

## External Examiners

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### Eligibility and selection

1. In the selection of a nominee for appointment as an External Examiner, the following criteria shall apply:
  - a. an appointee shall be external to the University;
  - b. an appointee shall normally be an academic member of staff from another UK higher education institution. Assessment Boards must seek permission from the Academic Standards Sub-Committee to appoint an External Examiner from overseas;
  - c. an appointee must have relevant current experience and expertise in the discipline being assessed, 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 practitioner experience where appropriate;
  - e. an appointee must have competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience;

- f. former lay members of Council, students or employees of King's College London shall not be appointed before a period of five academic years 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 students 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 the University is appointed to act as an External Examiner in the same subject and 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 Academic Regulations Oversight Sub-Committee by the Chair of the relevant Sub-Board;
- j. an appointee shall not belong to an institution to which an existing or exiting examiner belongs;
- 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 programmes or modules in question;
- l. an appointee shall not hold an external examiner role for more than two universities.

## **Appointment**

- 2. Except as provided for below, an External Examiner is normally appointed for a period of four 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 years have elapsed. In exceptional circumstances reappointment may occur earlier on agreement with the Vice Principal (Education).
- 3. External Examiners appointed to MBBS and BDS Part Boards 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 years have elapsed.
- 4. 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.
- 5. 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 on the recommendation of the Vice Principal (Education).

6. If either party has cause to terminate the appointment, this should normally be arranged to take effect at the end of an academic year, but in any case, is subject to three months' notice by either party.
7. A Sub-Board may 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 Sub-Board and submitted through the Faculty for approval by the Assessment Board Chair who will then notify the ARQS team. Extensions will not normally be granted for more than one year.
8. An External Examiner is normally appointed to one programme or components of a programme. Additional programmes may only be assigned to an External Examiner's duties on approval from the Chair of Academic Regulations Oversight Sub Committee. Where required, King's Online Managed Programmes may be exempt from this requirement, but in no instance should they have more than 4 External Examiners appointed.

## Induction and information

9. The University will provide External Examiners with appropriate information relating to the [Academic Regulations](#) and procedures on an annual basis to include [College's Marking Framework](#) which provides details on:
  - Marking Criteria
  - Marking Models
  - Marking Schemes

## Duties

10. External Examiners 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.
11. External Examiners shall seek to ensure that assessment processes are fair, rigorous and operated equitably.
12. External Examiners shall 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. Due to subject specialism in the cases of LLB, MBBS and BDS External Examiners shall have oversight of components of the degree.
13. In cases where part of the programme is delivered by partner institutions the External Examiner shall have oversight of the assessments being delivered.
14. External Examiners are required to 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. A record will be kept of all approvals.
15. External Examiners have the right to inspect any script or other assessed material relevant to the duties of the appointment and are required to sample scripts or other assessed material,

including coursework.

16. External Examiners are required to advise whether marking schemes and schemes for the classification of honours or award of degrees and diplomas are consistent with internal and external standards.
17. External Examiners may be called upon to adjudicate in cases of conflict between internal examiners.
18. External Examiners may not change individual marks (except where adjudicating) but may recommend appropriate action to ameliorate systematic issues in marking.
19. External Examiners are ex-officio members of Sub-Boards and are invited to attend all meetings of the Sub-Boards to which they are appointed. They must, as a minimum requirement, attend the main meeting of the Sub-Board held to determine the results of assessments. They may be requested to attend other meetings as notified by the Chair. External Examiners should report to the Sub-Board any areas of good practice and key issues identified during the year.
20. In the case of first degrees in Medicine and Dentistry, External Examiners appointed solely for the purpose of conducting clinical examinations shall not be required to attend meetings of the Sub-Board.
21. The duties of External Examiners appointed solely to conduct clinical examinations in the Faculties of Medicine and of Dentistry shall be as determined by the Executive Dean of Faculty concerned.
22. External Examiners shall approve the results and the final award recommendations of the Sub-Board.
23. External Examiners are required to submit to the Principal, at the conclusion of the assessment period, a written report on the form provided. The report shall be submitted within one calendar month of the main meeting held to determine the results of students in the relevant academic year. The report shall include comment on the adequacy of the standard of the assessment and other matters relevant to the teaching and assessment of the programme or modules courses. The contents of the report will be brought to the attention of those teaching the programme or module, students on the programme or module, the Chair of the relevant Sub-Board, the Chair of the relevant Assessment Board and the Executive Dean of Faculty. Academic Regulations Oversight Sub Committee will consider an annual report on action taken further to issues raised in External Examiners' reports.
24. Failure to submit a report within two months of the meeting held to determine the results of students will result in a recommendation that the External Examiners' appointment is terminated.
25. External Examiners may be invited to attend any meeting convened to consider an appeal against the decision of the Sub-Board of which they are members.
26. External Examiners shall observe the Academic Regulations and Academic Policies regarding

confidentiality of setting and marking assessments, proceedings of Sub-Boards and all results and awards.

