

Section 9: External Examiner Involvement

Requirements for External Examiner

- 9.1 The main purposes of External Examining are:
- to verify that standards are appropriate for the award elements which the External Examiner has been appointed to examine
 - to assist in the comparison of academic standards across higher education awards and award elements
 - to ensure that assessment processes are fair and operated in line with University Regulations.
- 9.2 External Examiners must be appointed to take part in:
- **Assessment** of all modules at Undergraduate Credit Levels 5 and 6 and Postgraduate Credit Level 7; External Examiners are appointed to Credit level 3 and 4 for discrete programmes leading to a University award and where the modules in question form part of a course delivered in collaboration with another institution.
 - **Progression and award** of all final University of Westminster awards and all decisions on exclusions based on academic performance.
 - Consideration of course and module modifications as appropriate
- 9.3 **Subject Area**
External Examiners are appointed to provide subject area expertise. The size of the team should be such that each External Examiner has a reasonable and broadly equitable workload in terms of modules or subject areas covered and student numbers for each. Occasionally the appointment of one External Examiner to a Subject Area will be sufficient. Each approval term covers up to four academic sessions, in exceptional circumstances this may be extended by one further year.
- Note: From 2021/22 new External Examiners only will be appointed for five years, with the understanding that extensions will be very rare.
- 9.4 **Module Board**
External Examiners will be involved in the confirmation of module marks for a group of modules not owned by a single academic department. The External Examiner should have familiarity with modular or credit accumulation schemes and expertise in the assessment process.
- 9.5 **Progression and Award Board**
Chief External Examiners are appointed from the existing pool of Subject Area external examiners; they should normally have been a Subject Area External Examiner at the University of Westminster for at least one year. One Chief External Examiner will normally be appointed to a School-based Progression and Award Board. They will be involved in progression and award decisions for all final awards and decisions to exclude a student from a course on academic grounds.

Familiarity with course coverage and degree outcomes (rather than detailed subject knowledge) is required. The Chief External Examiner should have experience of modular or credit accumulation schemes and expertise in assessment.

- 9.6 Where an External Examiner is appointed to a Subject Area and subsequently to a different Board, for example a Module Board and/or Progression and Award Board, the total period of service should not exceed four years (or in the case of externals appointed from 2021/22 five years).
- 9.7 Where possible External Examiners for franchised or other collaborative courses should be the same individuals as those appointed to the equivalent course (or set of modules) taught at the University.
- 9.8 External Examiners (Industry consultation) may be appointed for subject areas or individual courses identified as at risk by the Portfolio Planning Committee Portfolio Sub-Committee in relation to employability data (such as below benchmark for highly skilled Graduate Outcomes data for three years). The role would **not** align to Progression and Award Boards or marking processes. It would instead formalise a link between industry and the course team, with a particular focus on curriculum and work-based learning opportunities for students.

Procedures for Approval of External Examiners

- 9.9 The Head of College is responsible for securing and submitting External Examiner nominations (in consultation with the Head of School and the Head of any other College which shares responsibility for the subject or course). Approval of nominations should be sought in the semester before the External Examiner must be involved in the assessment process.
- 9.10 Nominations for Module Board External Examiners should be made by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education).
- 9.11 All nominations must be made on a standard form available from the Quality and Standards Department's SharePoint site. All sections of the form must be completed in full. Incomplete forms will be returned to the Head of College or Head of School. A summary curriculum vitae (six pages or less) must accompany each nomination.
- 9.12 While the agreement of the individual should be sought for a copy of the CV and for submission of the nomination, no commitment to an approval can be made prior to the formal decision at University level being made. In no circumstances should a nominee be involved in assessments or progression and award decisions unless notification of the approval has been given by the Quality and Standards Office. Approvals cannot be made retrospectively.
- 9.13 The UK Visas and Immigration Office requires all universities to undertake identity checks on all those paid via staff payment system including External Examiners, to ensure that they are eligible to work in the UK. For this reason, a photocopy or scan of the passport of each nominee for External Examiner must be submitted along with the nomination form to the Quality and Standards Office.

- 9.14 Once appointed, all External Examiners must complete the required right to work checks for employment records. External Examiners may be required to bring their passport when they first visit the University as part of the College induction for verification or complete an online right to work check depending on their nationality and what kind of permission they have to work in the UK.
- 9.15 Decisions are normally made within a month to six weeks of a nomination being submitted but if extra information is required a final decision may take longer.

