



Guidance for External Examiners

2023/24

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Applicability

The national context

1. This guidance document applies to all of the College's taught provision at undergraduate and taught postgraduate level, leading to an award of King's College London.
2. UK universities offer their own awards under their degree awarding powers. Each university is responsible for the standards it sets for its awards and the quality of the programmes of study it provides leading to those awards, wherever and however provided. Universities are expected to be able to demonstrate that they have undertaken rigorous quality assurance that ensures that the standards of achievement of graduating students meet national and, increasingly, international expectations and also that the quality of the learning opportunities provided give students a fair and reasonable opportunity to complete their programme of study successfully.
3. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)¹ is the independent body with responsibility for safeguarding the quality and standards of UK awards. It does this via the provision of a series of reference points that help to define clear and explicit standards against which higher education provision is evaluated. These reference points are set out in the [The Quality Code \(qaa.ac.uk\)](http://www.qaa.ac.uk) expressed as Expectations which are illustrated by Core Practices. The Core Practice of "*the provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent*" relates to external examining.

Academic judgement

4. King's College London expects its staff to exercise their academic judgement in ways that are evidence-based, fair and reasonable, and pertinent to the expectations of their academic discipline/field of professional study. The College's external examiner system is designed and intended to demonstrate and support the proper exercise of academic judgement.
5. The College expects its staff and external examiners to apply their academic judgement in ways that demonstrate broad comparability of standards and quality with the national norms associated with their specific fields of study and/or practice. Further, it expects its staff and external examiners to be able to act consistently in meeting the university's requirements concerning the exercise of academic judgement and its management.
6. External examiners work within the context of their discipline and the particular programme and modules that they are asked to consider. They are expected to do this in two regards:
 - The academic context - in which they consider and comment on the delivery and assessment of the module or its components. Here external examiners are looking for comparability against national standards and against other similar institutions/programmes, and consistency within and between those University programme(s) and or components they are acting as an external for;
 - The administrative/management context – here external examiners are required to comment on (and confirm where appropriate) the consistency of procedural aspects and, additionally, that procedures are appropriate for the outcomes they are intended to cover/deliver.
7. Comparability focuses on standards and student achievement in one or more of the following ways (according to the specific role of each external examiner):
 - Across the modules within a single programme;
 - Across programmes within a single subject area within King's College London;

¹ [The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

- Across programmes within a single subject area in other similar institutions of which the external examiner has experience;
- Any of the above, across cohorts during the examiner's period of appointment.

Eligibility criteria, nomination and approval process

8. Programme teams should approach a potential external examiner in the first instance and if agreeable, request the nomination is completed and submitted to their Assessment Sub-board chair.
9. The existing QAA Quality Code² (specifically Chapter B7) set out the typical person specification for an external examiner which King's College London adopted and which is as follows:
 - a) An appointee shall be external to the College
 - b) An appointee shall normally be an academic member of staff from another UK higher education institution. Faculty Assessment Boards must seek permission from the College Assessment and Standards Committee³ to appoint an External Examiner from overseas
 - c) An appointee must have relevant current experience and expertise in the discipline being examined, including the design and operation of assessment, in order to speak authoritatively on academic standards germane to the discipline and should be familiar with the standards and procedures of university-level education in the United Kingdom
 - d) An appointee should have relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined and/or extensive practitioners experience where appropriate
 - e) An appointee must have competence and experience relating to the enhancement of student learning experience
 - f) Former lay members of Council, students or previous employees of King's College London shall not be appointed before a period of five academic year has elapsed
 - g) Any individual who has been involved in the validation or approval of a programme as an external expert or similar will be excluded from acting as an external examiner for that programme before a period of three academic years has elapsed
 - h) An appointee shall not have any close personal professional or contractual relationship with staff or student involved in the delivery of the programme nor be involved in any activity that could be considered a conflict of interest:
 - i) An appointee shall not normally belong to an institution in which a member of staff of King's College London is appointed to act as an external examiner in the same subject at the same level. It is recognised that, in certain subjects, this situation might be unavoidable. In such instances a case must be referred to the College Assessment and Standards Committee by the Chair of the relevant Assessment Sub-board
 - j) An appointee shall not belong to an institution to which an existing or exiting external examiner belongs to
 - k) An appointee shall not have 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
 - l) An appointee shall not hold an external examiner role for more than two universities

