GUIDANCE FOR EXTERNAL EXAMINERS
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1. Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to act as an external examiner for Queen Mary University of London. Queen Mary fully appreciates the commitment that you have shown in agreeing to undertake this role, and we will do everything that we can to support you. Queen Mary considers that external examiners play a vital role in the proper management of academic standards, and in ensuring rigorous and fair assessment processes.

The Guidance for External Examiners provides generic information relating to your role, and a broad outline of the activities in which external examiners are likely to be involved. Examination boards may also - by agreement - ask you to act in an advisory role (for example, on the redevelopment of curricula), but such activities are not covered in detail in this document. The Guidance should be read alongside the more detailed information sent to you by your examination board.

2. Responsibilities of External Examiners

The formal line of responsibility for external examiners is to the Principal; your annual report will be addressed to the Principal (though sent to the Assistant Academic Registrar (Assessment Governance)), and you have the right to submit a confidential report to the Principal at any time.

External examiners have a key role in quality assurance:

- External examiners’ primary duty is to ensure that the standard of the degree is consistent with those awarded across the UK university system in that discipline.
- External examiners have a key responsibility to ensure that all candidates are treated fairly, and that decisions in relation to individual students are taken after due deliberation;
- External examiners are asked to review the examination process, and to comment on its operation. The reports of external examiners are also a key source of information in the monitoring of modules and programmes of study;
- Because of their experience of assessment procedures at other institutions, external examiners are in a position to offer valuable advice and counsel to examination boards and programme/module organisers.

3. Appointment of External Examiners

External examiners do not normally operate in isolation, but as a panel with collective responsibility for ensuring the standards of the qualification. Therefore, your appointment will have been made in the context of the whole panel of external examiners for the programme and award for which you have been appointed.

Queen Mary has appointment criteria in place for the appointment of external examiners. Your nomination will have been requested by the Chair of the Examination Board, and approved by the Assistant Academic Registrar (Assessment Governance) and the relevant Faculty Dean for Education (in consultation with the Vice-Principal (Education), where required).

4. Period of Appointment

Your appointment will normally run from 1 September in the year of appointment to 31 December four years later. This will enable you to be involved in assessment processes from the start of the academic cycle, and to continue in office to consider reviews, further assessment, resits, etc.
If you wish to resign before the expiry of your period of office, please write formally to the Principal, addressed to the Assistant Academic Registrar (Assessment Governance), giving sufficient notice for the appointment of a replacement.

The termination of an external examiner’s appointment by Queen Mary before the expiry of the term of office is rare, but can be made by a formal recommendation to the Vice-Principal (Education) from the Chair of the Examination Board or the Academic Registrar, with support from the appropriate Dean for Education. The Vice-Principal shall take the final decision. Reasons for termination of an appointment include failure to perform the duties of an external examiner (including non-attendance at board meetings and non-submission of reports), and breakdown in the relationship with Queen Mary.

5. Briefing

The Academic Secretariat will send you a letter of appointment at the start of your term of office, together with:

- a copy of the last report of the previous external examiner, and (where applicable) the response from the examination board;
- two copies of the External Examiner’s Agreement, which forms the contract between Queen Mary and external examiners;
- a personal details form (required for payment purposes).

We would be grateful if you could complete the personal details form, and return this with one signed copy of the Agreement. These should be addressed to:

Academic Registry and Council Secretariat (External Examiners)
ARCS, E10 Queens’ Building
Queen Mary, University of London
London, E1 4NS.

The appointment letter also includes the URL of Queen Mary’s external examiner resource page: [http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/](http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/) This page includes the following:

- Queen Mary’s Guidance for External Examiners (this document);
- a template for your annual report (updated annually);
- Queen Mary’s Academic Regulations;
- Queen Mary’s Assessment Handbook, which contains details of our assessment processes;
- Expenses claim form template

You are encouraged to use this web page to access guidelines, regulations and templates, as this ensures that you always have the most up to date version of each document. The Academic Secretariat ensures that this page always provides the most recent version of each document.

Queen Mary’s letter of appointment gives a general outline of your responsibilities, but the detailed role of each external will vary according to the discipline, the customs, practices and needs of individual examination boards, and the distribution of responsibilities across each team of examiners. As a new external examiner, you will be carefully briefed by the Chair of the examination board as soon as possible after your appointment has been confirmed.

