External Examiner Handbook

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# Introduction

This handbook is intended for External Examiners for all taught programmes at the University of Leicester. It has been produced to assist you in your role, and contains information about University of Leicester regulations and procedures, the duties of External Examiners, and how the University will consider your reports.

The handbook should be used in conjunction with other materials provided to you by the School and by our Education Quality and Enhancement Development team (EQED). These include:

* [Senate Regulations](https://le.ac.uk/policies/regulations/senate-regulations)
* Programme Specifications ([UG](https://le.ac.uk/study/undergraduates/courses/21-22) and [PG](https://le.ac.uk/study/postgraduates/courses/21-22))
* [Module Specifications](https://uniofleicester.sharepoint.com/sites/university/module-specifications/SitePages/Welcome.aspx)
* [Training Materials](https://uniofleicester.sharepoint.com/sites/staff/academic-administration/SitePages/External-examiners.aspx)

Additionally, it is expected that all External Examiners attend an induction session led by EQED at the beginning of their tenure. This induction will outline the information contained herein in a supportive environment and give further information about the processes and procedures at University of Leicester.

Any questions about the information contained in this handbook can be sent directly to EQED at [extexaminers@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:extexaminers@leicester.ac.uk).

# Section 1: Role and Responsibilities of External Examiners

* 1. The University recognises that External Examiners play a major role in ensuring the academic standards and awards of the University. Regulations relating to the appointment and duties of External Examiners are stated in Senate Regulation 7. A summary of the key responsibilities is given below.

## External Examiners

* 1. External Examiners are appointed to provide impartial and independent advice and informed comment on the University’s standards and student achievement in relation to those standards.
  2. External Examiners are appointed for a period of four years in most cases and are required to give a period of 3 months’ notice if they wish to resign for any reason during their period of service.
  3. For each award-bearing programme, including for the award of credit, the University appoints at least one External Examiner, including for awards made with or through a partner institution. An External Examiner may be appointed for several related programmes.
  4. The University appoints sufficient Examiners for a particular programme to cover the full range and complexity of the syllabus and the size of the student cohort.
  5. For awards resulting from study both on campus and by distance learning, the University will ensure that External Examining arrangements enable the Board of Examiners to make judgements about the comparability of standards across both cohorts.

## Role and Responsibilities

* 1. In accordance with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, External Examiners will be asked by the University of Leicester to provide informative comment and recommendations upon whether or not:
* The University is maintaining the threshold academic standards for its awards in accordance with the Framework for Higher Education qualifications and relevant subject benchmark statements;
* The assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the University’s policies and regulations;
* The academic standards and the achievement of students are comparable with those in other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) of which the External Examiners have experience.
  1. As an External Examiner you will also:
* Be asked to identify areas of good practice or opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students. These may contribute to the School’s Curriculum Planning or Annual Programme Review. Where Schools are looking to develop new programmes, they may ask the External Examiner to assess the details of the proposed programme, especially while creating an innovative curriculum design;
* Report on standards at both module and award level via the Board of Examiners and the annual report;
* Have the opportunity to consider samples of students’ assessed work, together with marks agreed by the internal markers. You should receive sufficient material from the School to form a view as to whether the internal marking has properly assessed student performance against appropriate standards. This should include 10% of the pieces of assessment with a sample across the range of student achievement. In some cases, where the number of students registered on a programme is such that the External Examiner would be unable to form a judgement from a 10% sample, the size of the sample may vary;
* Be consulted about access to non-written assessment and attendance at any live assessment events. Externals may be required to access student performance during assessed School experience, clinical or other work-placement, irrespective of location;
* Mentor new External Examiners;
* Be an equal member of a Board of Examiners and participate in the transaction of the Board’s business.
  1. Upon appointment as an External Examiner, you will be provided with all materials and guidance to complete the above requirements of the role. These should include:
* Opportunity to attend an induction session with EQED, giving guidance over the role and expectations;
* Programme specifications for the programmes the External will oversee;
* Previous Examiner’s reports and departmental responses;
* An appointment letter detailing the specific programme(s) the External will be responsible for, and the terms and conditions of their appointment;
* Key contact details for the Business Administration Manager, Programme Lead(s), and the Director of Education and Head of School;
* Key dates, including those for the Boards of Examiners, dates they will be sent assessment briefs and be expected to return comments, and date when they will be sent samples of student work;
* Information on the specific process the School will use for sample sharing and expectations on workload;
* Student Handbook and/or programme handbook;
* Module specifications
  1. IT accounts

