



External Examiners (Taught Provision) A guide for students

Who are External Examiners and what do they do?

An External Examiner is normally a senior academic from another university whose role is to assist in monitoring the quality of the education we provide to our students. They help to ensure that the awards you receive at Birmingham are comparable to similar awards at other UK universities.

Sometimes, a team of External Examiners will be appointed to your programme of study, with each member assigned to specific modules. In some cases there may also be an External Examiner with a professional background if your programme has professional requirements.

External Examiners are asked to scrutinise the assessment and marking processes on your programme of study. This is to ensure they are fair, rigorous and conducted in accordance with University procedures and regulations. They do this through a number of important roles. For example External Examiners will:

- read and approve all draft assessments set in each module (coursework and examination papers);
- read samples of student work to ensure the marking is fair and accurate;
- provide feedback on the consistency and accuracy of marks awarded;
- attend Board of Examiners meetings to endorse marks and awards;
- provide an annual written report to the University on their findings.

External examiners will not determine the outcome of your results or final award. The confirmation of marks and award decisions at Board of Examiners meetings are agreed by the Board collectively. External Examiners have no direct influence in determining an individual student's marks or award. They are asked to ensure that our marking and awards are in line with national standards and comparable with other Universities.

Who is my External Examiner and can I meet them?

The name, home institution and post held of the External Examiner(s) appointed for your programme of study will be available in your programme documentation (e.g. student handbook or through your School's Canvas area).

In most cases you will probably not meet your External Examiner. However, External Examiners are provided with the opportunity to meet representative groups of students from the relevant programme of study. So you might be asked to meet an External Examiner, together with other students, to discuss your experience of the programme. If this happens, your School should provide you with more detailed guidance about the purpose of that meeting and its limitations.

However, a student must not contact an external examiner directly. External Examiners are required to remain impartial at all times and they do not participate in determining marks for individual students. Students should not attempt to contact any External Examiner, and External Examiners are not permitted to respond to contacts made by students or anyone on behalf of a student. If a student is found to have contacted an external examiner they may be subject to University disciplinary procedures as set out in Regulation 8: Conduct. If you need clarification with regard to a mark you have been awarded for a piece of assessment, you should contact your personal tutor or programme/module leader in the first instance.

How does an External Examiner provide feedback and how is this feedback used?

External Examiners are required to submit an annual written report on their views of the academic standards of the programme of study, based on the evidence they have seen. Schools are required to provide a response to the External Examiner which addresses any issues raised in their report. This helps University staff reflect on their programmes and modules which can, in turn, lead to developments or improvements to a programme of study.

All External Examiner reports are scrutinised by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) or their nominee and discussed at relevant School, College and University level committees. The report and the School's response are also discussed with Student Reps as part of the normal business of Staff Student Committee meetings. The minutes of such meetings are normally made available to all students by the School, either through Student Rep noticeboards or via Canvas.

A student can request to see an External Examiner's report and the School's response. Your School will have a mechanism in place to provide this, ideally with the opportunity to talk through the report and the response with a member of staff.

For undergraduate students you can expect to be able to have access to the previous session's external examiner report and School response from around November. For postgraduate taught students this is likely to be March. This allows time for the report to be carefully considered by the University and your School, and for the response to be written giving you the full picture of any issues that have been raised about your programme of study. You can also obtain your external examiner's report by contacting the Registry directly at externalexaminers@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Where can I find more information on external examiners and quality assurance?

Further information about External Examiners can be found at:

- General Information on the University's External Examiner system
www.birmingham.ac.uk/external
- University Code of Practice on External Examining (Taught Provision)
www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/external-examiner-system.pdf

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) webpage on External Examining

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

If you have any specific questions about External Examiners you should either contact your School Teaching Office (or equivalent) or you can contact the University Registry at externalexaminers@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

The External Examiner System is just one of the ways in which the quality of higher education is maintained. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has a role in safeguarding standards and working to improve the quality of UK Higher Education. Their website (www.qaa.ac.uk) contains further information about the systems in place for ensuring academic standards in Universities.¹ They have a section on their website dedicated to student engagement:

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/who-we-work-with/students>

¹ It should be noted that the QAA UK Quality Code is currently being revised. Until the new UK Quality Code is published the University will continue to work to the existing UK Quality Code.