

External Examining Handbook



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1. Key Contacts

<p>Academic Quality & Policy Office (AQPO)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy • Procedural queries • Processing of Nomination Forms to appoint new external examiners • Maintaining external examiner database • Sending Report Forms • Oversight of cycle completion • Analysis of data across reports and reporting trends 	<p>exex-admin@bristol.ac.uk</p> <p>https://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/exexs/</p>
<p>Fees and Expenses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processing of authorised fee claim payments from the school 	<p>UG: payroll-uob@bristol.ac.uk</p> <p>PG: accountspayable-queries@bristol.ac.uk</p> <p>External examiners should contact their school contact with fee queries in the first instance.</p>
<p>Temporary Staffing Service (TSS)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right to Work Check for UG external examiners 	<p>Tss-cag@bristol.ac.uk</p> <p>https://www.bristol.ac.uk/temporary-staffing/cag/contact-us/</p>
<p>School Teams</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arranging and approving Nomination Forms • Local induction • Access to materials • Communications with external examiner to fulfil the role • Engaging with and responding to external examiner feedback • Receiving and authorising fee claims submitted by external examiners 	<p>Various individual and team contacts.</p> <p>Listing of Schools by Faculty: https://www.bristol.ac.uk/faculties/</p> <p>Head of School: Senior staff member responsible for external examining within a School and who may delegate operational tasks to a School Education Director or Examinations Officer.</p> <p>Programme Director (or alternative): First point of contact in the School for queries related to the academic unit(s)/programme(s) and the external examiner role and responsibilities.</p> <p>Student Administration Manager (SAM) / Graduate Administration Manager (GAM) (or deputy): First</p>

		point of contact for administrative queries related to the external examining process including queries about fee claims.
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2. Key References

The Policy for External Examining of Taught Programmes at 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 Handbook accompanies the policy and is intended to provide guidance to Schools and external examiners about their engagement with the process and to set out the terms of the external examiners' appointment and engagement throughout the duration of their appointment, and, where specified, beyond the duration of their appointment.

Internal facing process/ systems guidance and related forms for University staff are available in the Bristol Education Administration Manual ([BEAM](#)), including:

- External Examiner Nomination Form
- External Examiner Reappointment Form
- Discontinuation of Appointment Form
- Further guidance documents

Fee claim forms for external examiners are available on the Finance Services website: <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/directory/finance/receive-payments/fee-and-expense-claims/>.

Any reference to students in this Handbook shall mean the students of the University.



3. Nomination, Appointment, Reappointment and Discontinuation

3.1 Nomination Process

The University of Bristol has a formal process in place for Schools to nominate external examiners. Once the Programme Director 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 nominee should normally have substantial experience in teaching and learning and hold a substantive appointment at another UK Higher Education Institution. The Student/ Graduate Administration Manager (SAM/GAM) (or administrator) will send the partially completed form to the proposed external examiner for review and completion with their details. Forms will be returned to schools for review and authorisation of the appointment by the Head of School (or delegate role holder, being either the School Education Director or the Examinations Officer (the **Delegate**)).

The University expects that Schools will appoint external examiners for both UG and PGT programmes in good time and by the end of August, ready for the start of the academic year. This may mean that there is a slight overlap, particularly for PGT programmes which have an extended academic year. External examiners are normally appointed to cover academic years rather than appointed mid-academic year. For PGT programmes which run for a longer period, this will involve seeing through the final cohort when an external examiner is in the final year of their tenure.

Once internal approval processes have been completed by the School, which will include a Right to Work check for UG external examiners, the Academic Quality and Policy Office (AQPO) will send the confirmation of appointment letter (the **Appointment Letter**) to the external examiner. Once the external examiner has confirmed their acceptance of the terms of the Appointment Letter, AQPO will add the external examiner to the University external examiner database and inform the School.

3.2 Appointment Criteria

Permitted Models for Allocation of External Examiners to Programmes

The University has three models for allocating external examiners to programmes to help ensure that the right number are contracted and that we transition from having bespoke external examiners appointed to cover single or small numbers of units only.

1. One or two external examiners are appointed to cover a programme as part of a programmatic approach.
2. For more complex programme structures, an external examiner can be appointed to cover a stage or level within a programme/ cognate programmes. External examiners will become familiar with a particular level of the qualification framework (e.g., Year 2/ Level 5).
3. Another approach for more complex programme structures or when specific skills are required is to appoint an external examiner by broad theme/ grouping of units (e.g., units related to French language and culture).

A school with the same programme being delivered at more than one campus site will be required to have the same individual external examiner covering both versions of the programme.