EQED will organise IT collaborator accounts for all External Examiners on appointment and arrange for their annual renewal. These accounts will give External Examiners access to Blackboard so that they can view samples of assessment and will provide them with a University of Leicester e-mail account. All correspondence should be completed with this e-mail account. It would be best practice to set up automatic forwarding to the External’s institutional account if they do not access the University of Leicester e-mail account frequently.

# Section 2: Role of External Examiners in the Assessment Process

* 1. External Examiners will not be involved in the assessment or examination of the work of individual students and will not be the final arbiter for the award of marks/grades either within a module or for the final award. External Examiners will be invited to comment on the standard of marking against the written criteria but may not seek, or be invited, to raise or lower the marks assigned to individual students. External Examiners may, however, ask for marks to be revisited by the internal markers against the written criteria across a full cohort if they consider that there is sufficient evidence to support under- or over-marking, or if they have concerns about the robustness of marking.

## Assessment Process at University of Leicester

* 1. The University operates an anonymous marking system for summative coursework, unless in the view of the College Dean of Education there are sound educational reasons for not doing so. Marking processes are reviewed through the Annual Programme Review and the Periodic Development and Enhancement Review processes.
  2. All summative assessments are marked by internal examiners, who also serve as members of Panels and Boards of Examiners and are responsible for the validity of assessment outcomes. Summative assessments that contribute to a student’s overall degree classification cannot be marked by a single marker. Peer marking and automated marking can be used for some types of assessments.
  3. All assessments should be internally moderated. A broad sample of assessments should be provided to the moderator who will review the robustness of marking practices across the module. Where a disagreement occurs, a third party should be consulted to resolve the marks.
  4. After moderation, Schools complete an initial scrutiny of marks, which consider:
* The percentage of students failing the module at the first attempt (excluding mitigating circumstances);
* Comparison of average marks for the module to the previous three academic years where possible;
* And the average mark for the module compared to the average mark of all modules in that level.
  1. External Examiners will be asked to scrutinise all assessment briefs (with the minor exception of those noted below) and exam papers that contribute to the degree classification. These should include:
* Undergraduate degrees – all level 5 and 6 (year 2 and 3) modules
* Integrated Masters degrees – all level 5, 6, and 7 modules
* Postgraduate Taught degrees – all modules

In addition, the School may ask to send Level 4 modules that contribute to professional accreditations but do not otherwise contribute to the degree. Compulsory modules which are not credit bearing, but which are assessed, do not have to be scrutinised by the External Examiner.

* 1. Where the assessment constitutes 10% or less of the overall module, it may not be necessary to have the External Examiner comment on the brief. The School may also ask you to comment on non-standard types of assessments, such as field lab notebooks.
  2. Both first sit and resit exam papers should be supplied to the External Examiner for comment. Assessment briefs should include clear marking criteria, rubrics or model answers. You will be given two weeks to reply.
  3. You should expect the sample of briefs to be sent to you:
* Semester 1 modules in October
* Semester 2 modules in December
  1. The University operates a two tier process of Panels and Boards of Examiners. These are in place to evaluate and maintain academic standards, ensure adherence to the Senate Regulations, consider the interests of individual students, and ensure fairness across a cohort.

## Samples of Assessments

* 1. External Examiners are expected to review samples of student work in order to form a view as to whether the internal marking has properly assessed student performance against appropriate standards.
  2. As a minimum, the amount of work you are expected to consider would be 10% of each module assessment component, or 10 assessments, whichever is the greater.
  3. You will be given access to Blackboard to review larger samples if you desire.
  4. The samples provided should cover the range of student achievement including a sample of failed scripts. External Examiners should also be provided with the Panel of Examiners reports, and these should give comparative data for the previous three years (or less if the module has not run in the previous three years).
  5. You may also be contacted about access to non-written assessment and attendance at any live assessment events such as oral presentations. This is particularly important where the non-written assessment or live assessment event contribute significantly to the overall degree. You should attend where possible, or be provided with a sample of the work.

