



**QUEEN'S  
UNIVERSITY  
BELFAST**



# Risk-Based

**E X T E R N A L  
E X A M I N I N G**

**STANDARD OPERATING  
PROCEDURES**



## External Examining Standard Operating Procedures

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## 1. Key Contacts

Academic Affairs <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nomination</li><li>• Appointment</li><li>• Quality Assurance Report</li></ul>	<a href="mailto:externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk">externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk</a>
Fees and Expenses	<a href="mailto:extexamexpenses@qub.ac.uk">extexamexpenses@qub.ac.uk</a>
School Office	<a href="#">School office contact details</a>

## 2. External Examiner Appointment

External examiners are appointed by the Education Committee (Quality and Standards) based on the recommendation of the relevant School. An external examiner should normally have **substantial experience in teaching and examining** and should hold an academic appointment of at least **Senior Lecturer** level.

Nominations, and in exceptional cases extension requests, to commence in the following academic year should be submitted to Academic Affairs by **the last Friday in March each year** for consideration by the Education Committee (Quality and Standards) in May of the relevant year. Academic Affairs will provide a summary of external examiners requiring replacement in the following academic year to School colleagues in December annually. Faculty Deans will have oversight of those examiners requiring replacement to ensure nominations are received in adequate time for Faculty consideration and onward referral to ECQS, if required.

Links to the relevant forms can be found in the [guidance below](#). Vacancies should be advertised to invite expressions of interest well in advance of the March deadline.

### **Criteria for Appointment**

#### ***Person Specification***

The University will appoint external examiners who can evidence the following:

- (i) Knowledge and understanding of UK sector-agreed standards for the award(s) being assessed.
- (ii) Competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study such that the respect of academic and/ or professional peers can be commanded. It is expected that nominees are of at least Senior Lecturer level, or equivalent.
- (iii) Relevant academic qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined and/or practitioner experience.
- (iv) Competence and experience in designing and implementing a variety of assessment tasks.
- (v) That they meet any applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The University will not appoint as an external examiner those who:

- (i) Have excessive influence due to their standing in other roles, particularly when linked to the University, or because their inclusion in a team of external experts that has had oversight of QA processes in the nominating discipline creates an unbalanced view.
- (ii) Have a current or previous close personal, family or legal relationship with a student being assessed.
- (iii) Have been significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management, or assessment of the programme(s) in question. Significant involvement in this context refers to those directly involved with a close knowledge of one another's work.
- (iv) Have excessively engaged with the University or have been repeatedly re-engaged.
- (v) Are former staff or students of the institution unless a period of five years has elapsed, and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s).
- (vi) Are employed by a provider that is already currently providing an external examiner to the same programme grouping at Queen's. For example, a nominee from institution A to be assigned to

Film and Theatre Making would not be appropriate if an external examiner from institution A is already appointed in the area of Film Studies and Production.

- (vii) Are employed by an institution that has a currently appointed an external examiner in the same programme grouping from Queen's University Belfast.

Schools must use their judgement when ascertaining whether a conflict of interest exists. Therefore, this is a non-exhaustive list and other factors may be considered where appropriate.

### **Terms of Office**

The duration of an external examiner's appointment will normally be for four years, with the possibility of an extension of one year to ensure continuity.

An external examiner may be reappointed but only after a period of at least five years has elapsed since their last appointment.

External examiners normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes at any point in time.

Appointments to undergraduate programmes will run from 1 October in the year of appointment to 30 September in the final year.

Appointments to taught postgraduate programmes will run from 1 October in the year of appointment to 30 November in the final year. This arrangement permits the outgoing external examiner to moderate the dissertation for the final cohort of the appointment and permits a short period of opportunity for the incoming external examiner to shadow the outgoing external examiner before assuming full responsibility for the programme.

External examiners who retire from employment during their term of office can continue until the end of the period of appointment. The appointment of an external examiner will not normally extend beyond three years after retirement.

### ***Extensions***

There may be reasons for seeking an extension to the normal four-year term of office for a particular external examiner. Where a School wishes to propose an extension to the normal four-year term of office for an external examiner, it should complete the [Part A of the External Examiner nomination form](#) indicating that this is an extension request. The external examiner should then complete [Part B \(Self-Declaration\) of the nomination form](#). Academic Affairs will bring the request to the Education Committee (Quality and Standards) for consideration. If the Education Committee (Quality and Standards) approves the extension, Academic Affairs will write to the Head of School and the examiner with details of the terms of the extension and its duration.

### **Nomination Process**

Faculty Education Committees should have oversight of all nominations submitted within the Faculty. Faculty Education Committees must identify nominations that do not meet the appointment criteria and endorsement at Faculty level, if appropriate, is required prior to progressing the nomination to Education Committee (Quality and Standards) for consideration/approval. For those nominations that meet the appointment criteria, Faculty Education Committees have the authority to approve the nomination.

Prior to making a recommendation a member of School staff normally ascertains, by informal enquiry, that the nominee is willing to serve as an external examiner.

If the Head of School endorses the nomination, the relevant nomination forms should be submitted for consideration by the relevant Faculty Education Committee:

- [Part A of the nomination form](#) should be completed by the nominating School.
- [Part B \(Self-Declaration\) of the nomination form](#) should be completed by the nominee.

The nominating School must submit Part A of the nomination form once the nominee has confirmed that they agree to be nominated and the Head of School has endorsed the nomination.

Once Part A of the nomination form has been submitted, the nominating School should contact the nominee to request that Part B of the nomination form is completed. **Part B must not be submitted in advance of the School's submission of Part A.** Schools may wish to include the following information when making this request:

Dear External Examiner,

Following our recent conversation in relation to you undertaking an external examining role in the School of [INSERT SCHOOL] at Queen's University Belfast, the School have submitted some initial details to the External Examining Team.

The next step is for you to share some further personal information and details of your current role and external examining experience. Please submit the nominee declaration using the link below.

- [Part B \(Self-Declaration\) nomination form](#)

Your nomination form will then progress to the relevant Faculty Education Committee for consideration.

**To ensure that Part A of the nomination form and Part B are matched correctly, it is imperative to ensure that the email address for the nominee is entered correctly without any additional spaces.**

Appointments to teams of external examiners should normally be staggered, to ensure continuity of oversight.