The Chair’s briefing should cover the following:
• general information on the school/subject area, including information provided to students such as the school handbook and the regulations for the programme(s) to be examined;
• the names of other external examiners appointed to the examination board and the programmes of study for which they are responsible, together with details of the modules for which each external is solely responsible.
• the programmes’ aims and learning outcomes (and, where relevant, those of individual modules), together with their syllabi and means of assessment;
• the conventions used by the examination board in assessing individual items of assessment (scripts, projects, coursework, etc) – for example, marking criteria, and modes of second marking or moderation.;
• the calendar of events over the coming year, including the deadlines for submission of work to external examiners and for its return, the dates of board meetings, and any other dates on which the externals are needed at Queen Mary (for example, to meet students or oversee vivas/OSCEs).

The Academic Secretariat will post ‘red pen’ versions of the Academic Regulations and Assessment Handbook each year, which will highlight any major changes to Queen Mary’s policies and procedures.

6. Core duties of external examiners
External examiners have the following core duties:

• to comment upon the assessments for each module for which they are responsible, the extent to which the assessments cover the syllabus, and whether they enable candidates to demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes;
• to consider, comment upon, and approve (or otherwise) all examination question papers, and to comment upon marking schemes for individual papers, assessment criteria and model answers;
• to confirm whether or not the standard of marking is satisfactory by scrutinising a sample of assessed work for each module (sample size to be agreed between the board and the examiner);
• to comment upon the standards of achievement of candidates, and the comparability of this achievement to standards elsewhere;
• to comment upon the standards of proposed awards, and their comparability to similar awards elsewhere;
• to make known any causes for concern in relation to academic standards achieved by candidates, the standards of modules, and the standards of awards to be made, should such cause arise;
• exceptionally, upon written request, to provide independent opinion where there is a significant unresolved difference between the marks awarded by the internal markers on any script or piece of work;
• to advise the examination board on appropriate actions where the marks for any module are significantly outside the normal pattern;
• to attend, or conduct, oral examinations where applicable (note: QM only approves the use of viva type examinations as approved elements of assessment with detailed marking schemes that form part of a module’s assessment. They are not normally used for making decisions in classification);
• to attend meetings of the examination board, and to participate fully in decision marking;
• to endorse (or otherwise) results and progression decisions and recommendations for award;
• to attend meetings of the Degree Examination Board, where the examiner wishes;
• to submit a full annual report and, if desired, an additional confidential report to the Principal;
• to perform any other duties requested by the Senate or the Degree Examination Board, following appropriate consultation on the nature of those duties.

By agreement with the examination board, and in consultation with the relevant school(s), you may also be asked to carry out other duties, including the approval of project topics and essay titles, interviewing students about their programmes of study and experiences, commenting upon proposed changes to the curriculum, or commenting upon proposed changes to assessment methods.

As an external examiner, you will also have a less tangible role in encouraging good practice and advising the examination board on dealing with difficult problems.

Where the method of programme delivery is non-standard (for example, mixed mode), the examination board will discuss with you the arrangements for sampling and moderating the internal marking. This should take place at a very early stage in the session, and you should collaborate with internal examiners in monitoring the effectiveness of the arrangements throughout the session. You are particularly requested to comment upon the effectiveness of the sampling and moderation procedures as they relate to non-standard programmes in your annual report.

7. Moderation of examination question papers

The examination board is responsible for overseeing the production and agreement of examination papers; this is often delegated to a small sub-committee of examiners known as the Scrutiny Sub-board. Examination papers (including marking schemes, assessment criteria, and model answers) are prepared by internal examiners in accordance with Queen Mary’s approved minimum standards and template. These are then reviewed by the Scrutiny Sub-board, and sent to you for review and approval (or otherwise). Examination papers for all sittings of examinations must be set, scrutinised, and approved in accordance with the approved procedure. You should review and approve all examination papers, including resit papers, even where individual questions may have been agreed separately in the past.

The draft question paper should be accompanied by model answers or, where this would be inappropriate (for example, in question papers that require essay based answers), by an indication of the length, style and content of the desired answer (a ‘skeleton answer’).

You should satisfy yourself that the question paper:

• is appropriate to the level of the module;
• is an appropriate means of testing whether candidates have achieved the stated outcomes of the module;
• covers the full range of the syllabus;
• is fair – that is, that some candidates will not be at an advantage other than by virtue of their academic ability and commitment.

In the event that you are unable to agree an examination paper this will be reported to the Chair of the Degree Examination Board and the Academic Registrar (or nominee). The Chair of the Degree Examination Board will make a decision on whether or not the paper should be approved, or if amendments should be made. The decision will be based upon consideration of your objections and the viewpoint brought forward by the exam board setting the paper.

