of Academic Quality and Standards as a matter of urgency. You may also make representations to the Chair of the relevant Degree Examination Board, and relevant Faculty Dean of Education.

The report from a Subject Examination Board to a Degree Examination Board must detail any cases where the majority of external examiners disagreed with a decision concerning the classification of a particular candidate.

Written reports

As an external examiner, you are also required to make an annual written report to the Principal (though addressed and emailed to the Head of Academic Quality and Standards). This should be completed and submitted within 30 days of the main board meeting using the relevant template from: <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/governance-and-legal-services/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/>.

External examiners' written reports form an essential part of Queen Mary's quality assurance framework and constitute a major source of information for the various reviews of taught programmes of Schools/Institutes. Reports are made available to students through Student Voice Committees, and any reference to an individual student in a report must be avoided. You may attach a confidential report as an appendix to the main report if you wish to report a matter concerning an individual student. Reports are also considered by the School/Institutes in the relevant forum (normally Education Committees) and used to inform enhancements and amendments to academic provision.

The Directorate of Governance and Legal Services reads all external examiner reports and highlights comments that require a formal response, before sending the report to the examination board. Chairs of examination boards are required to respond to the points made by external examiners, normally within 30 days of submission of the report.

The Chair of the board will send you a written response and a copy is retained by the Directorate of Governance and Legal Services. In the event that you raise an issue of principle that has not already been addressed by the School/ Institute, it should first be discussed at a staff meeting, the next meeting of the Examination Board, or a meeting of the relevant Education Committee as appropriate to the circumstances.

Please note that the Directorate of Governance and Legal Services does not normally respond to individual points in reports (this being done by the examination board) unless this is specifically requested. Instead, after review of all reports, it creates an annual summary report of institution-level issues for Education Quality and Standards Board; this directly informs policy review processes at Queen Mary.

In cases where an external examiners' report contains particularly sensitive or serious comments, the Head of Academic Quality and Standards will refer the matter to the Vice-Principal (Education), who will contact the appropriate Examination Board Chair and/or Head of School/Institute immediately. The Vice-Principal will normally require a formal written response to serious criticism.

Report templates are reviewed and revised annually. Please download the most recent version each year, from <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/governance-and-legal-services/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/#Reports>. The Directorate of Governance and Legal Services will pursue the non-submission of reports, and provides regular reports on non-submission to the Deans for Education and Vice-Principal (Education). Please note that fees will only be paid upon submission of a report, and that Queen Mary reserves the right to refuse to pay for late reports.

Queen Mary aims to establish and maintain constructive and effective relationships with its external examiners; if, however, you experience any problems, please report them immediately to the Head of Academic Quality and Standards, or the Vice-Principal (Education).

18. Payment

Fees

Following submission of your report, the Directorate of Governance and Legal Services will request a fee payment form from the Examination Board. The fee amount is at the discretion of the Examination Board, however there is a base rate calculated using a fee payment formula that takes account of (for example) the number of scripts reviewed. Queen Mary reserves the right to refuse payment for reports received more than six months after the board.

The Directorate of Governance and Legal Services cannot process any payment without confirmation of your personal details. Queen Mary will also need to carry out a right to work check, and you will be asked to bring your passport and right to work permit (if required) to Queen Mary so that a verified copy can be made. Non-UK residents will be asked to provide confirmation of their status in the UK and will be asked to provide their Biometric Residence Permits (BRP) and/or share code for the Home Office portal. You will only have to provide this information once, and the Directorate of Governance and Legal Services will ask you to confirm your personal details on an annual basis to ensure your details remain up to date.

The normal payment date is the 24th of each month, though the 'cut-off' date for Human Resources to receive the payment request is the 1st of each month – claims processed after that date will be paid the following month.

Expenses

The exam board will reimburse travel and subsistence expenses for external examiners, in line with the Queen Mary Expenses Policy - <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/governance-and-legal-services/policy/policies-by-category/>. Subsistence costs are limited to a daily amount and these are listed within the *Expenses Policy*. Please check with your Examination Board as they may book accommodation/transport for you.

To reclaim your expenses, please submit a signed expenses claim form (found here: <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/governance-and-legal-services/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/#Expensesclaims>) and return this together with the original receipt(s)/ticket(s) to the exam board Secretary. Please note that Queen Mary cannot refund claims more than three months old or claims without original ticket(s)/receipt(s).

19. Key contacts

Your primary point of contact with Queen Mary will be the Chair of your Examination Board; the Chair's contact details will be provided in your appointment letter. The main contacts in the Directorate of Governance and Legal Services are:

Alice de Havillan, Academic Standards and Quality Officer
a.l.dehavillan@qmul.ac.uk.

For matters relating to fees, appointments and nominations, questions on report submission, and general queries.

Simon Hayter, Head of Academic Quality and Standards
s.n.hayter@qmul.ac.uk

For any policy matters, and for concerns to be raised with the Principal.

Any written correspondence can be sent to:

Directorate of Governance and Legal Services (External Examiners)

Queen Mary University of London

Department W

81 Mile End Road

London, E1 4UJ

The external examiners resource page is available here:

<https://www.qmul.ac.uk/governance-and-legal-services/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/>

Queen Mary's 'Policy Zone' web page provides a full list of policies and regulations:

<https://www.qmul.ac.uk/governance-and-legal-services/policy/policies-by-category/>