### **Exceptions to the Nomination Criteria**

To submit an exception to the nomination criteria, a supporting statement from the Head of School must be included in [Part A of the nomination form](#) for the consideration of the relevant Faculty Education Committee and Education Committee (Quality and Standards).

### **Mentoring Arrangements**

Where an appointment at Queen's is an individual's first experience of external examining, the School must nominate a mentor to provide support and advice. A mentor should be a member of Queen's staff, who has experience as an external examiner at another institution and has no direct responsibility for the quality and standards of the provision under consideration. Mentors should be pre-agreed in advance of a nomination being submitted and the School is responsible for ensuring that the external examiner has access to contact details for their mentor.

## **Right to Work**

The immigration status of a nominee must be obtained by the School before submitting the nomination form to Academic Affairs. Following appointment, Schools must conduct a right to work check in line with the University procedure. Further guidance on Eligibility to Work is available from the [People and Culture Directorate](#).

## **Appointment Letter**

Once the relevant Faculty Education Committee/ Education Committee (Quality and Standards) has approved a nomination, Academic Affairs will send the external examiner a [letter of appointment](#) (copied to the School), together with these Standard Operating Procedures which include information about fees and expenses for external examiners.

## **Amendments to Appointment**

Changes to an external examiner's duties (for example, taking responsibility for a new or additional programme) will normally require approval by the Education Committee (Quality and Standards). The School should notify Academic Affairs ([externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk)) for consideration by the Education Committee (Quality and Standards).

## **Emergency Appointments**

An emergency appointment may be required when:

1. An external examiner is unexpectedly unable to fulfil their duties.
2. An external examiner resigns from the appointment.
3. A School fails to meet the deadline for the nomination of new and replacement external examiners.

The Head of School should arrange for the completion of [Part A of the nomination form](#), giving the reasons why an emergency appointment is required. The nominee should then complete [Part B of the nomination form](#).

Academic Affairs will bring the request to the attention of the relevant Faculty Dean who may authorise an emergency appointment on behalf of the Faculty Education Committee.

## **Termination**

Whilst the University hopes that such a situation will not arise, it reserves the right to give notice of premature termination of appointment to an external examiner whose performance or conduct is unsatisfactory or incompatible with the ethos of the School in which they examine.

Where such a situation does arise, the School must contact the external examiner and attempt to resolve the matter informally.

If this attempt fails, the Director of Education and Student Services, in consultation with the School, may issue a written warning to the external examiner, although this will not be a requirement where urgent action is more appropriate.



Should it become necessary to terminate the appointment prematurely, this will be subject to the authorisation of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education and Students, in consultation with the Director of Education and Student Services and Head of School.

Examples of circumstances that may prompt premature termination of the contract include non-fulfilment of role duties, including submission of the annual Quality Assurance Report within the specified timeframe.

Neither the raising of well-founded concerns about academic standards nor the submission of a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor (whether or not followed by the submission of a concern to QAA and/or a relevant professional body), is a valid ground for termination.

The external examiner may terminate the appointment contract early by giving at least one months' notice of termination to Academic Affairs ([externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk)).

### **3. The External Examiner Role**

A single external examiner role is adopted at Queen's to provide programme oversight.

Key to the external examiner role is the adoption of a risk-based approach to providing assurances on standards.

To implement the risk-based external examining role, the work of external examiners is divided into three dimensions, which should be afforded roughly equal time and effort:

- [Assessment Standard Setting](#)
- [Maintenance of Standards and Quality](#)
- [Critical Friend Discussion to Inform Programme Enhancement](#)

#### ***Engagement of External Examiners***

While all programmes and modules have an external examiner appointed to them, not all modules will have assessments sampled each year. A risk-based approach is adopted to identify the modules to be sampled each year, with input from the relevant external examiners.

A module may be identified for priority review if one, or more, of the below are true:

- (i) If the module is new.
- (ii) If there have been changes to the assessment profile.
- (iii) If student performance (i.e. average marks) for the current year deviates radically from the previous year.
- (iv) If previous student feedback has indicated significant issues with the module.
- (v) If the module utilises innovative teaching approaches that could optimise module delivery across the University.

The below models for the allocation and engagement of external examiners should be used. Schools may use a combination of both models across their suite of programmes.

- (i) Model 1: External Examiner by Programme

Where possible, programme level external examiners will be identified for each programme as outlined below:

- a. One external examiner per taught postgraduate programme.
- b. One to two external examiners per undergraduate subject available as a named component of a bachelor's degree.
- c. Two external examiners per undergraduate integrated master's degree.

- (ii) Model 2: External Examiner by Specialism

If the above is not possible for some/all School programmes, allocation of external examiners will be across the suite of programmes within an area (undergraduate and/or postgraduate), rather than for individual programmes (as appropriate). This enables subject expertise to be matched within and across programmes. Schools should consider whether an external examiner has sufficiently wide knowledge to work across related disciplines, or whether over the course of subsequent appointments, more focus is given to different sub-specialties.

This model provides an opportunity for Schools to rationalise the number of external examiners appointed to ensure best use of this resource.

### ***Allocation of Modules***

A risk-based approach should be adopted to identify the modules to be sampled each year. The workload of external examiners should be roughly comparable. It is suggested that allocating modules to external examiners should be undertaken by Directors of Education and Directors of Graduate Studies with input from other relevant staff with programme expertise. To accommodate input from the relevant staff, it may be useful to add this as an item to the agenda of a meeting of the School Education Committee. External examiners should also be consulted during this process.