² <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-existing-uk-quality-code>

³ Following the governance review outcome (November 2018) this may be subject to change

10. Nomination forms and other related documentation are available on [ARQS Webpages](#). All submitted forms should be checked and approved by the Assessment Sub-board Chair, Assessment Board Chair and then sent to the [Academic Regulations, Quality & Standards Office](#) to gain approval by Chair (or his/her nominee) of College Assessment and Standards Committee, on behalf of the Vice-President and Vice-Principal Education.

Appointment

11. Except as noted below, an external examiner is normally appointed for a period of four years (academic) with no option for an extension. On completion of the appointment, an external examiner will not normally be eligible for re-appointment until a further five years has elapsed⁴.
12. External examiners appointed to MB BS and BDS programmes will normally be appointed for a period of five years with no option for an extension. On completion of the appointment, an external examiner will not normally be eligible for re-appointment until a further five year has elapsed.
13. Where a nomination is approved, the appointee shall be informed within one month of the date of the approval. Normally, the appointment will commence upon the expiry of the appointment of the previous external examiner and will coincide with the start of the academic year.
14. An Assessment Sub-board may exceptionally request an extension of an external examiner's appointment beyond four years in order to meet local requirements. Such a request must be approved by the Chair of the relevant Assessment Sub-board and submitted through the Faculty for approval by the Assessment Board Chair, who will then notify the Academic Regulations, Quality & Standards team. Extensions will not normally be granted for more than one year.
15. An external examiner is normally appointed to one programme or specific component (pathway; year) of a programme. Additional programmes may only be assigned to an external examiner duties on approval from the Chair of the College Assessment and Standards Committee.
16. If an Assessment Sub-board wishes to have more than two external examiners per Assessment Sub-board then a request, with a rationale, must be submitted to the Chair of the College Assessment and Standards Committee for approval.

Publication of external examiners' reports

17. External examiner reports are made available to students on an intranet web page. External examiners name and institution are made visible to students but any other personal information noted in the report is redacted.
18. External examiners are also referenced to in student handbooks, either by name or institution.

Termination of external examiner's appointment

19. If an external examiner is no longer eligible to hold office (under the above or is unable or unwilling to fulfil the duties specified below), or there is a conflict of interest that cannot be satisfactorily resolved, their appointment shall be terminated following consultation with the Vice-President and Vice-Principal (Education).
20. If an external examiner fails to submit a written annual report within two months of a Board being held, and without any good reason after receiving three reminders from the Academic Regulations, Quality & Standards Office, or fails to fulfil any of his/her duties, including attendance at specific Assessment Sub-boards, King's College London has the right to terminate the appointment.

⁴ In exceptional circumstances re-appointment may occur earlier on agreement with the Vice-President and Vice-Principal (Education)

21. If either party has cause to terminate the appointment, this should normally be an arrangement to take effect at the end of an academic year, but in any case is subject to three months' notice by either party.

Induction

22. Following an individual's appointment it is expected that the Assessment Sub-board will arrange an induction for the external examiner⁵ and be responsible for communicating with them throughout the year. The induction to be provided by the Assessment Sub-board should cover the documentation and support package listed below; offer the external examiner the opportunity to meet with current students (though this is not compulsory); and normally take place during the first half of the academic year.

23. Upon appointment the College will send all external examiners the following documentation (electronically):

- Academic Regulations
- The College Marking Framework
- College Marking Criteria (UG/PGT)
- External Examiners' Guidance on Induction

24. The College will also provide external examiners with appropriate information relating to College regulations and procedures on an annual basis.