For all programmes except the MBBS, at least 50 percent of the assessed work for each module must be double marked/moderated in accordance with the QM Code of Practice on Double Marking and Moderation (found in section 5 the Assessment Handbook at http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/). This will normally include all examination scripts, and any substantial elements
of coursework. For the MBBS, different arrangements are in use whereby only short answer question scripts from resits are double marked. Where a module is assessed wholly by coursework, the elements selected for double marking/moderation must, as far as possible, be the same for all students. Where assessment is based upon a selection of coursework (for example, best three of four essays), the elements to be double marked/moderated must be drawn from those that contribute to the assessment.

8. Moderation of examination scripts and other assessed coursework

As an external examiner your role is to moderate the marking of internal examiners, hence you have the right to examine any script or other piece of assessed material. The selection of assignments to be sent to you is a matter to be agreed between yourself and the Chair of the examination board. You should have sufficient evidence to determine that internal marking and award recommendations are of an appropriate standard and are consistent. Sampling arrangements will therefore normally provide for you to see examples of the following:

- assignments from the top, middle, and bottom of the range;
- assignments from borderline candidates;
- assignments marked internally as first class, or failure;
- exceptionally, assignments where the internal markers cannot agree on the mark to be awarded.

The assignments must be accompanied by the comments of the internal examiners. Evidence of double marking/moderation (where required by Queen Mary's Code of Practice on Double Marking and Moderation) should be clear, and the marks of the two internal examiners easily distinguishable. If there has been disagreement between the two internal markers, the final agreed mark should be clearly identified for you. If the internal examiners are unable to resolve marking differences, the assignment may be referred as a third marker. This will be in exceptional circumstances only.

Where your moderation indicates the need for a significant alteration to the mark for an assignment, the relevant internal examiners should discuss with you whether the marks for the entire cohort should be reviewed. If the latter appears necessary, the examiners have discretion on whether to remark all scripts, or to scale marks in relation to agreed benchmarks. Such rescaling should be reported to and endorsed by the assessing examination board.

You should not be asked to undertake:

- first or second marking;
- revision of the marks awarded for the assignment of an individual student other than giving an opinion in specific exceptional cases at the request of the internal examiners; i.e. where it has not been possible to resolve the matter internally. Where such exceptional cases involve changing the mark of an individual (rather than a cohort), they must be carefully documented in the examination board minutes.

9. Examination boards

Queen Mary operates a two-tiered system of examination boards. Subject Examination Boards (SEBs) consider marks and progression, and any circumstances that may have impacted upon these, and make recommendations for awards. Degree Examination Boards (DEBs) are award boards and approve awards and classifications, as well as ratifying other results achieved and progression decisions. The LLB programme is unique in operating a combined SEB and DEB.

As an external examiner, you are required to attend the Subject Examination Board for the programme(s) to which you have been appointed, and may attend the Degree Examination
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Board if you elect to do so. Exceptionally, where you are unable to attend the Subject Examination Board, the meeting may proceed in your absence provided that you provide comments of the candidates' performance prior to the meeting. These will be reported to the board, and you will be asked to endorse all recommendations and decisions.

It should not be necessary to make more than three visits to Queen Mary each year. Exceptions may be made where you are asked to be present at (e.g.) a resit board, presentation, OSCE.

Subject Examination Boards expect to receive marks that have already been moderated by external examiners except on rare occasions where the performance of one or more candidates raises an issue of policy upon which the whole board must decide. The Chair of the Subject Examination Board therefore has responsibility for ensuring that the marks and other information put before the board includes the comments of external examiners. Some boards ask external examiners to send their comments in writing a week before the board, while others organise preliminary board meetings at which all outstanding issues are resolved.

10. Debtors and alleged assessment offences

Students flagged as being in debt to Queen Mary (where the debt relates directly to the programme of study – e.g. tuition fees, library fines, field course fees and bench fees) will be considered by the examination board as usual. However, the official results of these students must be withheld until confirmation has been received that the debt has been cleared.

Students who are alleged to have committed an examination offence or other assessment offence cannot be considered. Even where the alleged offence concerns only one module, the outcome may potentially affect all modules. The examination board should agree arrangements for determining these students' results upon resolution of the allegations; this will normally be by Chair's action, following discussions between the Chair and a nominated external examiner.

11. Extenuating circumstances

Students are required to notify examination boards (through a named contact) of any extenuating circumstances (ECs) that may have affected their performance at least three working days before the meeting of the examination board’s Extenuating Circumstances Sub-board in order that their performance can be considered in light of these circumstances. Submissions must be supported by relevant written evidence, such as medical documentation.

