

External Examining: Procedure for External Examiners

The Policy for External Examining of Taught Programmes and the University of Bristol sets out the specific role and duties of an External Examiner. The Policy can be found online at the following link: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/exexs/>. This document accompanies the policy and is intended to provide guidance to External Examiners about their engagement with the process.

1. NOMINATION AND APPOINTMENT/ REAPPOINTMENT

Nomination Process

1.1 The University of Bristol has a formal process in place for Schools to nominate External Examiners. Once the School has identified an individual that they would like to appoint as an External Examiner a nomination form will be completed, which will set out the details of the proposed appointment. The Student/ Graduate Administration Manager (SAM/GAM) (or nominee) will send the completed form to you for review and may request that you provide an up to date CV to support the nomination. You will be asked to sign to confirm that you agree to the appointment on the basis of the information in the form and to confirm that you meet the University of Bristol appointment criteria for External Examiners (provided as an appendix to the form). Signed forms should be sent back to the SAM/GAM (or nominee).

1.2 Once internal approval processes have been followed at the University, which will include a Right to Work check for UG external examiners, you will be notified of the appointment decision by the Academic Quality and Policy Office (AQPO), who will send the relevant appointment documentation to you, including a letter of appointment, with a link to relevant University level regulations and policy.

1.3 On occasion, you may agree with the School to cover another programme during the term of your appointment. The School will ensure that the appropriate internal approval procedures are followed and AQPO will issue a new appointment letter confirming the extended coverage. If this situation arises, the original end date will still apply.

1.4 As stated in the Policy, the normal period of appointment for External Examiners is four years (or five years for the MBChB, BDS and BVSc). Exceptionally, the School may request to extend an appointment for a further one year period to ensure continuity, for example a programme is coming to an end. If you agree to the proposed extension, then the School will seek the relevant internal approvals. Upon approval of the extension, AQPO will send updated appointment documentation to you.

2. INDUCTION PROCEDURES

Initial Induction

2.1 The School is responsible for arranging a suitable programme of induction for you at the start of your appointment, to enable you to carry out your duties as an External Examiner. This may be via face to face meetings, by virtual means, the provision of information or a mixture of these. You will be allocated a key academic point of contact for liaison – this will

normally be the Programme Director but in some Schools this role may be performed by an alternative contact, for instance an Exams Officer or the School Education Director.

2.2 The induction will cover:

- an introduction to the Programme Team and other relevant staff in the School;
- information on the relevant reference points, including any external partnerships and/or accreditation for the programmes for which you are responsible;
- the assessment design and criteria for the programme(s) and the content and structure of units;
- an introduction to your role as External Examiner at the University of Bristol, making it clear what falls within and outside of your remit;
- an overview of relevant regulations, policies and procedures concerning assessment procedures and the function of Boards of Examiners; where there are exceptional arrangements, the School should set these out to you in advance of the Exam Board.
- links to sector reference points (found on the External Examining webpage) - [External Examiners | Academic Quality and Policy Office | University of Bristol](#))
- relevant professional issues, such as fitness to practise or accreditation, and any features that relate to the specific discipline
- a link to the programme and unit catalogue and any relevant student handbook(s).
- marking and moderation policies;
- any IT platforms used for student work and board activities
- a review of the report provided by the previous External Examiner (if applicable).
- information on how and when marks data and statistics will be shared with the External Examiner.
- GDPR and confidentiality requirements, particularly for external examiners recruited from non-academic backgrounds.

2.3 You should agree with the Programme Director (or alternative) as early as possible the method for selecting students' work for review.

3. EXTERNAL EXAMINER RESPONSIBILITIES

Review Curriculum

3.1 As an External Examiner, you should ensure that you have a good understanding of the programme(s)/unit(s) that you are responsible for and provide advice on matters of curriculum content, balance and structure. The University of Bristol publishes all unit and programme information in an online catalogue, which can be found at the following link: <https://www.bris.ac.uk/unit-programme-catalogue> You may feedback comments and observations to the Programme Director (or alternative) at any point, but will be asked to comment formally on the curriculum in the end of year External Examiner Report.

Review Draft Assessment Requirements

3.2 As an External Examiner, you must be satisfied that the assessment requirements are such as to enable students to be fairly assessed in relation to the stated intended learning outcomes. You will be invited to scrutinise and approve the draft assessment requirements and will be sent the relevant documentation to enable you to do this. This might include information relating to aims and objectives, contents, intended learning outcomes, assessment/marketing methods for the relevant unit.

3.3 You will be invited to scrutinise all summative assessment tasks where the contribution to a unit mark is the equivalent of greater than 25 percent of a 20 credit point unit and which contributes to the final degree result. (Therefore including weightings of greater than 12.5% of a 40 credit point unit etc).