A module may be identified for priority review if one, or more, of the below are true:

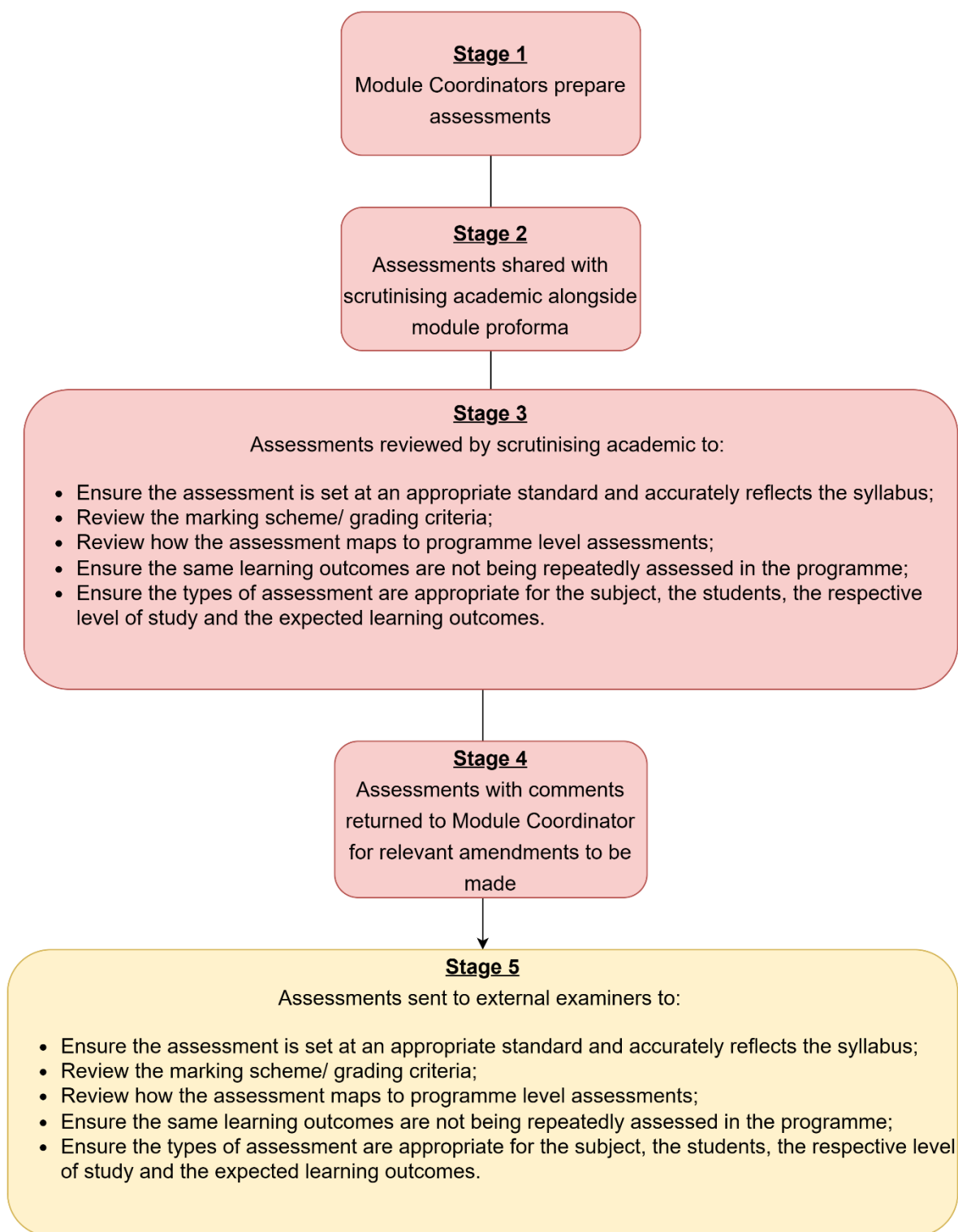
- (i) If the module is new.
- (ii) If there have been changes to the assessment profile.
- (iii) If student performance (i.e. average marks) for the current year deviates radically from the previous year.
- (iv) If previous student feedback has indicated significant issues with the module.
- (v) If the module utilises innovative teaching approaches that could optimise module delivery across the University.

### **Assessment Standard Setting**

Throughout the academic year, School colleagues must make contact with external examiners for input on assessment standard setting on modules within their allocated programmes. This should involve:

- a. Approving draft examination papers and other significant components of assessed work, ensuring that they are set at an appropriate standard and accurately reflect the syllabus; and reviewing the marking scheme/grading criteria.
- b. Ensuring the types of assessment are appropriate for the subject, the students, the respective level of study and the expected learning outcomes.

School colleagues may continue to follow their own assessment scrutiny processes. However, the below provides an outline of the expected process to be applied to ensure appropriate input on assessment standard setting.



## **Maintenance of Standards and Quality**

Prior to the meeting of the Board of Examiners School colleagues must engage with external examiners so that they may provide assurances on the maintenance of standards and quality. To fulfil this aspect of the role, external examiners must submit an [annual Quality Assurance report](#) to the University.

The attendance of external examiners at Board of Examiner meetings is optional as it is expected that external examiners are engaged with School colleagues throughout the academic year. However, where external examiners do attend Board of Examiner meetings, they are full members of the relevant Board. Where the consensus of the Board of Examiners is unclear, the Chair may call for members to vote on specific decisions. Where present, the external examiner has a single vote as a member of the Board and the majority decision of the members present at the Board of Examiners will be upheld.

This element of the role will involve:

- a. Reviewing the moderation approach and ensuring that internal moderation is consistent, by reviewing a limited selection of moderated scripts within their allocated modules.
- b. Reviewing programme and module outcome data to confirm the consistency of module and programme outcomes over time, identifying potential issues with module assessment, where required, and ensure outcomes are in line with sector comparators.
- c. In exceptional circumstances, advising on any proposed scaling of marks at a cohort level in advance of the Board of Examiners meeting.
- d. Confirming adherence to relevant assessment policies and procedures.

### ***Sampling and Moderation***

External examiners for taught courses are not responsible for, or involved in, the assessment of individual students - for example, they do not mark assessed work. However, to fulfil their role, external examiners view student work - ranging from reading essays or examination scripts to viewing performances (live or recorded), media or artefacts. This allows external examiners to see whether markers have assessed student performance against the standards of the course, to ensure consistency in marking and moderation processes, as well as helping to form a view on whether those standards are in line with national thresholds.

