



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Guidance for External Examiners (Taught Provision)



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May we take this opportunity to thank you for agreeing to serve as external examiner for this academic session. We are most grateful to you.

The University places great value on our external examiners and upon the expertise you bring to this role. External examiners' views form a key part of the University's quality assurance processes. The reports we obtain from you receive careful consideration both in the annual academic review and during the in-depth review of programmes.

This guidance document supplements the University's Code of Practice on External Examining (Taught Provision) and should assist you in carrying out your duties effectively. It includes contact details, information on how the external examiner system is managed at Birmingham, and provides links to relevant sections of University legislation.

We hope you will find your time as an external examiner for the University of Birmingham rewarding.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jon Green'.

Professor Jonathan Green
Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)

Contact Details

The external examiner system is managed by the Policy & Quality Assurance section of the University Registry.

Tel: 0121 440 4049

Email: externalexaminers@contacts.bham.ac.uk

External examiner homepage: www.birmingham.ac.uk/external



Using this document

This guidance is designed to supplement the University Code of Practice on External Examining (Taught Provision). Where a section refers to a part of the Code of Practice the relevant clause is listed in brackets.

The term 'School' is used throughout this document with reference to your role and responsibilities but it is acknowledged that your main point of contact might be at Programme, Department or College level.

In a number of sections the guidance advises you to contact us should any queries arise during your appointment. Please use the contact details on page 2 for this purpose.

1. Your Appointment

Once your nomination has been approved by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) or their Deputy on behalf of the University you should receive an **External Examiner Appointment Letter**.

This will include details regarding;

- The academic sessions you have been appointed for;
- The School you will be working with;
- The programme(s) you have been assigned to;
- The fee for each session.

Please check that all of this information is correct, and contact us if you have any queries. With the letter you will receive a reply slip, asking you to confirm that you accept the appointment as external examiner on the terms stated.

The University appoints its external examiners to a normal period of service of **four years**. In some cases external examiner appointments are extended into a fifth year but this is considered exceptional and a case has to be made by the School to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) or their Deputy.

2. Contact Details

It is important that we are able to contact our external examiners throughout the year. Therefore, we ask that you keep us informed of any changes to your contact details (address, phone numbers, and email address) including changes to your place of employment.

Please note we are increasingly using email as our method of communication with external examiners.



3. Induction (3.1-3.8)

When your appointment has been confirmed the relevant School is notified, and from this point on the University would expect a designated contact to work with you in ensuring you have all the information needed in order to fulfil your role as an external examiner.

This should include:

- Programme handbooks (to include programme specifications);
- Module specifications;
- Student handbooks;
- Marking and assessment criteria;
- Guidance on marking and moderation practices;
- Relevant QAA subject benchmark statements;
- Details of Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements where appropriate;
- Key dates for the year (e.g. Board of Examiners meetings);
- A copy of the previous external examiner's report and actions arising as a result;
- Details of Degree Apprenticeships where appropriate;
- Details of programmes delivered on the University's Dubai campus where appropriate.

The University holds an induction event in March/April, which all newly-appointed external examiners are encouraged to attend where possible. You may also be invited by the School to visit the University to help familiarise yourself with the programme(s) you have been asked to examine, or to attend days when students' work is on display (e.g. Poster Days).

If you feel you have not received sufficient information from the School, or have not been made aware of key dates well in advance [please contact us](#).

4. Code of Practice on External Examining (Taught Provision)

[The Code of Practice on External Examining \(Taught Provision\)](#) is central to the University's External Examiner System. All newly-appointed external examiners receive a copy of the Code of Practice and all external examiners are notified if any substantial changes are made to the Code for a new academic session.

The Code is designed to map on to the Quality Assurance Agency's UK Quality Code and the Advice and Guidance on External Expertise.



It is suggested that on appointment you familiarise yourself with both the University's Code of Practice and the QAA guidance¹.

5. Draft Assessments (5.6)

The University expects Schools to provide external examiners with all draft assessments, and accompanying model answers / marking criteria, for comment and approval. When scrutinising draft assessments, external examiners are also requested to flag up any issues relating to academic content, for example, ensuring that questions are solvable, logical and appropriate for the level of study. Schools should share draft assessments in good time to provide you with ample opportunity to provide feedback on the assessments. In return the School should reply to you indicating how your comments have been taken into account, with a full explanation if any of your suggestions have not been acted upon.

For programmes being delivered on the University's Dubai campus, external examiners should scrutinise draft assessments for the Dubai-based programme if the assessment differs from the Birmingham-based version of the programme.

6. Role in Marking/Moderation procedures

a) Approach (5.1, 5.4)

One of the main roles of the external examiner is to scrutinise the marking and moderation procedures of the University, in order to ensure high academic standards, which are comparable with other universities in the sector.

