



External Examining at the University of East London A brief guide

Introduction

This guide is intended for those who have been approached with a view to being considered for approval as an external examiner at the University of East London.

The guide provides a brief explanation of the main duties of external examiners. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all rights and responsibilities. More detailed guidance will be provided in the *UEL External Examiners' Manual* which is issued upon appointment.

What do external examiners do at UEL?

External examiners help to:

- verify that academic standards are appropriate for the award or part thereof which the external examiner has been appointed to examine;
- support/advise our University to assure and maintain academic standards across higher education awards;
- support/advise our University to ensure that the assessment processes are sound, fairly operated and in line with our policies and regulations.

The following provides some brief guidance on the role that is expected of an external examiner at UEL.

1 *Ensuring comparability of standards*

This is one of the key roles. Our University is anxious to ensure that the standards of its modules and programmes are comparable with those of similar programmes of higher education elsewhere. You are also asked to compare how well students from our University are performing in comparison with students from elsewhere.

2 *Approving assessment tasks before students take them*

You should approve the form and content of proposed assessment tasks which are prescribed as counting towards the relevant award(s) in order to ensure that all students will be assessed fairly in relation to the module specification and regulations and in such a way that you will be able to judge whether they have fulfilled the objectives of the module and reached the required standard. Every component of assessment that leads to an award, at all levels, is subject to external examiner moderation. Subject Area examiners should expect to review the full range of assessment activities which contribute to judgements about the performance of students and not just examination paper, at least four weeks prior to the first scheduled use of the assessment task.

In discharging this responsibility, we are asking you to ensure: that the tasks provide the students with the opportunity to perform at a standard comparable with students elsewhere; that the assessment tasks enable the students to meet the intended learning outcomes identified in the module specification, and are appropriate to the curriculum content; that the examination paper/assignment is presented in a way which all students will have an equal chance of understanding.

3 *Evaluating assessed work*

You should have access to all assessed work. In particular, you should see the work of students proposed for the highest available category of award and for failure in those parts of the course for which you have designated responsibility, and samples of the work of students proposed for each category of award, in order to ensure that each student is fairly placed in relation to other students. However, in the majority of cases it will be impractical for you to look at all the assessed work. The Assessment & Feedback Policy provides that a minimum of 10% or 10 individual pieces of each assessment task (whichever is the greater) should be made available to you for moderation. This sample should be taken from the full range of performance.

You should aim to review the full range of assessment modes. For example, if students are assessed by examinations and assignments, then you should evaluate both of these. Where forms of assessment are adopted which are less easy to record on paper you should discuss with the subject area team what methods should be adopted to enable you to review what has taken place.

It is up to you and the School to work out how you will undertake this responsibility. Some examiners ask for samples to be sent to them in the post prior to the assessment board. Others prefer to come to our University the day or morning before the assessment board so that they have time to look at work in-depth prior to the meeting.

Increasingly where the method of assessment allows, submission of coursework is via e-submission. The preferred method of e-submission is via Turnitin Grademark. Where assessment is submitted by students via e-submission, it should be marked and second marked online. The preferred approach for supporting you with your role within e-submission is to provide you with direct access to the relevant Moodle sites, enabling moderation directly via Turnitin Grademark.

We appreciate that this will probably be the most time-consuming part of your job and that it will often occur at the busiest time of the year. Where it is agreed that you will receive work for moderation by post, normally a minimum of 5 days should be allowed for moderation to be completed, in addition to any postal time involved.

You should not be requested to act as a second or third marker, or to adjudicate on disagreements between internal markers. Your role is to determine whether the marking *process* is accurate, fair and of the right standard.

4 Moderating marks

You have the right to moderate the marks awarded by internal examiners, in accordance with UEL's policies regarding assessment.

If, having moderated the sample of assessed work provided, you believe that the marks for the assessment component or element are not consonant with the standard expected, are unduly high or low or do not appear to be an accurate reflection of the general ability of the students, then you may recommend to the assessment board that *all* marks for a particular assessment are raised or lowered. This should not be done by moving the pass mark or classification points, as this may inappropriately affect the overall average mark for each student.

You may also, as part of your general sampling of assessed work, find inconsistencies in the marking of a particular component of assessment, or procedural errors such as incorrect addition of marks on an examination paper. In this event you should notify the module leader and/or Dean of school/Head of Subject Area of your concerns and request that the whole component is remarked. This should happen only rarely, but it is the only fair way to resolve the problem.

You should always seek the support of the assessment board for any moderation of marks you are proposing. This support will not be withheld unduly, but remember it is your *right* to moderate marks if you are of the view that the standard of the award or justice to students may otherwise be compromised.