Extenuating Circumstances Sub-boards review claims, make recommendations on outcomes, and identify claims that may require consideration by the full examination board; these will normally be cases where a candidate’s marks/grades or classification may be affected. The Sub-board cannot act independently of the main board in deciding how to deal with extenuating circumstances, and its recommendations must be endorsed by the board. Queen Mary does not advocate the detailed discussion of cases at the full board, but exceptionally, in difficult cases, this may be required.

12. Late Submission of Assessments

Queen Mary uses the following late work penalty for all programmes; for every period of 24 hours, or part thereof, that an assignment is overdue there shall be a deduction of five per cent of the total marks available (i.e. five marks for an assessment marked out of 100). After seven calendar days (168 hours or more late) the mark shall be reduced to zero, and recorded as 0FL (zero, fail, late).
Certain assessments which cease to be a valid measure of a module’s learning outcomes prior to the seven working day cut-off. For example, where feedback has been provided to the class, any submission made after that point would not be an accurate measure of attainment. In such cases, the late submission policy shall apply as normal up to the day on which feedback is given; at that point, a mark of zero (0FL) shall be applied, even if this is within seven working days of the deadline. Schools and institutes must make clear to students in advance where this variant policy applies, or else the general policy shall be applied.

13. Vivas
Viva voce examinations are oral examinations. For taught programmes, Queen Mary only endorses the use of a viva as an integral part of the assessment for a module (all students being involved, and with a detailed marking scheme). In these cases, a single examiner may be used, though the SEB may request that an external examiner attend to moderate the process and give input (though not to award marks). The examiners have discretion on the adjustment of the provisional marks/grades, as with all other assignments.

Queen Mary does not endorse the use of vivas to determine the recommended classification for borderline candidates up for award. The regulations are set on the basis that credit shall only be given for attainment in assessment; a final viva for classification does not constitute part of the approved assessment for a programme, does not have a detailed marking/assessment scheme, and risks favouring students with skills in presentation and self-confidence above others who may not excel in those areas, but who have better subject knowledge and understanding.

14. Students with Specific Learning Requirements
Students may be granted additional time in written examinations under Queen Mary’s special arrangements procedures. Scripts are marked as usual, noting the guidance supplied in the Specific Learning Requirements (SpLD) cover sheet. All written assessments will also be submitted with the SpLD covesheet.

15. Classification for honours
Degrees that are classified are based on a College Mark, calculated using the appropriate method as specified in the Academic Regulations. Examination boards do have a degree of discretion in determining the class of degree, within the permitted scope of QMUL’s borderline classification policy. There is no discretion at the pass/fail borderline. There are overarching Queen Mary rules on discretion (detailed in section six of the Assessment Handbook discretion is recommended by Subject Examination Boards, and agreed by Degree Examination Boards (along with awards). The recommendation must be detailed clearly in the minutes of the SEB meeting, as it may have to be defended on academic grounds should a candidate challenge a decision. As an external examiner, your opinion will be especially influential in such cases and your agreement should be recorded in the examination board’s minutes.

16. Opinions of external examiners
Examination board Chairs must ensure that external examiners are invited to express their opinions, particularly on difficult and contentious cases, and these opinions will always carry a particular weight. In routine cases where there are disagreements within the board, the final decision will normally be taken by a majority vote (the Chair having a second and casting vote in the event of a tie). Where, however, an external examiner expresses grave concern that a particular decision would be improper (e.g. unfair to a candidate, or in violation of appropriate standards), the Chair must seek the views of all of the external examiners on the issue. If the majority of external examiners are in agreement, the board
must defer to their views and the substance of the discussion must be recorded in the minutes or report of the meeting.

17. External examiners’ reports

Oral reports
After the examination board has completed its deliberations, you and your fellow external examiners will each be invited to give a brief oral report. This should cover:

- your opinion of the assessment process, including its fairness, accuracy, and efficiency;
- your opinion of the academic quality of the cohort(s) that have been examined;
- your opinion of the quality of teaching, as judged by the students’ assessment;
- any recommendations to the examination board for improvements to the teaching or assessment processes;
- your opinion as to whether recommendations from previous years have been properly followed up.

Examination boards are normally very willing to respond to external examiners’ comments. If, however, the Chair of the board fails to respond to any critical comments you have made in a positive manner, you should contact the Academic Registrar as a matter of urgency. You may also make representations to the Chair of the relevant Degree Examination Board, and the Chair of Senate (the Principal) if you are dissatisfied with a decision.

The report from a Subject Examination Board to a Degree Examination Board must detail any cases where the majority of external examiners disagreed with a decision concerning the classification of a particular candidate.