Criteria for Approval of External Examiners

- 9.16 Criteria for approval relate both to the individual nominee and the combined expertise of all External Examiners within the Subject Area. However, the overriding criteria for all nominations are that the proposed External Examiner possesses the necessary subject expertise at the appropriate level (Subject Areas) and an understanding/experience of credit accumulation (Module Boards and Progression and Award Boards), and, that they are wholly independent of the internal examining team and the Head of College and Head of School.
- 9.17 Within each Subject Area there should be:
- prior experience of both internal and External Examining at the relevant level;
 - a gender balance where possible and representation from a range of ethnic backgrounds where possible;
 - representation from industry, commerce or professional practice (where appropriate) alongside academic membership;
 - a spread in the host institutions of the External Examiners; normally only one External Examiner will be drawn from a particular institution or organisation except where a clear declaration and rationale is made at nomination.

In the case of a Subject Area which has only one External Examiner, these criteria apply to successive appointments.

- 9.18 To be appointed, External Examiner nominees must demonstrate:
- knowledge and understanding of agreed reference points for quality and standards;
 - competence and experience in the fields of study to which they will be appointed;
 - relevant academic and/or professional qualifications at least to the level of the qualification being examined, and/or practitioner experience, where appropriate;
 - competence and experience relating to the design and operation of a variety of assessment tasks;
 - appropriate standing and credibility in the field of study with academic and/or professional peers;
 - familiarity with the standard expected of students to achieve the module outcomes at the appropriate level;
 - fluency in English and fluency in the language of delivery and assessment if the course is not delivered in English;
 - meeting applicable criteria set by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies, where appropriate;
 - awareness of current developments in the field of study;
 - experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

9.19 A nominee will not be appointed if:

- they are a member of a governing body or committee of the University of Westminster or one of its partners, or a current employee of the University of Westminster or one of its partners;
- they have a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved in the course;
- they are required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the course;
- they are, or know they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the course;
- they are or 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 course or modules;
- they are former staff or students of the University of Westminster unless a period of five years has elapsed, and all students taught by or with the External Examiner have completed their course;
- there are reciprocal arrangements involving cognate programmes at another higher education provider;

Note: reciprocal arrangements are where a member of staff at the University of Westminster is an external examiner at another institution and an external examiner is nominated from that same University. In such cases a “reciprocal arrangement” is not possible within the same group of programmes. Members of staff are expected to declare external examiner positions to the Head of School.

- they will succeed an External Examiner from their home institution or department;
- there are other External Examiners in the team from the same department of the same higher education provider.

9.20 An External Examiner may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances but normally only after five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.

9.21 External Examiners must normally hold no more than two External Examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time.

9.22 Lack of prior experience of External Examining does not preclude approval so long as other External Examiners in the relevant Subject Area do have such experience. Where a sole External Examiner is required, lack of previous External Examining experience should not prevent approval if the nominee has significant and relevant internal assessment experience. In addition, induction can be provided by making an early approval and so providing a period of overlap with the outgoing, experienced examiner.

9.23 External Examiners (Industry Consultation) are not required to have prior experience of external examining, the same level of knowledge of agreed reference points for quality and standards or competence and experience relating to the design and operation of assessment tasks.

Exemptions to Criteria for Approval of External Examiners

In certain subject areas the requirement for gender balance in the examiner team may be difficult to fulfil, or the requirement of representation from practitioners may not be relevant. If these circumstances are judged to apply the responsible Head of College may present a reasoned case for a standing exemption to the particular criteria to the Quality and Standards Office. Other criteria will be waived only where exceptional circumstances have been fully demonstrated.

Applications for Extension and Changes in Responsibilities of External Examiners

Requests for extension to an External Examiner's term of approval must be made on the standard extension request form and supported by a statement from the Head of College. An extension into a fifth year will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. For External Examiners appointed from 2021/22 for 5 years, extensions are unlikely to be approved unless for example, if a course is due to be discontinued, it may be inappropriate to make a replacement nomination for one year only.

- 9.24 Any amendment to an External Examiner's terms of approval (such as a proposed move to a new Subject Area or Board, perhaps as part of a general reorganisation of coverage of Boards, or other revision of responsibilities from that stated in an examiner's approval letter) requires formal approval from the Quality and Standards Office who will act in consultation with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

Approval of Nominations of External Examiners

- 9.25 A detailed consideration of the nomination will be undertaken with reference to the criteria for approval, noting the External Examiners currently and previously approved to the Subject Area or Board. The Quality and Standards Office will request further information where necessary.
- 9.26 Recommendations are made in writing, with a copy of the nomination form, and are sent to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) on behalf of the University Teaching Committee, for a decision. Any conditions of approval will be agreed at this stage.
- 9.27 Notification of approval will be sent to the Head of College, the Subject Leader, and the relevant College Office with a copy of the approval letter. In cases of non-approval, the Quality and Standards Office will on behalf of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education) write to the Head of College to explain the reasons for non-approval. Conditions of approval will be highlighted on the memorandum signifying approval.