The Head of School or a Delegate is responsible for ensuring that sufficient external examiners are engaged and for reporting appointments to Faculty Boards for oversight.

Person specification

An external examiner should meet the following criteria:

- a) Knowledge and understanding of UK academic standards and of the assurance and enhancement of quality;
- b) Relevant academic qualifications, or where appropriate professional qualifications and/or extensive practitioner experience;
- c) Breadth of knowledge and standing within the subject to demonstrate credibility to peers;
- d) Competence and experience in the areas covered by the programme (or parts thereof) and of assessment methods appropriate to the subject;
- e) Competence and experience of the standards expected of students to achieve the award and of the enhancement of the student learning experience;
- f) Awareness of current developments in curricula design and delivery;
- g) Fluency in English, and for programmes that are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s);
- h) Where appropriate, any additional criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies;
- i) Be reasonably available to carry out the required duties and have the right to work in the UK; and
- j) Residency in the UK or Republic of Ireland (or exceptionally within the EEA or other territories where UK GDPR adequacy regulations apply).

Right to Work

UG external examiners must agree to and complete a formal Right to Work check as part of the appointment process, and before commencing any work. The check is required to ensure that the University complies with relevant legislation. The Right to Work check is coordinated by the Temporary Staffing Service (TSS) and will usually require completion of an online ID verification process. Further details of this are contained in the nomination form. PG external examiners are not required to undertake a Right to Work check.

Number of appointments

The nominated external examiner must not hold an unreasonable number of other external examiner appointments that would interfere with their ability to engage with the programme at Bristol. It is recommended that there are no more than two appointments at any one time.

Avoiding reciprocal and long-standing arrangements

The nominated external examiner should not come from the same department in the same institution as the outgoing external examiner or as any other external examiner covering the programme(s). The appointment should not create a reciprocal arrangement with a cognate programme at another institution.

Conflicts of interest

Any conflicts of interest that may prevent the nominated external examiner from being able to undertake the role must be declared on the nomination form. Conflicts of interest may include:

- a) a current or previous close personal, family or legal relationship with a student on a programme falling within their remit;
- b) a current or previous close personal, family or legal relationship with a member of staff within the school's academic or professional services team;
- c) having excessive influence due to their standing in other roles such as Funding Bodies or relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies;
- d) having excessive and/ or repeated engagement with the University through other roles;
- e) for former students and former members of staff a period of at least five years should have passed before their appointment as an external examiner.

Exceptions and special cases

Any legitimate reasons for exceptions and special cases with regards to the appointment criteria or potential conflicts of interest are to be declared in the nomination form so that the authorising officer is aware when agreeing to the appointment. Example permitted exceptions when correctly documented:

- a) Individuals who have retired may be appointed but they should provide sufficient evidence of continuing involvement in the academic area in question, and with current developments in higher education learning, teaching and assessment;
- b) Individuals who have been an external examiner for the School before and a period of five years since their prior engagement ended;

For other cases, guidance can be sought from AQPO where required.

3.3 Term of appointment and Reappointment

The period of appointment will be specified in the Appointment Letter (the **Core Appointment Period**). The normal period of appointment for external examiners is four years (or five years for the MBChB, BDS and BVSc professional programmes). Exceptionally, the School may request to extend an appointment for a further one year period to ensure continuity, for example where a programme is coming to an end or it has not been possible to identify a suitable new appointment.

Schools will agree an extension with the external examiner using the Reappointment Form. Once this has been approved by the Head of School or Delegate and sent to AQPO for processing, AQPO will update the external examiner record and issue a confirmation letter to the external examiner with a copy to the School. Save as specified in the confirmation letter, the terms of the external examiner's appointment and engagement during the extended period shall be the same as the terms under the Core Appointment Period.

On occasion, external examiners may agree with the School to cover another programme or additional units during the term of appointment, for example where another external examiner is temporarily unavailable. The School will ensure that the internal approval is secured from the Head of School (or Delegate) for any changes and send notification to AQPO. AQPO will amend the central records and issue a new confirmation letter confirming the extended coverage to the external examiner with a copy to the School. If this situation arises, the original

end date and the other terms of appointment and engagement specified in the Appointment Letter will still apply to the appointment term.

3.4 Discontinuation of Appointment

If an external examiner wishes to resign from their appointment, they must inform the Head of School and their usual school contact in writing before the end of the academic year. External examiners would normally be expected to complete their duties as in the role related to that academic year of appointment. If an external examiner wishes to resign during the academic year, they must inform the Head of School and usual school contact in writing, giving no less than a three-month notice period.