25. It is the College's expectation that Assessment Sub-board Chairs will provide the following local documentation:

- Programme handbooks and module descriptions (including learning aims and outcomes)
- Details of the marking scheme for each module
- Subject-discipline marking criteria (where available)
- The format of each element of assessment (including in course assessments)
- The relative contribution of each element of assessment to the final module mark
- The marking model utilised in assessing each element of assessment
- Details of any aspect of the programme delivered off-campus

26. Support prior to the start of each academic year: it is the College's expectation that all external examiners will receive:

- Details of the timeframe for receiving and vetting draft examination papers and other assessments where these form the mainstay of modular assessment
- Details of the key dates and deadlines including dates of attendance at College sentence needs completing
- Details of key contacts – centrally and departmentally
- Details of payments and fees

⁵ Assessment Sub-Board Chairs will determine how best to organise this for the individual concerned. For example, a joint session involving several external examiners across several Assessment Sub-Boards would be acceptable (this session could be via Skype)

27. To enable external examiners to assess the marking standards and processes the following documentation should be provided at appropriate times during the academic year:

- Draft examination papers
- Draft in-course assessment questions where appropriate
- All failed pieces of coursework and examination papers
- Samples of examination papers along with internal assessors/markers comments and marks awarded for each band (UG pass; second class; upper second class and first class and PGT pass; merit and distinction)
- Samples of coursework along with examiners' comments and marks awarded for each band as above
- Module mark sheets showing clearly how the final module mark for each candidate was derived
- Total examination records for each final year candidate

Roles and responsibilities

28. The College has established as the primary roles and responsibilities of its external examiners within the context of the requirements of the QAA *Quality Code*⁶, the following:

That they shall:

- Assist in the maintenance of the standard of awards of King's College London and advise if there is a falling below national standards in the subject area for which the external examiner is responsible
- Seek to ensure that assessment processes are fair, rigorous and operated equitably
- Have regard to the totality of the degree or other programme in question and shall be involved in the decisions relating to the award of each degree or other qualification
- In cases where part of the programme is delivered by partner institution(s) the external examiner shall have oversight of the assessments being delivered
- Comment upon and give approval to all draft examination papers and other forms of assessment with a significant contribution to the module and/or programme for which they are responsible
- Have the right to inspect any script or other assessed examination material relevant to the duties of the appointment and are required to sample scripts or other assessed material, including coursework
- Advise whether marking schemes and schemes for the classification of honours or award of degree and diplomas are consistent with internal and external standards
- Be called upon to adjudicate in cases of conflict between internal examiners
- Not change individual marks (except where adjudicating) but may recommend appropriate action to ameliorate systematic issues in marking

⁶ Existing Chapter B7 of the QAA UK Quality Code

- Be ex-officio members of Assessment Sub-boards and are invited to attend all meetings of the Assessment Sub-board(s) to which they are appointed.
 - Approve the pass lists and final award recommendations of the Assessment Sub-board
 - Submit to the Principal at the conclusion of the assessment period a written report on the form provided
 - Be invited to attend some meetings convened to consider an appeal against the decision of the Assessment Sub-board of which they are members
 - Observe the Academic Regulations and Academic Policies regarding confidentiality of setting and marking of examination papers, of the proceedings of Assessment Sub-board and the results of the examinations
 - Be expected to attend the College for as much time as is reasonably necessary for the duties of the post to be properly discharged
29. The Chair of an Assessment Sub-board shall determine the distributions of work between external examiners. In those cases where external examiners see a selection of scripts/coursework, the guiding principle for such selection must be that the external examiners should have enough evidence to carry out their duties.
30. In general, all scripts should be made available to the external examiner(s) on request, but their attention should be drawn to a sample of scripts from the top, middle, and the bottom of the range (including a sample of scripts assessed internally as first class/distinctions) and all failures and to the scripts of students with a borderline overall classification.
31. An external examiner should also see all scripts where the examiners have been unable to reach agreement on the marks.
32. The duties of external examiners appointed solely to conduct clinical examinations in the School of Medical Education and Dental Institute shall be as determined by the Executive Dean of Faculty concerned.

Comment on draft assessment

33. External examiners will receive for consideration, comment and approval all draft examination papers and other forms of assessment that have a significant contribution to the overall module and/or programme.
34. External examiners do not need to approve the assessment for modules worth less than 25% of the overall assessment for the module.
35. Approved assessments should be returned within the timeframe specified by the Faculty.
36. It is the responsibility of the Assessment Sub-board to ensure external examiners have received in a timely manner draft examination papers and other forms of assessment for consideration and approval.