## Panels and Boards of Examiners

* 1. Once the initial marking practices have been completed as noted above, marks are considered by the Panel of Examiners.
  2. Panels of Examiners are convened for clusters of cognate modules and report to the Board of Examiners.
  3. Panels of Examiners may identify patterns of performance that are out of line with the wider cohort or historic trends. During an initial review of module outcomes, where Schools identify potential areas of concern, they may involve the External Examiner at the time to consider whether marks need to be calibrated or other norm-referencing activities need to be conducted.
  4. Marks confirmed by the Panel of Examiners are then sent to the Board of Examiners.
  5. A Board of Examiners is the body responsible for overseeing each student’s academic performance on the relevant programmes and for making decisions on progression and award based on assessment results.
  6. A Board ensures that students are treated consistently and fairly.
  7. A Board also ensures that appropriate academic standards are maintained.
  8. Heads of School are responsible for deciding how Boards of Examiners are organised for their School and for the programmes for which a Board is responsible. For example, Boards of Examiners may encompass more than one level of a programme or more than one programme. Alternatively, separate meetings may be held to consider award and progression decisions.

## Role of the Board of Examiners in the Assessment Process

* 1. The Role of the Board of Examiners is to:
* Confirm the recommended module outcomes from one or more Panels of Examiners;
* Consider the academic performance of individual students;
* Agree awards and classifications, in accordance with regulations;
* Consider borderline cases (see Senate Regulation 5.33 for further guidance);
* Agree progression decisions, including recommendations for re-assessment or termination of studies;
* Ensure the appropriateness of marking practices for the modules for which it has responsibility;
* Make recommendations on prizes;
* Consider comments from External Examiners on the programmes under consideration.

## Membership of the Board of Examiners

* 1. A Board of Examiners is comprised of:
* Chair
  + The Chair of a Board of Examiners is a senior member of academic staff. This may be the Head of School or another member of staff approved to undertake this role.
  + The role of the Chair is to:
    - Ensure that proceedings are properly conducted and managed in an efficient manner using the prescribed documentation and members are appropriately briefed;
    - Ensure that students are treated equitably and in accordance with programme regulations and University regulations for progression and award;
    - Guide the Board to clear recommendations and decisions;
    - Ensure that where External Examiners are present they are invited to comment on the proceedings and arrangements for the Board, on the academic standards of the programme and any other issues which they consider relevant;
    - Be responsible for taking any action on behalf of the Board where empowered to do so after the meeting;
    - Sign the Board Report as an accurate record of the meeting;
    - Approve the minutes.
* Programme leads
* Members of the Panel(s) of Examiners, including the Chair of the Panel;
* External Examiner(s), where awards are being made
* Secretary
  + The Secretary to a Board of Examiners is a member of the administrative staff of the relevant School(s) with appropriate experience and an understanding of both the programme and Senate Regulations. They will usually make arrangements for the meeting. The Secretary’s role also includes working with the Chair to ensure that meetings run smoothly and ensuring that Boards have all the necessary documentation, and minutes are produced in a timely fashion.
* Academic Registrar’s Representative (ARR)
  + An ARR is a member of professional services staff of the University who attends each meeting of a Board of Examiners where awards are made to students. Their role is to advise the Board on Senate Regulations and their interpretation, taking into account any variations approved for a particular programme, and any broader regulatory matters. They are also required to intervene if they believe a Board is making a decision which is not in accordance with regulations.