Approval of External Examiner Nominations by Professional Bodies

- 9.28 Where a course is required to have external examiners approved by a Professional Body, for example for a course accredited by that body, approval must be sought only after a nomination has been agreed by the University.
- 9.29 All such submissions to professional bodies are made by the Quality and Standards Office on the advice of the Head of College or Head of School concerned and require the approval of the Deputy Registrar, Quality and Standards.

- 9.30 It is particularly important to make such nominations well in advance of the proposed date of the first Subject Area or Board meeting which the External Examiner should attend to allow sufficient time for the required two stages of consideration.

Briefing External Examiners

- 9.31 If a nomination is approved, a letter giving details of the approval is issued by the Quality and Standards Office to the approved candidate accompanied by a direction to the online Handbook of Academic Regulations and the general guidance note on External Examining at the University.
- 9.32 The Head of College/Head of School (in association with the Course Leader) is responsible for ensuring that new External Examiners are briefed on the specific subject area or course(s) which they will consider, and their role in relation to the internal examiners.
- 9.33 Subject Area and Module Board External Examiners must receive full details of the syllabuses and assessment procedures for every module within the remit of the Board or Subject Area to which they have been appointed, with briefing on which modules are their special responsibility. They should also receive briefing on the courses to which these modules contribute (where many courses have common modules, it is best to provide a précis of details of these courses, rather than sending each External Examiner an unwieldy set of course documents). University Validation Panel reports and reports from outgoing External Examiners should also be made available.
- 9.34 External Examiners should be invited to the relevant Subject Area meeting(s). Such meetings are the University's expected forum for a holistic discussion of the curriculum, feedback and moderation processes. Subject Area meetings also enable a group of External Examiners in the same team to meet as a group at least once a year. The Subject Area meetings normally take place towards the end of the teaching year ahead of the Progression and Assessment Board and enable discussions that can feed forward into the next academic year. External Examiners are expected to attend Subject Area meetings (in person or virtually) at least once a year. Further information is available in Section 14 of the Academic Regulations.
- 9.35 New Chief External Examiners must be provided with all course and award specific assessment regulations (including details of foundation certificate programmes where these are part of the course scheme).
- 9.36 The advantage of early approval is that good induction can be provided, e.g. attendance at an Assessment Board as an observer and/or a more informal meeting with staff and students.
- 9.37 As well as providing an initial briefing it is important to inform External Examiners of subsequent changes to module or course content and/or assessment regulations. Where changes are made across the whole institution, for example in University Assessment Regulations, the Quality and Standards Office will provide updates.
- 9.38 Where External Examiners are appointed to a collaborative partner based overseas the Head of College is responsible for ensuring the expected University Health and Safety process is undertaken prior to each trip, including ensuring the required travel insurance process has been conducted.

Protocols for External Examiners

- 9.39 External Examiners should not be asked to take on responsibilities which are outside their original contract with the University as specified in the approval letter, unless this has been formally approved and the External Examiner has consented to the change.
- 9.40 Good notice should be provided of scheduled assessment dates and of days when attendance at the University will be required. Wherever possible provisional dates should be cross-checked before being finalised to avoid a clash of Subject Area meetings or Boards or other engagements. Campus Registries are responsible for notifying Board dates to External Examiners and once notified to External Examiners, dates should only be changed in exceptional circumstances.
- 9.41 Draft assignment briefs and examination papers, as well as papers to be set for deferred re-sits, must be sent to External Examiners with adequate time for checking. Within the overall time constraints of examination and Board schedules, every effort should be made to give External Examiners adequate time for review of marked scripts and other work.
- 9.42 The sampling methods used to decide which work will be sent to an External Examiner must be agreed with them in advance; the examiner has the right to request to see any assessed work.
- 9.43 The External Examiner may request any information relevant to their responsibilities from the University. Depending on the information's nature, such requests should either be addressed to the Head of School, Course Leader or to the Quality and Standards Office.

Role of External Examiners

- 9.44 The University operates a Single Tier Assessment Board process (with the exception of some modules). The role External Examiners is outlined in [Section 13 of the Academic Regulations](#).