Receiving mark sheets and representative samples of student work across the full ability range

37. The Academic Regulations, Quality & Standards Office will provide external examiners with the College's generic marking criteria and College Marking Framework.
38. Faculties will provide external examiners with the other relevant discipline specific marking criteria and lists of:
- The original marks made by the 1st and 2nd marker for all modules
 - A commentary where there is a discrepancy between marks.
39. Where there is a discrepancy of ≥ 10 percentage points or where the difference in marks crosses a classification boundary the original markers are required to reconsider the work. If there is still a

discrepancy a third, independent, experienced marker will be asked to help determine the final mark.

40. Departments may request an external examiner to attend the College to review assessed work prior to the meeting of the Assessment Sub-board.
41. External examiners have the right to see all assessed work including coursework, performances and presentations, where the unit of assessment contributes 25% or more to the overall module mark.
42. Faculties should advise external examiners what marking model they are using and provide them with information on how the marking sample is selected and the size of the sample calculated.

Reviewing the level and range of marks, within and between modules

43. External examiners are required to:
 - Review the congruence between module outcomes and related method(s) of assessment and the appropriateness and range of marks in the components of each module examined
 - Compare the level and range of final marks of all modules in the relevant subject contributing to the programme award
 - Check for consistency in marking
 - Examine the relationship between learning outcomes and assessment types
44. External examiners must not be used for second marking.

Moderating internally-marked work

45. The process for external examination is one of moderation, which is a verification process and not one of re-marking. Since moderation is usually conducted on the basis of a sample of work, the adjustment of an individual's marks based on that sample alone is not appropriate.
46. If an external examiner deems that marks are inconsistent across the sample they may request a re-marking of all the assessed work in that module. The external examiner may also propose an adjustment of all marks if, in his/her view, the assessment is consistently over- or under-marked.

Attendance at Assessment Sub-boards

47. External examiners are ex-officio members of Assessment Sub-boards and are invited to attend all meetings to the Assessment Sub-board(s) they are appointed to.
48. They must, as a minimum requirement, attend the main meeting of the Assessment Sub-board held to determine the results of examinations.
49. An external examiner unable to attend a meeting due to illness or other good cause should endeavour to be available for consultation. In such circumstances the absence of the external examiner from the meeting will not render it invalid.
50. External examiners may be requested to attend other meetings, as notified by the Chair of the Assessment Sub-board, and it is expected that they will attend the meeting.
51. For those external examiners appointed solely for the purpose of conducting clinical examinations for the MB BS and BDS programmes, attendance at meetings of the Assessment Sub-board is not a requirement.
52. External examiners should be noting at the Assessment Sub-board any areas of good practice and key issues identified during the year. Such views are given serious consideration.

53. The external examiner(s) will be asked to approve the pass list and final award recommendations of the Assessment Sub-board, hence attendance must be had as a minimum, at the meeting where final awards are recommended. The minutes are signed by the Chair of the Assessment Sub-board and all external examiners associated with that programme who are present. The lists of recommended awards are sent to the Boards and Awards office for approval by the Assessment Board.
54. An external examiner has the right not to sign the minutes and, in such circumstances, informs the Assessment Board Chair or nominee, in writing and at the earliest possible opportunity, of the reasons; the Assessment Board Chair will then notify the Vice-President and Vice-Principle Education and Director of Students and Education. The Assessment Board Chair ensures that the external examiners remarks are submitted, along with all other recommendations, to the Assessment Board and that full consideration is given to them in reaching any decision.
55. It is the responsibility of the Chairs of Assessment Sub-boards to ensure that external examiners are given adequate notice of any meeting which they are required to attend.
56. The final responsibility for the approval of module marks rests with the Assessment Sub-board, the membership and terms of reference for which are set out in the *Academic Regulations*.
57. If an external examiner is appointed to a King's Online Managed Programme then attendance at Module Assessment Sub-Boards can be done by virtual means. However external examiners must physically attend the annual Assessment Board.