5 Attending assessment boards

You should attend relevant Assessment Board meetings. You should contribute to decisions on awards and ensure that those decisions have been reached by means according with UEL's requirements and standard practice in higher education.

Attending meetings of the assessment board is a very important part of your role. It is essential that external examiners are in attendance at assessment boards. We appreciate that in most cases you will be invited to attend three boards a year, and in some cases four, and that this makes very significant demands on your time. You should however expect to be consulted about the date of the board early in the year, or at least notified of the date at an early stage, in order to give you maximum advance notice of this commitment.

6 *Ensuring assessment regulations are observed*

Another key role of examiners is to ensure that the assessment regulations are followed. You will receive guidance in the External Examiner Manual on the UEL regulations. We appreciate that this is sometimes a very complex technical task. However, you will be supported by the servicing officer of the assessment board who is also responsible for ensuring the regulations are observed.

7 *Writing a report*

You are required to report back to UEL, at least once annually or as may otherwise be prescribed, on the effectiveness of the assessments and any lessons to be drawn from them.

The external examiner system is a key part of the quality assurance process at our University. Your comments help us to ensure that our modules and awards are of an appropriate standard and that students are treated fairly. As such all external examiner contracts with our University include the requirement to produce an annual report, normally submitted after the summer assessment boards, and you will not be paid until we have received this report. Your report will be read by the Head of Quality Assurance & Enhancement and the Pro Vice Chancellor and we expect you to then receive a formal response from the School. In order to help you prepare this report our University provides a standard pro-forma which outlines the issues that we would like you to cover and can be downloaded from the web. The report form is in two parts. The report will be read widely within the University and will be made available in full to students (for on-campus modules only). We will use the information that you provide to help us improve the programmes and modules that we offer.

8 *Contributing to any review of an assessment board decision*

You should participate as required in any reviews of decisions about individual students' awards taken during your period of office.

What help would I receive when I first start?

In addition to the *External Examiners' Manual*, which provides an explanation of your terms of reference and all general University regulations relevant to the assessment of students, you would receive from our university's Quality Assurance & Enhancement Office: a contract and your terms of reference.

During your first year of office you would be invited to a University-wide induction day designed to help you to understand your role and how our university operates.

Academic schools are responsible for induction at local level and you would also meet the staff in the school to discuss how you wish to fulfil your duties. At that point you would receive a copy of the module specifications and any other relevant information.

What sort of time commitment is involved?

It is very difficult to be specific about the time commitment involved as this varies significantly from subject area to subject area.

There will be ongoing work throughout the year as you approve examination papers and assignments etc but the busiest time will be immediately after assessment has been completed. At this point you will have a short period of time to evaluate student work before attending the assessment board and it is inevitable that you will feel under some pressure.

For Undergraduate programmes, assessment boards will normally take place during the third study period, with additional boards normally being held in late August for reassessment. Exceptionally, additional assessment boards may be held outside of these times where local factors necessitate.

For, postgraduate programmes, assessment boards will be held at the end of Term 1, at the end of Term 2, and at the end of the summer reassessment period.

Study on an advanced independent research module a joint Award and Subject Area Board will meet to award credit for this module, normally during October. In such cases you may be required to attend assessment boards pertaining to assessment in the final academic year of your appointment which occur in the following academic year, and thus slightly outside the dates specified in your contract.

How much would I get paid and when?

The external examiner fee varies depending on the amount of work involved. Typically it is about £45 per undergraduate module (£65 per postgraduate module) a year but it is important to check how much the fee is with the Head of Subject before you agree to be an examiner because there are variations.

You will be paid once a year. No fee is paid until our university receives a written report.

For how long would I be an examiner?

The normal duration of an external examiner appointment is four years but sometimes the length is varied, usually to provide continuity in the external examiner team (i.e. it is not a good idea for all the examiners to change in the same year).

Would I be working on my own?

The number of external examiners responsible for any one subject area varies significantly. Most subject areas have at least two or three, but there can be as many as eight or nine for a large subject area.

If you are an inexperienced external examiner you will not be left to work on your own. We will normally arrange for an experienced examiner to work along side you, at least for the first year.

Who do I ask if I have any outstanding queries?

Please get back to the person who first contacted you. This was probably the Head of Subject or Dean of school. That person should be able to answer any specific queries about your role. You are also welcome to contact me if you have any general queries.

What happens next?

If you decide that you want to become an external examiner at our university, please let the Head of Subject or Dean of school know immediately. You will be asked to complete a form so that our university can formally check your suitability in terms of subject knowledge, experience and impartiality. This process can take some time as it involves a number of different stages. Once your application has been approved you will receive your contract and your induction can begin.

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