27. External Examiners will be expected to attend the University for as much time as is reasonably necessary for the duties of the post to be properly discharged.
28. It is the responsibility of Chairs of Sub-Boards to ensure that External Examiners are given adequate notice of any meeting which they are required to attend. 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.
29. The Chair of a Sub-Board will determine the distribution of work between External Examiners. In those cases where External Examiners see a selection of scripts, the guiding principle for such selection must be that the External Examiners should have enough evidence to carry out their duties. In general, all scripts should be made available to the External Examiners on request, but their attention should be drawn to a sample of scripts from the top, the middle and the bottom of the range (including a sample of scripts assessed internally as first class/distinctions or failures) and to the scripts of students with a borderline overall classification. An External Examiner should also see all scripts where the examiners have been unable to reach agreement on the marks.

### **Procedure for investigating concerns about academic standards and quality**

30. External Examiners should raise issues or concerns they may have about academic standards and quality with the Sub-Board and in their report to the Principal. External Examiners have the right to raise any matter of serious concern in confidence in a separate report to the Principal.
31. Other concerns about the University's academic standards and quality (including concerns about the accuracy and completeness of information published by the University) should be raised in writing, in the first instance, with the relevant Head of Department/Division or Executive Dean of Faculty, who shall normally respond within 14 days. The Head of Department/Division or Executive Dean of Faculty may delegate the investigation of the concern to another senior staff member who may respond on behalf of the Head of Department/Division or Executive Dean of Faculty.
32. If the person who has raised the concern remains dissatisfied following the response from the Department/Division or Faculty, they may request a review of the Department/Division or Faculty's response by the Vice Principal (Education). The request for a review must be submitted in writing within 14 days of the response being issued. The Vice Principal (Education) will normally respond within 60 days of receipt of the request for a review and the response shall be final. The Vice Principal (Education) may delegate the review up to a Senior Vice President who may respond on the Vice Principal's behalf.
33. This procedure shall not be used for concerns or issues which have been or should more appropriately be raised under another University procedure. Third parties may not use this procedure for raising concerns or issues regarding the University's relationship with a particular student, as the University provides students with procedures for doing so.

**Academic Judgement**

34. The University 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.
35. 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.
36. 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;
  - 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.

**Induction Information**

37. Following an individual's appointment, it is expected that the Assessment Sub-board will arrange an induction for the external examiner<sup>1</sup> 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.
- 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

38. Support prior to the start of each academic year: it is the University's expectation that the Faculty will provide all external examiners with:
- 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 University for Assessment Board meetings
  - Details of key contacts
39. 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.

### **Moderating internally marked work**

40. 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.
41. 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.
42. When reviewing the level and range of mark, within and between modules External Examiners are required to:
- Review the similarity 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.
43. External examiners should not be used for second marking.
44. External examiners will be provided with the 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.
45. Where there is a discrepancy of  $\geq 10$  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.
46. 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.

## Samples for moderation

46. 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
47. The Chair of a Sub-Board will determine the distribution of work between External Examiners. In those cases where External Examiners see a selection of scripts, the guiding principle for such selection must be that the External Examiners should have enough evidence to carry out their duties.
48. In general, all scripts should be made available to the External Examiners on request, but their attention should be drawn to a sample of scripts from the top, the 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. An External Examiner should also see all scripts where the examiners have been unable to reach agreement on the marks.

## External Examiners' reports

49. External examiners are required to provide timely written reports annually during their term of office, they 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 University 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 University 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 University*
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 Regulatory Oversight Sub-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 Assessment and Regulatory Oversight Sub-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.
68. Assessment and Regulatory Oversight Sub-Committee<sup>7</sup> 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.

## External Examiners' report process