We do not ask our external examiners to determine marks for individual students but to consider, and provide feedback on, the consistency and accuracy of marking across a cohort. This is achieved through reviewing the marking within each module, and between modules of the same level.

b) Work samples (5.9, 5.10)

The University expects external examiners to be provided with samples of marked student work. This is usually done in one of two ways:

- i. The work sample is sent through the post to the external examiner for scrutiny, with an indication of the date the work needs to be returned to the University.
- ii. The external examiner is invited on to campus (often just prior to the Board of Examiners meeting) in order to view the work samples and for ease of access to the full set of work for each module.

In either case you should have been made aware of the timescales involved, in order for you to set aside sufficient time to scrutinise the work samples in question. The

¹<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>
<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/external-expertise>



School should also have agreed with you the size and scope of the sample. For example, where you are part of a team of external examiners, it is likely you will be allocated a group of modules according to your area of expertise.

Where external examiners are responsible for programmes delivered on the University's Dubai campus, a sample of assessed work produced by Dubai-based students should be provided by Schools to the external examiner for scrutiny.

It should also be noted that, where appropriate, samples of assessed work from Degree Apprenticeship programmes are provided to the relevant external examiner for scrutiny.

The School should inform you of your role with respect to work samples but, as a general rule, the following list gives an idea of what you should be looking at:

- i. The work sample should be from across the full mark range;
- ii. There should be a clear indication of how a mark has been arrived at;
- iii. There should be evidence of the moderation process (e.g. markers' comments);
- iv. Markers' comments should map on to the relevant marking criteria and reflect the mark awarded.

c) Resolving Disagreements (5.11 – 5.14)

There may, on occasion, be instances where you disagree with the marks awarded by the internal markers within a mark sample. If this occurs then you can request that the School undertakes an additional level of moderation or re-marking. However, this must apply to all students who have completed the assessment in question, not just those within the work sample.

The University does not permit external examiners to alter the mark of an individual student's work from the sample, as this would be inequitable for those whose work has not received the additional scrutiny you provide.

The University would expect disagreements between internal markers to have been resolved before the work is seen by an external examiner (e.g. through the use of additional internal markers). However, in exceptional circumstances, where it has not been possible to agree a mark internally, the views of the external examiner can be taken into account when agreeing the final mark.

7. Board of Examiners Meetings

a) Attendance (6.1-6.5)

The University considers all external examiners to be full members of the relevant Board of Examiners (BoE) meetings. On appointment, the School should inform you of



the dates of the BoE meetings. The University expects all external examiners to attend BoE meetings as part of their duties.

If you are unable to attend a BoE meeting this should be agreed well in advance with the School, so that an alternative mechanism can be put in place to obtain your agreement on the results and decisions made. In such cases technology is being increasingly utilised by Schools (e.g. Skype, video conferencing). Please note Schools and the external examiner should ensure that, if video conferencing is used, the privacy of the information being discussed is maintained. Schools must be confident that the external examiner is linking up from a suitably private location.

Please note that external examiners responsible for programmes delivered on the University's Dubai campus will not be expected to travel to Dubai. All marks and progress/award decisions for Dubai based programmes will be managed through the existing Birmingham-based exam board meetings. It is likely that external examiners will have some discussions with the relevant Dubai-based programme lead via teleconferencing.

b) Endorsement of Results/Awards (6.6-6.8)

A key role for the external examiner at the BoE meeting is their endorsement of the results and awards made and you should be requested to sign a mark/award list or similar to evidence your endorsement.

If an external examiner does not endorse a decision taken at the BoE meeting this will be recorded and referred to the University Progress and Awards Board (PAB). In such cases the School will subsequently inform the external examiner of the final decision of the PAB meeting

9. Reporting procedures

a) Submitting your report (7.1-7.7)

The University requires all external examiners to submit an annual report using the template provided. This is in line with the QAA's guidance and the University's template has been developed to map on to QAA requirements. The template can be found at our [external examiner homepage](#). We ask that all report forms are completed electronically and sent via e-mail to externalexaminers@contacts.bham.ac.uk as this assists us in the storage and communication of the reports (approximately 400 per year).

The deadlines for the submission of reports is as follows:

- **Undergraduate programmes 10th July**
- **Postgraduate taught programmes 9th November**

Where programmes have a non-standard start date the deadline for the report is agreed with the School and University on appointment. If an external examiner wishes



to submit any further comments (e.g. following the supplementary examination period for UG programmes) they are free to do so, again using the report template.

The deadlines are set to allow the University's Quality Assurance Committee to consider the issues arising out of external examiners' reports, and determine any further action required. The deadlines are intended to give external examiners sufficient time to make their reports while allowing the reports to be considered in good time for any necessary follow-up action to be taken early in the following academic session.

If we have not received your report by the specified deadline the University Registry will contact you either by phone, letter or e-mail. We would be grateful if you could notify us of any problems or circumstances which may prevent you from submitting your report by the deadlines stated.

Please note, if you have been appointed to programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level we do require two separate report forms to be completed for the academic session.