3.4 The documentation you are given access to will vary depending on the type of assessment being used. Schools will be expected to provide the External Examiner with sufficient information about the assessment to enable them to consider whether each assessment, and the portfolio of assessment as a whole, is appropriate.

3.5 You may be given access to the following types of documentation (not exhaustive) to enable you to carry out your role:

- a) All draft examination questions and coursework questions (detailed marking criteria may also be provided);
- b) A sample of draft examination questions, taken from a larger pool of possible questions (detailed marking criteria may also be provided);
- c) Proof of concept for an assessment: This will include a description of how students will be assessed, an overview of what students will be assessed on and information about how the assessment will be marked.

3.6 As an External Examiner you will be required to sign off on the suitability of the assessment requirements and from this point the assessment will not be changed by the School without further consulting with you.

3.7 The School will normally set out the timeline for this work in the introductory letter (sent at the start of your appointment and the beginning of each year) so that you are clear what you can expect to receive and when. The Programme Director (or alternative) will let you know of action taken in response to the feedback provided on the draft assessment requirements.

Review Student Work

3.8 The Programme Director (or alternative) will discuss and agree with you the method for selecting students' work for review. You are required to review a sample of assessed work, to provide assurance that the institution is maintaining academic standards and rigour in its marking and moderation processes. You have the right to request to see all assessments that contribute to the degree result.

3.9 External Examiners are not directly involved in marking and should not change individual marks. If you have a concern regarding the overall standard of marking, please notify the Programme Director (or alternative) and the School Education Director. It is the responsibility of the Programme Director (or alternative) and the School Education Director to investigate the concerns of the External Examiner and agree any action to be taken, in consultation with the relevant Faculty Education Director.

Meet with Students

3.10 Where you are asked to meet with students, the meetings should discuss students' learning and assessment experiences (but not individual assessment outcomes) and provide an opportunity for students to comment on previous External Examiner reports.

3.11 Students will be given clear guidance by the School about the purpose of the meeting and what is outside the scope of the meeting. Except for an agreed meeting, it is inappropriate for students to initiate direct contact with External Examiners. If contact is made, please refer the matter to the Academic Quality and Policy Office (exex-admin@bristol.ac.uk).

3.12 Meetings with students may lead to the identification of possible programme improvements and provide you with an overall view of the student experience, which will enhance your contribution to the consideration of such matters at the exam board.

3.13 The Programme Director (or alternative) will confirm any opportunities for you to meet with students. It is anticipated that such meetings should normally include student representatives in the later stages of the relevant programme(s).

Member of the Board of Examiners

3.14 The School will provide you with the dates of the Boards of Examiners in the introductory letter sent out at the start of the External Examiner appointment and at the start of each year. If the dates are not known at the start of the academic year, the School will advise the date on which these are due be set and will subsequently contact you with the final exam board date once known. Any changes to dates will be communicated as soon as possible.

3.15 External Examiners are required to attend at least one meeting of the Board of Examiners in a year, normally the final meeting of the Board; this may be in person or virtually.

3.16 You will be invited to provide your reflections to the Board of Examiners, which will be formally recorded in the meeting minutes. If you are unable to attend a Board of Examiners meeting in any capacity, please provide the Programme Director (or alternative) with a written report that will be presented to the Board on your behalf. Any concerns or recommendations will be actively considered by the School before the start of the next academic year.

3.17 As an External Examiner, you are encouraged to make your views known to the Board of Examiners, which should take due account of your opinion, but the final decision on the marks or classification awarded rests with the Board of Examiners as a whole.

4. REPORTS

4.1 External Examiners are required to submit a written report using a standard University template, providing a commentary and recommendations on the conduct of the assessment processes, academic standards, assessment, and the curriculum delivery and design. You will also be asked to highlight examples of good practice, innovation and enhancement opportunities provided to students.

4.2 The standard University template for External Examiner Reports will be provided by the School ahead of the Exam Board each year.

4.3 Reports are normally submitted during June for undergraduate programmes following the Board of Examiners' meetings held in the summer or in November and December for postgraduate taught programmes following the Board of Examiners' meetings held in the autumn/winter.

4.4 The maximum deadlines are set out below:

- **Undergraduate Programmes: 1st July**
- **Postgraduate Taught Programmes: 20th December**

4.5 Some programmes at the University of Bristol have a non-standard structure where the above deadlines are unsuitable. The School will communicate any alternative deadlines to you, if the above standard dates do not apply. Similarly, if the School is

subject to external scrutiny (for example for professional accreditation) which requires the External Examiner Report to be submitted earlier than the normal deadline, the School will communicate this earlier deadline to you. If you have been asked to be the external examiner for both UG and PG programmes, you will normally submit separate reports. However, the School may have asked you to submit a report in line with UG deadline and to provide a supplementary statement about the PG provision after the PGT dissertations have been submitted and the later PGT exam board has been conducted.

Please submit your completed report to the student administration team in the relevant academic School, following the instructions they will provide.