## Principles on the Conduct of Business

* 1. Boards of Examiners must meet at the end of assessment cycles to ensure that award decisions are made at the appropriate time to allow students to graduate or to receive progression decisions in sufficient time to allow reassessment, where required.
  2. At least 75% of membership as noted above must attend the Board of Examiners; this must include the Chair.
  3. Except in exceptional circumstances members of the Board are expected to stay for the duration of meetings to ensure consistency of decision making.
  4. Board meetings will follow a standard agenda.
  5. Boards will be provided with a standard data set by Student Records.
  6. Boards will confirm the recommended module outcomes from one or more Panel of Examiners.
  7. Boards will consider and confirm award decisions.
  8. Boards will consider and confirm progression decisions.
  9. Boards will receive and consider comments from External Examiners.
  10. The Board of Examiners Report is the primary record of the Board’s decisions and authority. It should be signed as an accurate record by the Chair at the end of each meeting.
  11. In cases where a decision is deferred the Board can authorise the Chair to take action on its behalf at a later date.

## Documentation for Panels and Boards of Examiners

* 1. Panels and Boards of Examiners will have the following documentation:
* An agenda;
* A standard data set, usually from SITS (the student records system).
  1. In addition, the Secretary should ensure that the following are available for consultation;
* Programme Specification(s)
* Senate Regulation 5 (governing undergraduate programmes of study) or Senate Regulation 6 (governing taught postgraduate programmes of study)
* Senate Regulation 7 (governing the assessment of taught programmes of study)
* An extract from Senate Regulation 11 (student discipline on plagiarism penalties).

## What to do if the External Examiner has concerns about the marking and moderation

* 1. If the External Examiner has concerns about the standard of marking, it is expected that they raise these in advance of the Board of Examiners through their comments on the samples of assessment and panel reports.
  2. You can expect that the School consider your concerns, discuss the reasoning for the marking, and discuss options for scaling or re-marking as appropriate.
  3. Where significant concerns remain, please contact the Head of School in the first instance to discuss. If concerns continue and you feel have not been addressed appropriately, please seek advice from EQED at [extexaminers@le.ac.uk](mailto:extexaminers@le.ac.uk). You may remember that as the External Examiner you have the power to refuse to sign-off marks, in which case awards cannot be made until the issue is resolved.

# Section 3: Reporting and Payment

## Submission of Annual Report

3.1 During their period of office each External Examiner will be required to submit a written report to the University at the end of each assessment cycle. The University has a standard report form for this purpose which will be provided to you by EQED.

3.2 EQED will contact all External Examiners before the report is due with an electronic copy of the form and details on how to submit it.

3.3 The form is designed to collect the information required to confirm the standards of University awards, the appropriateness of student achievement and the integrity of the assessment process.

3.4 Reports should be submitted to EQED by the following deadlines:

* Undergraduate Programmes 31 July
* Postgraduate Programmes 31 December

3.5 Annual reports are a requirement for the position, and payment will not be made if a report is not received by EQED.

## Consideration of External Examiner Reports

3.6 On receipt of the report, EQED will check to ensure the report is complete and will acknowledge receipt.

3.7 Each report will be provided to the Head of School who will prepare an appropriate response to the issues raised. A copy of this should be sent to the External Examiner.

3.8 Reports and responses are considered by the School Education Committee and the College Education Committee. They are also shared with Student Staff Committees.

3.9 An archive of External Examiner reports will be maintained electronically by EQED and published on the website once they have been through formal University processes.

3.10 Schools and the University will use External Examiners’ reports as part of the Annual Programme Review and Periodic Development and Enhancement Review processes.

3.11 A digest of the reports of all External Examiner reports will be considered annually by the Education Committee and Senate.

## Payment of Fees and Expenses

3.12 Fees payable to External Examiners are notified in the Letter of Appointment issued to the External upon commencement of their employment at the University.

3.13 Where attendance is required on-campus for meetings or a Board of Examiners, expenses will be paid.

3.14 Fee payment will be processed on receipt of the annual report. External Examiners can claim expenses throughout the year as appropriate and where expenses only are being claimed an expenses form should be submitted. These are supplied by EQED. Receipts must be submitted along with the expenses form so that the form can be processed promptly.

3.15 In order to comply with the UKVI requirements the University is now required to ask External Examiners for proof that they are entitled to work in the UK. Details of this are given in appointment letters. Examiners will be contacted by EQED to provide verification of the documents provided. Documents that must be supplied are below.