External Examiners' reports

58. External examiners are required to provide timely reports to the Principal or delegated nominee at least annually a written report during their term of office. It is a condition of contract that external examiner's reports must be submitted before fees can be paid. The report should be submitted within one calendar month of the main meeting held to determine the results of students in the relevant academic year. There is no requirement for external examiners to provide a report following attendance at a resit Assessment Sub-board unless there are substantial changes that have occurred since the previous Board.
59. Failure to resubmit a report within two months of the meeting held to determine the results of students, or respond to the three reminders sent by the Academic Regulations, Quality & Standards team, will result in a recommendation that the external examiner's appointment is terminated.
60. The College expects its external examiners to take their reporting responsibilities very seriously and it, in turn, makes careful use of those reports. External examiners are required to include informative comments and recommendations in their report as follows:
 - Whether issues raised in the previous report(s) have been, or are being, addressed to their satisfaction
 - Whether the College is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualification and applicable subject benchmark statements
 - The programme of study itself (clarity of programme aims and learning outcomes; the structure and content of the programme in relation to the general aims and learning outcomes)
 - Whether the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the institution's policies and *Regulations*
 - That the academic standards and the achievement of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which the external examiners have experience

- The appropriateness of the marking criteria used, or marks awarded, and the overall range of marks in relation to the marking criteria
- The consistency of marking within and between the modules/programmes moderated
- The organisation and administration of assessment procedures and Assessment Sub-boards
- Confirmation that sufficient evidence was received to enable the role to be fulfilled (where evidence was insufficient, they give details)
- Areas of good practice

61. Additionally external examiners are required to provide an overview in their report to when their term of office is concluded.

62. The procedure for dealing with external examiner's reports is shown in Appendix 1.

Responsibilities for external examiners' reports within the College

63. External examiners' reports are received, on behalf of the Principal, by the Academic Regulations, Quality & Standards team, who brings the contents of the report(s) to the attention of those teaching the programme or module, students on the programme or module, the Chair of the relevant Assessment Sub-board, the Chair of the relevant Assessment Board, and the Executive Dean of Faculty.

64. Where an external examiner has raised a matter of serious concern the report is also passed to the Chair of Assessment and Standards Committee, as the nominee of the Vice-President and Vice-Principal Education. In such cases a response is requested from the Faculty within 4 weeks of them receiving the report for consideration and approval by the Chair of College Assessment and Standards Committee before returning to the external examiner.

65. External examiners' reports are made available to students online and Faculties ensure that any relevant issues arising from the reports are considered by the relevant Staff/Student Liaison Committee and Assessment Sub-boards. External examiners are asked not to name individual members of staff or students in their report.

66. Faculties produce an overview report of external examiner reports received, summarising comments raised by external examiners that have been identified as critical (academic standards at risk) or monitor (need to be kept under review) and any areas of good practice identified. External examiners' reports are also part of the documentation provided for the periodic review of the programme of study, together with any responses.

67. The Associate Director Academic Regulations, Quality & Standards produces an overarching summary report, one for UG and one for PGT, on issues raised by external examiners, identified areas of good practice, and any recommendations requiring institution action. The Chair of College.

68. Assessment and Standards Committee⁷ then reports to Academic Board key issues raised by external examiners and actions to be taken and confirms to Academic Board (who confirms to Council) that external examiners are satisfied that academic standards are secure.

69. External examiners are advised of the outcome of consideration of their report by the Assessment Sub-Board returning their report with responses included. The response to the report is then uploaded to an internal SharePoint site, managed by Academic Regulations, Quality & Standards.

Raising serious concerns

70. Through its *Academic Regulations, Academic Policies* and normal procedures the College has sought to reduce the potential for problems relating to external examining. The College, however,

⁷ Following the governance review outcome (November 2018) this may be subject to change

expects its external examiners to raise any concerns they have in a serious and proper manner. In the first instance this is done through the programme and it is the responsibility of the Programme Leader to seek to deal with the problem. Outstanding problems should be addressed at Faculty level, culminating with the Executive Dean of Faculty. Such matters should be brought to the attention of the Vice-President and Vice-Principal Education who may assist in problem resolution.

71. Where an external examiner considers that problems have not been dealt with satisfactorily s/he may write a confidential report to the Chair of College Assessment and Standards Committee (or the Principal).
72. Should an external examiner have a serious concern relating to systematic failings with the academic standards of a programme or programmes and has exhausted all published applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Principal, they may advise the QAA and/or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.

External Examiners' report process