To review the internal moderation approach, the external examiner should be provided with access to all work, the external examiner can then select a sample of moderated and unmoderated scripts to review. External Examiners must review a sample of moderated scripts to provide assurances on the consistency of internal moderation. The sample size is at the discretion of the external examiner and should be adequate to provide assurance that the work has been properly marked across a range of student performance in the assessment. It is expected that external examiners sample no more than 10% of assessments across the assessed components of a module. In the case of very small/large numbers, a minimum of 10 scripts and a maximum of 50 scripts are suggested for external consideration.

Anonymous marking of student assessment is adopted at Queen's and is retained throughout the internal moderation process, but it is important that external examiners can identify scripts that have been internally moderated to affirm calibration of internal moderation. If scripts are marked via Canvas, one of the below solutions may be adopted to allow external examiners to identify scripts that have been internally moderated. If assessments are not marked via Canvas and Schools have their own procedures for identifying moderated assessments, these can continue to be used.

1. Internal moderators may record the anonymous codes of students whose work undergoes internal moderation, provided on submission cover sheets. After marks are released and anonymity is disabled, these identifiers can be used to identify students who had their work internally moderated. This information may then be entered into the Canvas Gradebook.
2. Internal moderators may leave comments on relevant anonymised submissions to denote internal moderation status. Once anonymity is disabled, assignments can be scanned to identify those with internal moderation comments, which can then be marked in the Canvas Gradebook for external examiner consideration.

### ***Programme and Module Outcomes***

In order for external examiners to confirm the consistency of module and programme outcomes over time, identify potential issues with module assessment, where required, and ensure outcomes are in line with sector comparators, key data sets must be shared.

External examiners should be provided with the below module and programme data to inform their assurances on the consistency of standards over time.

#### a. Module Data

All external examiners should be provided with at least the module data [presented in the example](#). Providing this data for all modules for the programme for at least the **previous three academic years** allows external examiners to review the consistency of standards over time and identify potential issues with assessed components to be addressed by the School.

#### b. Programme Data

External examiners should be provided with at least the [attached data](#) for at least the **previous three academic years**:

- Number of students registered on the programme.
- Distribution of classifications awarded.

Module and programme data can be gathered using QGIS reports (further information below).

The process in QGIS will produce a word document for each Academic Plan/Subplan on Programme Specification for a given term. This word document contains the breakdown of degree classifications for that programme for the past 3 years, as well as the module breakdown, including module average and pass rates pre and post resit.

### **Summary of Report Criteria (Modular):**

The report returns the percentage of passes where the grading basis is GRD and then the percentage of passes where the grading basis is GRD and RES.

This is the closest to before and after resit period that can realistically be reported out of QGIS.

The criteria for students' results to be included in the calculations is that the grade is not "F", "PH", "AUD" or blank. It also excludes any instance where the grade is "NA" and the Exam Board Note is not "F" or "FX".

The report is also set up to return the pass rates for any Pass/No Pass, however it is not possible to distinguish between first and re-sit pass rates.

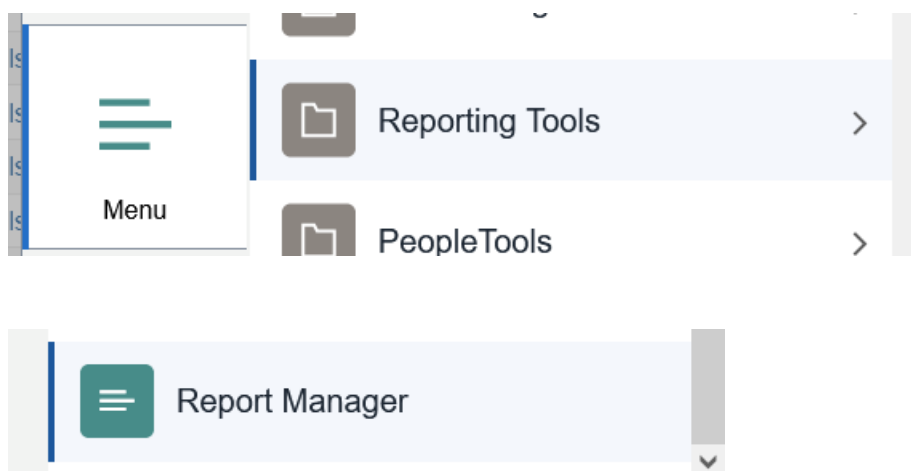
### **Retrieving Reports**

Nominated users will receive an email for each programme as the process runs in QGIS. This email will contain a link to Report Manager in QGIS, where the user can download the file. Once the process has run, reports will be available for 14 days.

Report Manager can also be accessed in QGIS:

### **Menu > Reporting Tools > Report Manager**

Click on the third Tab "Administration"



### ***Onsite Review of Student Work***

Some external examiners will be required to attend onsite assessments as part of their role. The School will inform external examiners if this is the case.

### ***Issues Raised During Moderation***

In viewing samples of student's assessed work, external examiners should not be invited to make recommendations on or change the marks of individual students or individual assessments.

External examiners have the power to recommend to the Board of Examiners appropriate action to ensure consistency of standards and may advise the Board on changes to marks across the module. In exceptional cases, where serious concerns about the assessment or marks awarded arise in the sample of work reviewed, the external examiner may refer the work back to the module co-ordinator for review and recommend appropriate action for the School's consideration. This may include a level of moderation (additional to that already undertaken), re-marking to be undertaken by the internal markers or scaling of the component marks. This must apply to all students who had undertaken the component of assessment. Where this occurs, the outcome should be documented

and communicated to the relevant Board of Examiners meeting. The external examiner should be kept informed of the action taken, including if the School decides not to take action in relation to any particular comments.

The Board should take the opinion of the external examiner very seriously. However, the final decision on marks and classifications must be a majority decision of the Board of Examiners.

### **Informing Programme Enhancement**

A key element of the external examiner role is the requirement for external examiners to engage in critical friend discussions with School colleagues to inform programme enhancement. This involves the external examiner meeting with School/University colleagues, student representatives, and with other external examiners (where applicable) for facilitated discussions on programme-level and sector issues/ enhancements.

School colleagues will arrange these critical friend touch points when appropriate and the [agenda](#) will be dictated by current issues within the School and external examiner feedback provided to date. This facet of the external examiner role includes:

- a. Reviewing the degree programmes (the sequence, nature and assessment of the modules necessary to complete a degree) and confirming their alignment with the [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#) and any relevant [Subject Benchmark Statements](#).
- b. Making recommendations for programme enhancement.
- c. Highlighting and encouraging good practice, and innovation in learning, teaching and assessment.