If you are a UK Citizen:

* Passport OR
* Full birth certificate issued in the UK and an official document giving your permanent National Insurance Number and your name, issued by a Government agency or employer.

If you are from a European Economic Area:

* Passport OR National Identity Card AND
* An access code, given by the UKVI, clarifying your right to work in the UK.

If you are not a UK citizen or from an EEA:

* Your passport and visa/entry clearance stamp/biometric immigration card issued by the UK Border and Immigration Agency giving permission to work in the UK.

# Section 4: Contact Details and Web Addresses

## Contacts

Any queries about appointment, reporting processes, payment or general queries about University regulations and procedures can be addressed to Education Quality and Enhancement Development. The email address for External Examiners is: [extexaminers@le.ac.uk](mailto:extexaminers@le.ac.uk).

## Web Addresses

University of Leicester website: [www.le.ac.uk](http://www.le.ac.uk)

Information and forms for External Examiners: <https://uniofleicester.sharepoint.com/sites/staff/academic-administration/SitePages/External-examiners.aspx>

Senate Regulations: <https://le.ac.uk/policies/regulations/senate-regulations>

Academic Quality and Standards: <https://uniofleicester.sharepoint.com/sites/staff/academic-quality-standards/SitePages/Home.aspx>

UK Quality Code for Higher Education: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

# Appendix 1: Guidance on the mentoring of new External Examiners

## Introduction

Whilst new External Examiners are identified as being qualified to examine in terms of their specialist subject knowledge and experience in Higher Education, they may not have sufficient recent external examining experience. As such, Curriculum and Quality Sub-Committee (CQSC) may require newly appointed External Examiners to be mentored by an experienced External Examiner.

The following sections confirm the role of the mentor and the criteria for selecting an appropriate mentor.

The details contained herein provide guidance on the criteria for selecting a mentor, how to set up a mentor and the role of the mentor.

## Mentor criteria

The following criteria should be followed when selecting a Mentor. A Mentor should:

* be an experienced External Examiner from the University’s current community of examiners
* where possible, be from a similar subject area as the mentee. Where this is not possible other External Examiners should first be considered from the same School as the mentee. If a suitable Mentor cannot be identified from within the School then consideration may be given to other External Examiners in the same College.
* Have been in post for at least one full academic year cycle, produced at least one annual report and submitted it in a timely manner.

## Setting up a mentor relationship

If a mentor is required by CQSC, Education Quality and Enhancement (EQED) will contact the School/Programme lead for the appointment to identify a mentor. It is the Schools responsibility to identify mentors and to get their agreement. It should be noted, that there is no additional payment for the mentor role.

Once a mentor has been identified, the School/Programme lead for the appointment should contact [extexaminers@le.ac.uk](mailto:extexaminers@le.ac.uk) with the selected mentor’s details. EQED will then record these and add them to the appointment letter. The mentor will be copied in to the email when sending the appointment letter and associated materials to the new External Examiner.

## Mentor role

### Initial meeting

An External Examiner Mentor should make contact with their Mentee to arrange an initial meeting. Wherever possibly, it is preferable for this meeting to take place face-to-face, either in person or virtually. However, if this isn’t possible similar information sharing can be achieved via telephone or email.

This initial meeting should take place as soon as possible after the Mentor has been appointed to cover the following:

* Discuss the role and duties of an External Examiner within the University of Leicester context. Note, there is no expectation that Mentors provide a formal induction for new External Examiners, the process of mentorship is primarily to provide support and advice
* Identify any areas where the mentee may need guidance and or support
* Establish expectations, such as contact methods, frequency of contact and any follow up actions etc.

### Ongoing mentoring

An External Examiner mentor should make themselves available to their mentee for the provision of advice and guidance on:

* How to achieve effective engagement with schools in both academic and administrative terms
* How to seek to achieve an appropriate level of challenge for schools when assuring academic standards
* the approaches to moderation (applying criteria, assessing consistency, sampling etc.)
* How to effectively contribute to Boards of Examiners discussions