5. RESPONSES

5.1 The School will review the External Examiner Report and provide you with a short overall response, followed by detailed individual responses to all recommendations using a standard University template. If you have raised a concern relating to University/Faculty policy or practice, you may receive a further response from a Faculty or University representative. You should expect to receive a response from the School within approximately four weeks of sending the report and by the following maximum deadlines:

- **Undergraduate programmes: 1st August**
- **Postgraduate Taught Programmes: 31st January**

5.2 Please note that programmes that have a non-standard structure and have agreed a separate deadline for reports will also have a separate maximum deadline for the response.

Disclosure of External Examiner Reports and Responses

5.3 External Examiner Reports and Responses will be made available by the University to various internal quality review panels, committees and groups and appropriate statutory and professional bodies. The Report and Response can also be made available to members of the public under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act.

5.4 The Report (and the Response Form) will also be made available by the School to students via the University Virtual Learning Environment. Students are made aware of the identity and current position of External Examiners appointed but are advised not to contact External Examiners directly.

5.5 Schools should ensure that any data identifying staff (with the exception of staff commendation) or students is removed from the Report Form and the Response Form prior to making these available via the relevant virtual learning environment.

5.6 The Academic Quality and Policy Office will prepare an annual summary report highlighting themes arising from the University's External Examiner Reports. This summary report will be reviewed by the University Academic Quality and Standards Committee to take forward any actions at University level. The report may contain extracts from External Examiner reports and School responses to these. The annual summary report is regarded as confidential but will be made available to various internal committees and groups, and to appropriate statutory and professional bodies.

6. FEES

6.1 The fee payable will be agreed at the time of your appointment as an External Examiner and the details will be set out in the appointment letter and confirmed by the School on an annual basis in the introductory letter. When you submit your report, please complete a fee/expense claim form – this can be downloaded here:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/directory/finance/receive-payments/forms/>

6.2 Please complete and return the claim form electronically to the SAM/GAM in the School. Separate forms are required for external examining work at UG and PG level because HMRC requires the University to deduct tax at source for UG but not PG. If you examine programmes at both UG and PG levels, you will need to submit two claim forms; one for the work completed at each level, adding up to the total agreed fee.

6.3 The School is responsible for responding to any queries related to fees or expense claims and is responsible for arranging payment.

7. DISCONTINUATION OF APPOINTMENT

7.1 If you wish to resign from your appointment, please inform the Head of School in writing before the end of the academic year. You would normally be expected to complete your duties as an External Examiner related to that academic year of appointment. If you wish to resign during the academic year, please inform the Head of School in writing, giving a three-month notice period.

7.2 In the event of unsatisfactory performance, the University reserves the right to terminate the appointment of an External Examiner at any time. Unsatisfactory performance could cover a range of issues, including the failure to attend appropriate examination boards without making alternative arrangements and the failure to submit completed reports. A termination of the appointment may also be necessary where a conflict of interest arises during the term of office.

8. DATA PROTECTION

8.1 External Examiners and staff in Schools should be fully aware of information security when exchanging draft exam papers and other draft forms of assessment, see www.bris.ac.uk/infosec/ for further information.

8.2 All personal data that you supply for the purpose of your appointment and subsequently your engagement as an External Examiner will be held securely for no longer than necessary and no longer than 7 years. Submitted reports and responses provided by the School may be held indefinitely.

8.3 The University will use this data for payment of fees and expenses and for any other necessary communications. This data may be shared, if necessary, with Schools of the University. The University will not disclose your contact details or any other personal details to third parties (i.e., outside the University) without your consent unless there is a legal requirement to do so.

9. SERIOUS CONCERNS

9.1 In the event that you have a serious concern relating to academic standards and internal procedures, during the term of office, which you are unable to resolve with the appropriate academic staff, you may draw these to the attention of the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education Quality and Standards) by submitting a special report to them at any time. The Associate PVC, or nominee, will notify the University Academic Standards and Quality Committee that a special report has been received and will investigate the points raised.

9.2 The University shall provide a timely response to the report received, which will describe the actions that will be taken to address the concerns. The Associate PVC, or nominee, will consider whether changes to Policy are required and provide an update to the University Academic Quality Standards Committee once the investigation has taken place and any actions to resolve the issues have been agreed.

Key Contacts:

Programme Director (or alternative): First point of contact in the School for queries related to the academic unit(s)/programme(s) for which you are External Examiner and your roles and responsibilities.

Student Administration Manager (SAM) / Graduate Administration Manager (GAM): First point of contact for administrative queries related to the external examining process including fee claims. Responsible for receiving and receipting external examining reports.

Academic Quality and Policy Office (AQPO) in Education and Student Success: The team with central oversight of the external examining process at the University of Bristol. Responsible for appointing external examiners nominated by Schools/Faculties and maintaining central databases. [Email: exex-admin@bristol.ac.uk]