Schools should record a summary of action points from this discussion and report them using this [MS Form](#). Action points will be shared with the relevant Faculty Dean, and it is expected that Faculty Education Committees will monitor progress on actions reported.

### ***Meeting Attendance***

These meetings should be attended, where possible, by Programme Co-ordinators, the Director of Education/ Graduate Studies, a secretary to record key actions and external examiners. Representatives from the student body should be invited to attend critical friend discussions to inform programme enhancement to ensure the student voice is captured in these conversations.



## 4. Reporting

### External Examiner Reporting Requirements

External examiners are required to submit an [annual Quality Assurance report](#) which specifically focuses on quality assurance matters in relation to the element of the role regarding the maintenance of standards and assuring quality. A [template of the annual Quality Assurance report](#) is available in the Supporting Documentation section of these Standard Operating Procedures.

The annual Quality Assurance report aligns with the [QAA Quality Code Advice and Guidance on External Expertise](#) and the recently published [QAA External Examining Principles](#).

For undergraduate programmes, reports should be submitted each year by **30 June** after all relevant meeting(s). For postgraduate taught programmes, reports for each year should be submitted by **30 November**.

External examiner reports will be shared with the relevant School to identify any concerns with regard to the maintenance of standards. If a report raises such a concern, the Head of School must bring this to the attention of the relevant Faculty Dean before responding to the external examiner. All reports received are shared for download on the [External Examiner SharePoint site](#). In reports where the external examiner does not recommend any changes to the current practices and procedures, the Head of School should still respond to the examiner to acknowledge that they have received and considered the report.

School Responses should be emailed to the External Examiners and copied to [externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk) within 3 weeks of receiving the report.

Schools should record their responses in the allocated areas of the report. Instructions on the procedure for responding to external examiner reports is available in the [Supporting Documentation](#).

Where an external examiner reports concerns with any of the following areas:

- Programme Structure
- Programme coherence
- Educational aims and learning outcomes
- Alignment to external frameworks
- Alignment to sector standards and subject benchmarks
- Standards
- Consistency over time
- Comparability with other institutions
- Alignment to Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications
- Assessment System
- Equitable operation
- Effectiveness of moderation
- Compliance with University regulations
- Assessment standards
- Assessment Design
- Assessment schedule
- Alignment with programme learning outcomes
- Rigor and fairness in measuring student achievement

The external examiner report will be shared with the relevant Faculty. The relevant Faculty will then review all concerns raised and will prepare a comprehensive response. This response will then be shared with Education Committee (Quality and Standards) to provide assurances that the appropriate actions to address concerns are being taken.

If external examiners require a University response to their annual report, this will be provided by the Chair of Education Committee (Quality and Standards).

External examiners should submit only ONE report per year, encompassing all of the undergraduate/postgraduate programmes examined.

External examiners may, if they prefer, submit a confidential report to [externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk). A confidential report will not be shared with the School unless the external examiner provides permission. External examiners should continue to complete a standard report as far as possible.

Queries should be directed to [externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk).

Should the external examiner hold a view that the practices/procedures in Queen's are contrary to, or out of step with, standard practice in other UK/Irish universities or the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, they should communicate these views in their [annual Quality Assurance report](#). The University will then consider the views expressed through its procedure for dealing with external examiner feedback.

### **Serious Concerns**

Where external examiners have serious concerns in relation to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme or programmes and have exhausted all published applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report, external examiners may invoke the QAA's Concerns scheme or inform the relevant PSRB. The University will inform the external examiner of the point when all internal procedures have been exhausted.

The QAA Concern Scheme can be accessed here: [https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/qaa-concerns-scheme.pdf?sfvrsn=c13dfd81\\_6](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/qaa-concerns-scheme.pdf?sfvrsn=c13dfd81_6)

This scheme is concerned only with systemic failings in an institution's management of standards or quality, and therefore should not be used in relation to one-off cases of ineffective practice.

### **University Consideration of Reports**

Academic Affairs will monitor external examiner reports to identify any general issues which need to be addressed centrally within the University – for example, issues relating to the University regulations. An annual report, compiled for consideration and decision by the Education Committee (Quality and Standards), will follow the normal committee cycle unless a particularly urgent matter has arisen.

Academic Affairs will monitor external examiner reports and School responses to provide relevant data for the [CAPE process](#).

### **Availability of External Examiner Reports to Students**

Schools must make the name, position, and institution of their external examiners available in module and programme information and make external examiners' annual reports available, in full, to students.

Schools may use School Canvas sites to make external examiners' reports available in full to students.

The reports should be presented alongside the associated responses from the School and, where applicable, the University.

Where School Canvas sites do not exist, the School may distribute external examiner reports at Student Voice Committees, make copies available in the School Office, or share these in a way that the School deems appropriate.

## **5. Induction and Training**

### **Provision of Induction Materials**

On appointment, Academic Affairs will direct external examiners to the External Examining Standard Operating Procedures.

Schools are also required to send external examiners full information on the programmes that they will consider. This should include:

- A link to the relevant programme specification(s);
- Module handbook(s);
- Guidance on marking and moderation practices;
- Relevant QAA subject benchmark statements;
- Details of Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements, where appropriate;
- The Final Report of the previous external examiner and the School's response and/or actions arising from the report.

Schools should advise External Examiners of a School-level contact, who they can approach with queries during their appointment.

### **Introductory Training**

External examiners will be required to attend an online asynchronous induction session in the first year of appointment.

Academic Affairs will make the introductory training session available to external examiners prior to the beginning of their term of appointment. The introductory training session will include:

- General information about the University and Staff Charter;
- The external examining role and reporting requirements at QUB;
- Academic Year Timeline;
- An introduction to the General Regulations;
  - Late Submissions;
  - Exceptional Circumstances;
  - Subject and Programme Boards of Examiners;
- General Queen's programme information;
- Degree classification;
  - Calculating Programme Marks;
  - Predominance;
- Academic Appeals.