The University reserves the right to terminate the appointment of an external examiner at any time in writing (including via email), in the event of unsatisfactory performance or otherwise. Unsatisfactory performance could cover a range of issues, including:

- the failure to engage or respond to repeated communication attempts from the School;
- the failure to attend appropriate Annual Programme Review Meetings without making alternative arrangements;
- the failure to submit completed written reports; or
- where a conflict of interest arises during the term of office.

The appointment will terminate immediately upon the receipt of the notice of termination by the external examiner. Following the termination of appointment, the external examiner must, as soon as reasonably practicable, return or destroy any data and materials that have been shared with them as part of their appointment.

Schools are to inform AQPO of any discontinuation that arises so that central records can be amended, and advice given.



4. Induction Procedures

When a new external examiner is appointed, AQPO will direct the external examiner to the external examining handbook, the policy and the location of fee claim forms.

Initial Induction

The School is responsible for arranging a suitable programme of induction for external examiners at the start of their appointment, to enable them to carry out the duties of the role. This may be via face-to-face meeting, online meeting, the provision of information or a mixture of these. All external examiners 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. The external examiner will also be given a named contact for administrative queries – usually the Student/ Graduate Administration Manager (or Deputy).

The induction will cover:

- an introduction to the programme team and other relevant staff in the School;
- information on any educational partnerships with external collaborators for the programmes for which they are responsible;
- relevant professional issues, such as fitness to practise or accreditation, and any features that relate to the discipline;
- the assessment design and criteria for the programme(s) and the content and structure of units;
- an introduction to the role as external examiner at the University of Bristol, making it clear what falls within and outside of the remit;
- an overview of relevant regulations, policies and assessment procedures and the function of Boards of Examiners;
- links to sector reference points such as QAA subject benchmarks (found on the External Examining webpage) - [External Examiners | Academic Quality and Policy Office | University of Bristol](#));
- a link to the programme and unit catalogue and any relevant student handbook(s);
- marking and moderation policies;
- any relevant IT platforms to be used for sharing student work and board activities, e.g., SharePoint, including how to access and how any files are structured and organised;
- information on how and when in the academic year assessment briefs, samples of student work, marks and feedback and unit/ programme statistics will be shared with the External Examiner;
- an explanation of the methodology used for selecting samples of student work and the anticipated volume;
- a review of the exit report provided by the previous External Examiner (if applicable);
- notice of any planned dates for meetings that the external examiner will be expected to join. (If exact dates are not known at the induction, the school should provide confirmation of when dates are likely to be available and take action to ensure that dates are communicated once they are set);
- a reminder of the University's overarching data protection and confidentiality requirements. More detail is available at <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/data-protection>.

Annual Induction in Following Years

The School should arrange for a short induction in each year of tenure and revisit the list provided above to ensure that there is a good working relationship with the external examiner and that they are clear on the resources, information and contacts available to them.



5. External Examiner Role & Responsibilities

5.1 Purpose

The role of subject external examiners is to provide external oversight of the University's programmes and assessment processes. The role is designed to look at both quality assurance and quality enhancement aspects.

The Role has three key dimensions:

- **Assessment Review Prior to Use** to advise on appropriateness of assessment design for the level of study;
- **Inform Programme Enhancement** by acting as a critical friend; and
- **Maintenance of Standards and Quality** by review of marking, moderation and mark trends.

5.2 Assessment Review Prior to Use

External examiners should satisfy themselves that the assessment requirements enable students to be fairly assessed in relation to the stated intended learning outcomes. Schools will invite external examiners to scrutinise and comment on the draft assessment requirements and will send the relevant documentation for this. This might include information relating to

aims and objectives, contents, intended learning outcomes, assessment/ marking and feedback methods, model answer and marking rubric for the relevant unit assessments. Year or programme maps of assessment may be useful to help examiners see an overview of assessment over time and allow them to comment on an integrated approach to assessment use.

External examiners should be invited to scrutinise all summative assessment tasks falling under their remit that lead to a student progress or award decision. This includes all types of assessment including exams, coursework, practical assessments and project work. Schools are 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.

Minimum requirements (as described in the [Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes](#)) are that external examiners will scrutinise summative assessment which is the equivalent of more than 25 percent of the overall mark in a 20 credit point unit and contributes to the final degree result. Building on this minimum requirement, best practice would be for Undergraduate first year assessments to also be shared with external examiners as part of the programmatic approach to assessment.

External examiners are asked to:

- Confirm that the assessments are set at the right level, of an appropriate standard and accurately reflect the content of the curriculum;
- Confirm that the mark scheme/ marking criteria is appropriate;
- Review how the assessment fits together with other programme or stage level assessments;
- Check that students are not being over or under assessed in relation to the same intended learning outcomes;
- Give an opinion on the appropriateness of the format of the assessment for the discipline, the students, the stage or level of study and the intended learning outcomes.