Attendance at Boards

Module Boards

- 9.45 External Examiners have the right to attend any Module Board for which they are approved to act but the Board will not be invalidated by the unavoidable absence of an external examiner provided that:
- sufficient expertise is judged by the Chair to be available to enable the board to fulfil its role;
 - the absent External Examiner has reviewed assessments for which they are responsible and has provided comments to the Board and has signified consent to the continuation of the Board in their absence;
 - the absent External Examiner endorses the recommendations of the Board in writing (or gives reasons for dissent);
 - where possible, the External Examiners present at the Board reflect the University's policy in respect of balance of academic and professional experience and gender.

Progression and Award Boards

- 9.46 External Examiners must attend all Progression and Award Boards to which they have been appointed, this can include virtually, if the opportunity to contribute to discussions is possible. With the prior agreement of the relevant external examiner the following exceptions are permitted by correspondence:
- following referred or deferred assessment
 - where only intermediate awards are being considered
 - Where only Credit level 3 or 4 modules are being considered, except where a professional body may make such a requirement or where such modules compose a discrete award.

Procedures for External Examiners' Reports

- 9.47 External Examiners are required to report annually after the last relevant Assessment Board or Subject Area meeting. However, they may submit additional reports at any time during the session. Reports should respond to the issues listed in the University's Report Guidance Note.
- 9.48 Reports must be returned within six weeks of attendance at a Subject Area or Board meeting to the Quality and Standards Office; reports received by other staff should be passed on immediately. In addition to reporting annually, the External Examiner is also invited to, at the end of their appointment, report on any changes or common themes which have emerged during the term of office.
- 9.49 All reports are acknowledged on receipt and published on the University's External Examiner information system.
- 9.50 The Head of College with academic responsibility for an Assessment Board or Subject Area is responsible for ensuring that a written reply is sent to each External Examiner and that appropriate action is taken in response to the points raised by the External Examiner. The task of writing responses may be delegated, for example to the Head of School or the Course Leader. These responses must be sent to External Examiners and the Quality and Standards Office no later than the end of the term following the Board meeting to which they relate.
- 9.51 The Head of College should identify any issues (e.g. on resources) which are outside their control and refer the report to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.
- 9.52 Reports are discussed during the relevant continuous improvement process, and they are included by the Course Team in Course cyclical review process documents, with a commentary from the Course Team.
- 9.53 The Quality and Standards Office will conduct an annual audit of all External Examiner reports for the previous session along with the responses to them. A critical read will be undertaken to identify any general points, particularly on assessment procedures, issues of concern and to draw out aspects of good practice worth disseminating. The conclusions may lead to recommendations to Academic Council for changes to policy or guidelines on external examining.
- 9.54 The Quality and Standards Office is responsible for ensuring that External Examiners are reminded of the need to submit their reports promptly.

Fees and Expenses for External Examiners

- 9.55 The fee due to each External Examiner is agreed at the point of formal approval and is stated in the contract. A supplementary fee may be paid for necessary attendance of more than two visits per year. Payment of the fee is conditional upon submission of the annual report, engagement with the Course team during the academic year and compliance with Home Office right to work checks. Fees are subject to tax and national insurance deductions.
- 9.56 Expense claim forms are provided to External Examiners, completed forms should be returned to the Quality and Standards Office.

Termination of External Examiners Appointments

- 9.57 The University will consider the early termination of an External Examiner's contract where that External Examiner has demonstrated an inability or unwillingness to fulfil the standard responsibilities of the role or has behaved in a manner that does not meet normal expectations or places the reputation of the University at risk.
- 9.58 Submission for consideration of early termination should be submitted to the Quality and Standards Office. Grounds for such submission include:
- Non-submission of the External Examiner's annual report or submission of a report that does not meet the minimum standard required;
 - Non-attendance at the University during a session without provision of an acceptable cause;
 - Failure to fulfil the normal set of duties required of an External Examiner e.g., not responding to invitations to attend, remaining out of contact with a team or failing to return draft question papers or marked scripts;
 - Changes to their personal circumstances such as losing the UKVI designation of "right to work" or retiring from their post;
 - Where a conflict of interest has arisen during the term office and cannot be resolved by other adjustments or my mutual agreement;
 - Loss of professional standing due to misconduct at work e.g., fraud or being found guilty of a criminal offence.
- 9.59 External Examiners will be informed of the decision to terminate their appointment by the Deputy Registrar, Quality and Standards.