### **Refresher Training**

External examiners will be required to attend an online asynchronous light-touch refresher training session in year three of appointment. This session will include:

- Final report requirements.

External examiners will receive an annual email update detailing significant changes to the regulations.

## **6. Fees and Expenses**

### **Fees**

External examiners in post from 1 September 2023 and thereafter in the schools of Nursing and Midwifery, Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering and Social Sciences, Education and Social Work will be paid a flat fee of £750 per year.

External examiners in other schools will remain on a points-based fee system for 2023-24.

All External Examiners appointed in post from 1 September 2024 and thereafter will be paid a flat fee of £750 per year.

### **Expenses**

The following expenses are covered by Student Services and Systems and will be reimbursed to the External Examiner accordingly:

- Travel (return flights, boat, train, taxis and bus) – £250 for all travel for one external examiner visit. If total travel exceeds £250, a journal voucher will be issued to the School to cover the excess.
- Expenses will be reimbursed for attendance at an Exam Board only. Expenses will be reimbursed for a maximum of two visits in the first year of UGT/PGT Examiner appointment, and one visit per year thereafter.
- Hotel – maximum of £100 per night for a maximum of two nights.
- Mileage – 40p per mile for first 100 miles. 25p per mile thereafter.
- Subsistence – up to £15 for Lunch including coffee/tea/soft drinks and up to £25 for dinner including coffee/tea/soft drinks. No alcohol will be reimbursed.

**External Examiners appointed by Stranmillis University College or St Mary's University College should contact the designated College contact at the institution where they are appointed to obtain information on the process for claiming fees and expenses.**

### **Timeline for the Payment of Fees and Expenses**

Payment of expenses is normally at the end of the following month of receipt of the claim form. Expenses will only be processed if signed by the Chair of the Board of Examiners and then sent onto [extexaminers@qub.ac.uk](mailto:extexaminers@qub.ac.uk)

Payment of fees is normally 4-8 weeks after the submission deadline. Fees will only be processed if signed by the Chair of the Board of Examiners and if the examiner's quality assurance report has been submitted. Fee claim forms should be submitted once per year, covering the previous academic year. The form should only be submitted after all Examining has taken place and will not be paid until the annual quality assurance report has been submitted.

### **Confirmation that Role Requirements have been Satisfied**

So that external examiners may be paid the annual fee of £750, confirmation that all role requirements have been met is necessary. When external examiners submit that all role requirements have been met, School colleagues will be contacted to confirm that this is the case.

Schools will be asked to confirm that:

- (i) The external examiner has engaged with the process of assessment standard setting.
- (ii) The external examiner has engaged with the process of maintaining standards and assuring quality through involvement with:
  - a) Reviewing the moderation approach and ensuring that internal moderation is consistent, by reviewing a limited selection of scripts.
  - b) Reviewing programme and module outcome data to confirm the consistency of module and programme outcomes over time, identifying potential issues with module assessment, where required, and ensuring outcomes are in line with sector comparators.
  - c) In exceptional circumstances, advising on any proposed scaling of marks at a cohort level in advance of the Board of Examiners meeting.
  - d) Confirming adherence to relevant assessment policies and procedures.
- (iii) The external examiner has engaged with critical friend discussions to inform programme enhancement.
- (iv) The external examiner has submitted their annual quality assurance report.

Academic Affairs will continue to share external examiner reports with School colleagues allowing Schools to confirm that this role requirement has been met.

## **7. Institutional Chief External Examiner**

### **Appointment Criteria**

Queen's University Belfast has appointed a Chief External Examiner to provide an overarching view on institutional academic quality and standards.

Appointment will commence in September 2024 and will have an initial tenure of two years but may be extended up to four years.

The Chief External Examiner will:

- Hold an academic appointment of Professor.
- Have a minimum of five years' experience as an External Examiner (at a UK HEI).
- Have extensive knowledge and understanding of external reference points for academic quality and standards and of the standard expected of students at the appropriate award level.
- Have demonstrable experience at senior level of providing oversight on QA processes such as programme approval and amendment procedures, providing oversight on assessment regulations, assessment procedures and assessment boards at their own or other institutions and providing expert advice as a member of core committees.
- Have the ability to comment on the effectiveness of processes across disciplines (including those outside their own subject area) and across the range of delivery methods.
- Have successfully completed the Advance HE Professional Development Course for External Examiners.
- Not currently hold more than two additional External Examiner appointments.

The fee for this role is £5,000, which may be claimed following submission of the annual Chief External Examiner report. Chief External Examiners can claim reimbursement of all reasonable travel and subsistence expenses incurred whilst undertaking Chief External Examining duties.

Those who have had a close involvement with Queen's University Belfast within the past five years are not eligible. 'Close involvement' may be defined as having been a member of staff, governor or student of the University, or possessing a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student (including involvement in collaborative research activity).

### **Role Definition**

The University appoints a suitably qualified and experienced senior academic to provide external scrutiny, quality assurance and enhancement, and advice in relation to ongoing institutional review of degree classifications and academic outcomes for students. The Chief External Examiner provides strategic oversight of the robustness of the University's assessment regulations and procedures. The position holder contributes to the University's annual review of overarching data and analysis on degree classifications and outcomes for students, and input on action to be taken in response to any trends highlighted. The Chief External Examiner will also provide input on institutional quality and enhancement review mechanisms.

The role complements and enhances the work already undertaken by programme level External Examiners in setting and maintaining academic standards and providing external assurance of the quality of the University's awards.

#### Role and Responsibilities

- Consult on regulations, procedures and policies underpinning assessment, progression and awards.
- Meet with external examiners and engage with a sample of external examiner reports.
- Review systemic issues reported by subject/ programme external examiners and the School/ University response to issues.
- Act as an external advisor to Academic Council and Education Committee (Quality and Standards/ Student Experience) to confirm that a consistent and acceptable standard is being maintained across programmes.
- Input on institutional quality and enhancement review mechanisms.
- Contribute to any proposed institutional review of external examining procedures and key quality and standards processes.
- Completion of an annual Chief External Examiner report.