Written reports
As an external examiner, you are also required to make an annual written report to the Principal (though addressed and emailed to the Assistant Academic Registrar, Assessment Governance. This should be completed and submitted within 30 days of the main board meeting using the relevant template from http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/.

External examiners’ written reports form an essential part of Queen Mary’s quality assurance framework, and constitute a major source of information for the annual review of taught programmes, and for periodic review of schools/institutes. Reports are made available to students through Staff-Student Liaison Committees, and any reference to an individual student in a report must be avoided. You may attach a confidential report as an appendix to the main report if you wish to report a matter concerning an individual student.

The Assistant Academic Registrar, Assessment Governance reads all external examiner reports and highlights comments that require a formal response, before sending the report to the examination board. Chairs of examination boards are required to respond to the points made by external examiners – both directly to you (normally within 30 days of submission of the report), and through the documentation produced for Annual Programme Review and Periodic Internal Review.

The Chair of the board will send you a written response, copied to the Assistant Academic Registrar (Assessment Governance). In the event that you raise an issue of principle that has not already been addressed by the school or institute, it should first be discussed at a staff meeting, the next meeting of the Subject Examination Board, or a meeting of the relevant Teaching and Learning Committee as appropriate to the circumstances.

Please note that the Academic Secretariat does not normally respond to individual points in reports (this being done by the examination board) unless this is specifically requested.
Instead, after review of all reports, it creates an annual summary report of institution-level issues for Senate; this directly informs policy review processes at Queen Mary.

In cases where an external examiners’ report contains particularly sensitive or serious comments, the Assistant Academic Registrar, Assessment Governance will refer the matter to the Vice-Principal (Education), who will contact the appropriate examination board Chair and/or Head of School immediately. The Vice-Principal will normally require a formal written response to serious criticism.

Report templates are reviewed and revised annually. Please download the most recent version each year, from [http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/](http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/). The Academic Secretariat will pursue the non-submission of reports, and provides regular reports on non-submission to the Deans for Education and Vice-Principal (Education). Please note that fees will only be paid upon submission of a report, and that Queen Mary reserves the right to refuse to pay for late reports.

Queen Mary aims to establish and maintain constructive and effective relationships with its external examiners; if, however, you experience any problems, please report them immediately to the Assistant Academic Registrar, Assessment Governance, the Academic Registrar, or the Vice-Principal (Education).

18. Payment

**Fees**

Following submission of your report, the Academic Secretariat will request a fee payment form from the examination board. The fee amount is at the discretion of the examination board; however there is a base rate calculated using a fee payment formula that takes account of (for example) the number of scripts reviewed. Queen Mary reserves the right to refuse payment for reports received more than six months after the board.

The Academic Secretariat cannot process any payment without confirmation of your personal details and a verified copy of your passport. You will be asked to bring your passport to Queen Mary (you need only do this once) so that a verified copy can be made. You will also be asked to confirm your personal details on an annual basis.

The normal payment date is the 24th of each month, though the ‘cut-off’ date for Human Resources to receive the payment request is the 1st of each month – claims processed after that date will be paid the following month.

**Expenses**

The exam board will reimburse travel and subsistence expenses for external examiners, in line with the Queen Mary Expenses Policy - [http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/policy/](http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/policy/). Subsistence costs are limited to a daily amount and these are listed on the reverse of the Expenses Claim Form. Please check with your examination board as they may book accommodation/transport for you.

To reclaim your expenses, please submit a signed expenses claim form (found here: [http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/](http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/)) and return this together with the original receipt(s)/ticket(s) to the exam board Secretary. Please note that Queen Mary cannot refund claims more than three months old, or claims without original ticket(s)/receipt(s).
19. Key contacts

Your primary point of contact with Queen Mary will be the Chair of your examination board; the Chair’s contact details will be provided in your appointment letter. The main contacts in the Academic Secretariat are:

Alice de Havillan, Academic Standards and Quality Officer
a.l.dehavillan@qmul.ac.uk / 020 7882 7789
For matters relating to fees and expenses, appointments and nominations, questions on report submission, and general queries.

Simon Hayter, Assistant Academic Registrar (Assessment Governance)
s.n.hayter@qmul.ac.uk / 020 7882 7783
For any policy matters, and for submission of your written report.

All written correspondence (including expenses claims) should be addressed to:

Academic Registry and Council Secretariat (External Examiners)
ARCS, E10 Queens’ Building
Queen Mary, University of London
Mile End Road
London, E1 4NS

The external examiners resource page is available here:
http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/

Queen Mary’s ‘Policy Zone’ web page provides a full list of policies and regulations:
http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/policy/index.html