All external examiner reports are read by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), or their nominee, and the University reserves the right to request additional information from an external examiner if it is felt there is insufficient detail in the original report. Therefore, we ask that all sections of the report are completed as fully as possible. We also request that no individual member of the University is identified in your report.

b) Responding to your report (8.1-8.8)

On receipt of your report the University Registry will send you an acknowledgement email. After your report has been read by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) or their nominee, it is passed to the School. If your report raises developmental issues you have asked the School to consider you should receive a response to this directly from the School in due course. We ask that Schools respond to external examiner reports within 6-8 weeks. However, it may take longer if issues are raised that the School needs to discuss at committee-level before responding. In these cases the School may need to send you a further response later in the year to update you on actions arising from your comments.

If your report raises issues regarding University regulations or procedures the University Registry will, in conjunction with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) or their Deputy, respond to you directly. The time it will take to respond will depend on the complexity of the issue raised but again, as with School responses, we would aim to reply to you within 6-8 weeks.

If you feel at any time that issues raised in your report have not been considered appropriately by the School or University [please contact us](#).



Feedback from external examiner reports is also considered by Quality Assurance committees at both College and University-level. If any common issues or themes arise out of these meetings information will be communicated back to all external examiners, detailing the University's response to the issue and any subsequent changes to legislation or processes.

c) Fee payment

On receipt of your report you will be eligible to receive your fee. Please refer to your appointment letter for further information. Should you require any assistance about your fee payment please contact your School Administrative Contact.

10. Working with Students

a) Programme Information (9.1, 9.4-9.5)

In line with the QAA's guidance, the University is required to include the name, position and home institution of external examiners in programme information which is made available to students. In most cases this will be the programme handbook, but in some instances Schools may put this information on the University Intranet, which is password protected.

All students registered on taught programmes will receive a guidance document to promote the role of external examiners. In this document the University will explain the 'do's and don'ts' of their interactions with external examiners, including an explicit instruction not to try and contact you directly under any circumstances. Please let us know if you are approached at any point during your appointment either by a student or by a third party on behalf of a student.

b) Meeting with Students (9.2-9.3)

The University encourages external examiners to meet with representative groups of students in order to discuss their experiences of the programme of study, so you can provide useful feedback to the School. Your School should offer you this opportunity and please feel free to request such a meeting if one is not offered to you. The meetings are usually held in relatively informal circumstances such as over lunch. Schools should inform students of the purpose of these meetings, and the limitations (e.g. not being able to discuss individual assessment outcomes). If you are unable to attend a meeting in person at the University, alternative arrangements, via Skype for example, are permitted and should be discussed with your School contacts.

Please note that external examiners responsible for programmes delivered on the University's Dubai campus will not be expected to travel to Dubai to meet with students. It is likely that external examiners will have some discussions with the relevant Dubai-based students via teleconferencing.

c) Student Access to Reports (9.7-9.9)



External examiners reports are made available in full to Student Representatives as part of the regular business of Staff Student Committee meetings. However, any student may request to see an external examiner's report and Schools are required to have a mechanism in place to allow for this to occur. In addition, College-level Student Representatives are present at College-level Quality Assurance Committees, and our Guild Sabbatical Officers are present at both College and University-level Quality Assurance committee meetings, where discussion of the issues raised by external examiners takes place.

11. Resignation / Termination of Appointment (2.11, 2.12)

a) Resignation

During your 4-year tenure there may come a point where you feel that, because of a change in your own circumstances, you are unable to continue your duties as external examiner. If this should occur the University would be grateful if you would notify us in writing, giving a three-month notice period. Letters of resignation should be sent to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Head of School.

b) Termination of appointment

The University reserves the right to terminate an external examiner's appointment at any point during their term should the external fail to fulfil their roles and responsibilities as laid out in the University Code of Practice. This may include; unexplained absence from Board of Examiners meetings, the non-completion of scrutiny of work samples, failure to complete the annual report in a timely fashion. Termination of appointment is viewed as a 'last resort' and the University does actively work with its external examiners to ensure this action would only be taken in exceptional circumstances. An external examiner appointment can also end early if the programme(s) they have been assigned to are withdrawn.

12. Causes for concern (7.7, 11.1-11.3)

If at any time during your appointment you feel the need to raise confidential concerns, for example where it is necessary to identify an individual within the University, you may submit a separate confidential report (either by letter or email) to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) pvceducation@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Section 11 of the Code of Practice details the steps you can take as external examiner if you feel a concern has not been fully addressed by the University.

13. Further University Information

a) Assessment Regulations

The University's assessment regulations can be found at the following web page. <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/legislation/regulations/Regulations-2018-19.aspx> (Sections 6 and 7 being the most pertinent to external examiners).



b) Codes of Practice

There are a number of other Codes of Practice which may be of use to you in your role.

<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/legislation/codesofpractice/index.aspx>

- Assessment of Taught Programmes and Module Assessment and Feedback
- Plagiarism
- Reasonable Diligence
- Student Support
- Adjusted Regulations

Registry (Policy & Quality Assurance)
Academic Services
University of Birmingham