

# Quick Guide on Quality Assurance

## External Examiner System

### Main principles

External Examiners (EEs) are senior academics from different UK Higher Education Institutions (HE Institutions), who are appointed to monitor the quality of the education that the University provides to its students, and assure that the University's academic standards are similar to those of other HE Institutions. All University programmes of study at foundation, undergraduate or postgraduate taught level must have one (or more) EE appointed (this includes programmes delivered at other campuses, and apprenticeships).

### Role of External Examiners

EEs provide impartial and independent advice on the University's academic standards, and student achievement in relation to those standards. EEs ensure that the University's assessment and marking processes are fairly operated, by:

- Scrutinising the marking and moderation procedures of the University, in order to ensure high academic standards, which are comparable with other HE Institutions.
- Moderating the University's assessment processes, by: reading and approving draft assessments set in each module; reviewing samples of students' assessed work, and ensuring that marking is fair and accurate; providing feedback on the consistency and accuracy of marks awarded.
- Meeting with students and staff in their respective Schools.
- Attending Board of Examiners meetings, to endorse and/or scrutinise awards.
- Providing an annual written report to the University on the above, outlining their views of the academic standards of the relevant programme of study (see 'Annual reporting' below, for further information on EEs' reports).

EEs do not, and cannot, alter students' marks. However, if they do not agree with marks awarded in a sample of work, EEs can request further moderation checks.

### Appointment of External Examiners

EEs are appointed by Schools, with suitability checks conducted by Registry. This suitability check includes:

- Ensuring that the EE's CV evidences the level of expertise and knowledge which is necessary to cover the programme(s) to be externally examined.
- Ensuring that the EE has no conflicts of interest, eg: the nominated EE would not have a personal and/or professional relationship with staff or students on the programme(s).
- Ensuring that the programme and the School are not over reliant on EEs from one institution.

## External Examiners and student meetings

The University encourages EEs to meet (informally) with Student Representatives from the relevant programme of study; only EEs and students are to be present at the meeting. As such, these meetings provide an opportunity for students to freely discuss their experiences of their programme of study with somebody who is independent to the University. The EE will discuss student feedback with the respective School, and students' views will be instrumental in wider University processes where action is taken, such as the Annual Review of Taught Programmes and Modules process.

Meetings can be held virtually, or in-person, to suit the circumstances and arrangements of the programmes, students, and EE(s). For example, meetings via Zoom are permitted.

## Annual reporting

Following the Board of Examiners meetings, EEs are required to complete an Annual Report. Annual Reports contain any comments that EEs may have about: information they have/have not received; the University's curriculum, assessment, and feedback standards; marking and moderation protocols, and clarity of how marks are derived; awards decisions; appropriateness of Board of Examiner meetings; outcomes of meetings with students; good practice; recurring issues from the previous year.

Schools are required to provide a response to the EE's Annual Report, which addresses any issues raised. This helps University staff reflect on their programmes of study, which can lead to positive developments and improvements.

EEs' reports (and subsequent action taken by the School in response to any issues raised) should be made available in full to Student Representatives, as part of the regular business of Staff Student Forum meetings. However, any student may request to see an EE's report (and actions resulting); students are not permitted to contact EEs directly, therefore Schools are required to have a mechanism in place to allow for this to occur. This mechanism should be communicated to students (eg: through a statement in the student handbook, or equivalent). If a request is made, it is suggested that a designated staff member should meet with the student, in order to talk through the report (and actions), and provide additional context and commentary to the documents. Undergraduate students can expect to have access to the previous session's EE report, and accompanying School response, from November; for postgraduate taught students, this is likely to be March.

## Further information

For more information regarding External Examiners, visit:

<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/externalexaminers/index.aspx>