## 8. Supporting Documentation

### Module Data

<b>Module Code</b>		<b>CATS Points</b>		<b>Assessment Format</b>	
<b>Module Title</b>		<b>Assessment</b> Coursework % Practical %			
<b>Programme</b>		<b>Module Coordinator</b>			
<b>Level</b>					

### Module performance

Year	No. of Students	Module Mean	Pass Rate (%)	Pass Rate Post re-sit (%)	Comments
2021					
2022					
2023					

**Programme Data**

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>2:1</b>	<b>2:2</b>	<b>3rd</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>2021</b>						
<b>2022</b>						
<b>2023</b>						

## External Examiner Appointment Letter



### Academic Affairs

Queen's University Belfast  
Belfast

BT7 1NN

Northern Ireland

Tel 028 9097 3322

Email [externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk)

[www.qub.ac.uk](http://www.qub.ac.uk)

«Title» «Forename» «Surname»

«Institution»

«Email»

Dear «Title» «Surname»

### **External Examiner Appointment**

I am pleased to inform you that the Education Committee (Quality and Standards), on behalf of Academic Council, has approved your appointment as an external examiner on the following terms.

#### **1. Your Appointment**

You have been appointed as an external examiner in the «School» for the below:

Subject: «Subject\_Title»

Programme: «Programmes\_Grouping»

Your appointment will commence on «EC\_Appointment\_Dates» and relates to the academic year commencing [MONTH & YEAR e.g. 2023] to [MONTH & YEAR e.g. 2027]. There may exceptionally be reasons for seeking an extension to the normal four-year term of office and your appointment may be extended (with your written agreement), for a maximum of one academic year.

#### **2. The Role of External Examiners**

External Examiners play an important quality assurance role in maintaining academic standards. To support external examiners to complete this role effectively, external examiners will be required to attend an online asynchronous familiarisation session in the first year of appointment and a light-touch refresher session in years two to four of appointment. Academic Affairs will be in touch to confirm your training requirements and details of relevant sessions.

In accepting this appointment, you have entered a contractual arrangement with Queen's University. This arrangement requires that you serve three main functions.

- a) To provide assurances on standard setting ensuring that assessment tasks and examination papers are systematically aligned to programme specifications, and national benchmarks;
- b) To provide assurances on standards and moderation processes which will involve the sampling of limited student work;

- c) To act as a consultant for programme-level and sector issues/ enhancements, facilitated by discussions with other external examiners, School/University colleagues, and students, and the completion of an annual quality assurance report.

Guidance on the role of external examiners, external examiner reports and the code of practice on examinations and assessments is available in the Standard Operating Procedures. The Standard Operating Procedures are currently under review and will be shared with you prior to the beginning of academic year 2023-24.

You will perform your role largely independently and remotely from the University's own internal examiners. With the exception of key time sensitive milestones in the external examining process (i.e., submission of the annual quality assurance report by 30 June (UG programmes only) / 30 November (UG & PGT programmes), you may perform your role at a place, date and time of your choosing using your own IT equipment.

### **3. Your Status and Independence from the University**

It is important that all external examiners are wholly independent of the University and can provide their expertise and academic judgment impartially, drawing on your experience as an academic employed at another university or as an industry professional.

To that end, the University has stringent criteria to ensure your independence (for example, you must not be, or have been an employee or student of the University in the previous five years). These criteria are appended to this appointment letter and were accepted by you when completing the [Nominee Declaration](#).

Your status with the University is that of a self-employed person. In accepting this appointment, you accept that your appointment does not constitute a contract of employment, you are not employed by the University, nor are you a worker, agent or partner of the University. Accordingly, you are not eligible for any of the University's employment benefits, nor to any statutory benefits that might accrue to employees or workers.

Please note that the University is required to check the right of external examiners to work in the UK. To comply with UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) requirements, you will be asked to provide documentary evidence of your right to work in the UK. Further information on this matter will be provided by the School.

### **4. Your fee, expenses and payment**

You shall be paid an annual fee of £750 for your duties. This fee is only payable following fulfilment of all duties associated with the role and submission of your annual quality assurance report.

Although you will be treated as self-employed for employment law purposes, HM Revenue & Customs considers that external examiners for first level degrees (and for post-graduate degrees if your appointment extends beyond one year) are employed for tax purposes (and in some instances, for national insurance purposes).

Accordingly, the University is required to deduct income tax (and may be required to deduct Class 1 NICs) from the payment of your fee. To facilitate these payments, the University will process your payment via The University's payroll system.

External examiners may also claim the reimbursement of certain expenses (for example, if you are required to travel to attend an in-person meeting). Further details about these expenses and how to submit a claim for them can be found on the [External Examiners website](#).

## **5. Termination of your appointment**

This arrangement relates only to the academic years indicated at paragraph 1 above (and any extended period that we may subsequently agree in writing).

If, prior the end of the appointment period, you no longer wish to be an External Examiner or if the University no longer requires your services, either you or the University may terminate this arrangement at any time by giving the other not less than one months' prior written notice.

In addition, the University reserves the right to terminate your appointment with immediate effect with no liability to make any further payments to you in the event that you are in serious breach of your obligations.

## **6. Confidentiality and GDPR**

The information that the University provides to you to carry out your services as an external examiner is strictly confidential. This includes any personal details about our students, as well as any copies, drafts or any other details about their examination scripts. There may be other types of confidential information or matters which come to your knowledge in the course of your role as external examiner. You may not use or disclose any such confidential information to any other person, whether during your period as an external examiner, or afterwards.

This of course does not apply to any use or disclosure of confidential information that is expressly authorised by the University, or required by law or to any information which is already in, or comes into, the public domain otherwise than through your unauthorised disclosure.

All data or documents (including copies) that the University sends to you, or which you produce in the course of carrying out your role as an external examiner, are and remain the property of the University. You must return all such materials immediately upon request of the University, or when your external examining has completed. You must also irretrievably delete such materials from any computer and communications systems and devices owned or used by you, including such systems and data storage services provided by third parties (to the extent technically practicable).

The University will collect and process information relating to you in accordance with the [privacy notice](#).

## **7. Further information**

While I expect most of your contact to be with the staff in the applicable School, subject area or discipline, please do not hesitate to contact Chloe Walsh ([externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk)) in Academic Affairs, if you have any queries in relation to the external examining process.

On behalf of the University, may I thank you for your assistance in undertaking the role of external examiner.

Yours sincerely

Chloe Walsh  
Academic Affairs

Copy to:       Head, «School»  
                  Director of Education/Graduate Studies  
                  School Contact

## Conflicts of Interest

The University will not appoint as an external examiner those who:

- (i) Have excessive influence due to their standing in other roles, particularly when linked to the University, or because their inclusion in a team of external experts that has had oversight of QA processes in the nominating discipline creates an unbalanced view.
- (ii) Have a current or previous close personal, family or legal relationship with a student being assessed.
- (iii) Have been significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management, or assessment of the programme(s) in question. Significant involvement in this context refers to those directly involved with a close knowledge of one another's work.
- (iv) Have excessively engaged with the University or have been repeatedly re-engaged.
- (v) Are former staff or students of the institution unless a period of five years has elapsed, and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s).
- (vi) Are employed by a provider that is already currently providing an external examiner to the same programme grouping at Queen's. For example, a nominee from institution A to be assigned to Film and Theatre Making would not be appropriate if an external examiner from institution A is already appointed in the area of Film Studies and Production.
- (vii) Are employed by an institution that has a currently appointed an external examiner in the same programme grouping from Queen's University Belfast.

Schools must use their judgement when ascertaining whether a conflict of interest exists. Therefore, this is a non-exhaustive list and other factors may be considered where appropriate.

## Critical Friend Discussion Agenda Template

CONFIDENTIAL



[SCHOOL]

[DATE]

### AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the Meeting held on [DATE]
3. Matters Arising
4. Programme Issues and Enhancements
  - 4.1 Programme Structure: Sequence, Nature and Assessment of Modules to Complete Programme(s), Programme Learning Outcomes and Sector Developments.
  - 4.2 Programme alignment to the [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#), any relevant [Subject Benchmark Statements](#) and accreditation requirements (where relevant).
  - 4.3 Good Practice and Innovation in Learning, Teaching and Assessment.
5. Sectoral Issues and Enhancements
6. Actions

Membership:

- Director of Education/ Graduate Studies
- Programme Team Representatives
- External Examiners
- Education Administrator
- Student Representatives



## **External Examiner Reporting Template**

*\*Please note that this is a template and reports should be submitted using the [online form](#).*

## **External Examiner Quality Assurance Report**

If you are an external examiner for undergraduate programmes only, reports for 2023-24 should be submitted by **30 June 2024** after all relevant meeting(s). If you are an external examiner for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes, your report for 2023-24 should be submitted by **30 November 2024** after all relevant meeting(s).

You should submit only ONE report per year , encompassing all of the undergraduate/ postgraduate programmes you examine.

**Please ensure that individual staff or students are not named in the report.**

You may, if you prefer, submit a confidential report to [externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk). A confidential report will not be shared with the School unless you provide permission. You should continue to complete a standard report as far as possible.

Queries should be directed to [externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk](mailto:externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk).

### **External Examiner Information**

Title

i.e., Professor, Dr, Ms, Mr etc.

Forename

Surname

Position/Job Title

Organisation

Email address

Please select the School / area you are External Examiner for

- Access
- School of Arts, English and Languages
- School of Biological Sciences
- School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering
- School of Electronics, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science
- School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics
- INTO Queen's
- School of Law
- Queen's Management School
- School of Mathematics and Physics

- School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering
- School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences
- School of Natural and Built Environment
- School of Nursing and Midwifery
- School of Pharmacy
- School of Psychology
- School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work
- St Mary's University College
- Stranmillis University College
- Institute of Theology
- Institute of Professional Legal Studies

Please provide the Programme(s) you are External Examiner for:

If you are unsure, please refer to your appointment letter.

Please select the level of study this report is in relation to\*:

- UG
- PGT

For the programme(s) which you reviewed, please complete the below questions, providing as much detail as possible. \*

### **Maintaining Standards and Assuring Quality**

Reflecting on the programme content reviewed, were you satisfied with

- The programme structure
- Programme coherence
- The educational aims and learning outcomes of the programme
- The alignment of the programme to external frameworks
- The alignment of the programme to sector standards and subject benchmarks

[YES/NO]

Please share any further comments below.

**Please do not name individual staff or students.**

Reflecting the programme assessment reviewed, were you satisfied with

- The assessment schedule
- The alignment of the assessments against programme learning outcomes
- The assessment process rigorously and fairly measuring student achievement against the intended outcomes of the course(s)

[YES/NO]

Please share any further comments below.

**Please do not name individual staff or students.**

Reflecting on the marks and/or degree classifications being awarded, were you satisfied with

- The standards applied
- The consistency of standards over time
- The comparability of degree standards with those of other institutions
- Degree standards alignment to the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications

[YES/NO]

Please share any further comments below.

**Please do not name individual staff or students.**

Reflecting on the module(s) in which you sampled student work, were you satisfied with

- The equitable operation of the assessment system
- The effectiveness of the moderation system
- The compliance of the assessment system with the University regulations
- Assessment standards

[YES/NO]

Please share any further comments below.

**Please do not name individual staff or students.**

**Recommendations to the University**

Do you have any comments which require consideration by the University Education Committee?  
[YES/NO]

Please share any recommendations for the University below. Please indicate if you would like a University response to these recommendations.

Please note that the Committee will only respond to concerns that cannot be addressed by the School and your recommendation may be delegated to School or Faculty level for a response, if appropriate.

If you have no recommendations, please enter N/A.

**Please do not name individual staff or students.**

**General Feedback**

Are you satisfied that the School/University has acted on your previous recommendations?  
[YES/NO]

Please provide further information below.

Based on the information provided to you, was sufficient evidence received in a suitable timeframe to enable the role to be fulfilled?  
[YES/NO]

Please provide further information below.

## Final Report

Are you in the final year of your appointment?

[YES/NO]

Please give an overview of your term of office below. Please comment on:

- Developments which have taken place in the School and/or subject area over the period of your appointment.
- The manner in which the School has engaged with your recommendations.
- Any ongoing concerns which you may have.

## External Examiner Reports - Instructions for School Response