The School will normally set out the timeline for this work in the introductory letter or meeting with the external examiner (sent at the start of the appointment and the beginning of each year) so that the external examiner is clear what to expect to receive and when. A likely timeline would be sharing of assessments in a particular teaching block before the start of term, or within the first few weeks, so that any revisions necessary can be actioned in a timely manner. The Programme Director (or alternative) will let the external examiner know of action taken in response to the feedback provided on the draft assessment details.

External examiners and staff in Schools must comply with the University's information security policies when exchanging draft exam papers and other draft forms of assessment to maintain the integrity of the assessment, see www.bris.ac.uk/infosec/ for further information.

5.3 Inform Programme Enhancement

Harnessing external examiner expertise for quality enhancement is a crucial dimension of the role and external examiners will act as a critical friend. External examiners should ensure that they have a good understanding of the programme(s)/ unit(s) that they are responsible for and provide advice on matters of curriculum content, balance and structure. External examiners should confirm alignment with the [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#) and any relevant [Subject Benchmark Statements](#) available from the QAA.

Schools will provide external examiners with relevant materials which may include student handbooks, access to materials on Blackboard and other resources. 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>. External examiners may feedback comments and observations to the Programme Director (or alternative) at any point but will be asked to comment formally at the end of year meeting and in the external examiner report. It is good practice for external examiners to make a note of any recommendations, commendations or more general observations throughout the year in a document or notebook which can then be used to inform the end of year report.

Schools will contact external examiners at relevant points throughout the year to discuss and seek opinion on proposed programme, unit and assessment changes for the year ahead.

Meeting with Students

Schools will invite the external examiner to meet with students (which could be online or in person) to hear the student voice. The Programme Director (or alternative) will confirm any opportunities for external examiners to meet with student representatives and facilitate the arrangements. The meetings should discuss students' learning and assessment experiences (but not individual assessment outcomes) and could provide an opportunity for students to comment on previous external examiner reports.

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, external examiners should refer the matter to the School contact, who will address any issues that are raised directly with the student concerned.

Meetings with students may lead to the identification of possible programme improvements and provide the external examiner with an overall view of the student experience, which will enhance their contribution to the consideration of such matters in the annual report and at the end of year review meeting.

Meeting with Staff

Schools will invite the external examiner to the Annual Programme Review (APR) meeting or other meeting convened by the School to discuss and review the programme. This will be the primary mechanism for external examiners to provide their reflections and be actively involved in the quality enhancement of the programme. External examiners are required to attend at least one meeting per a year, normally the APR meeting; and this may be in person or virtually. External examiners are **not** required to attend the Board of Examiners.

The School will provide the dates of the meeting in the introductory letter at the start of each academic 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 the external examiner with the final date once known. Any changes to dates will be communicated as soon as possible.

The School will circulate an agenda and any material or data for external examiners to consider ahead of the APR meeting. Data on individual units and programmes should be sufficient for external examiners to form a view of trends in the data, so a three year comparison is suggested (if available). This is to allow the external examiner to consider the consistency of academic standards over time. For units this should include the number of students, the average (mean) mark, the number or percentage of students requiring resit, the pass rate, the methods of assessment and their weightings. For programmes this should include the number of students on the programme and the spread of classifications awarded.

External examiners will be invited to provide their overall reflections to the meeting, to highlight any instances of good practice that they have identified, and to make any recommendations for change or enhancement. If external examiners are unable to attend a meeting, they shall provide the Programme Director (or alternative) with a written report that will be fed into the meeting on their behalf. External examiners are encouraged to make their views known to the APR meeting and engage in critical friend debate, but the final decision on the operation and design of programmes and units and any actions taken lies with the owning School.

5.4 Maintenance of Quality and Standards

External examiners 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 as well as to form a view of comparison with national thresholds. (See [section 17 of the Taught Regulations and Code of Practice](#)).

On programmes with a large number of units or complex structures, it will not be practical or possible for external examiners to review everything each academic year. Instead, a risk-based model should be adopted to make best use of the external examiners' expertise during their term of appointment.

Whilst all programmes will have external examiners appointed to them, not all of the unit assessments will need to be sampled by the external examiner each year. Instead, Schools (usually the School Education Director in discussion with Programme Directors) will decide which units will be sampled based on the criteria below:

- a. New unit running for the first time;
- b. Significantly revised unit or assessment or new staff are delivering the unit;
- c. Large credit point weighting of the unit, such as dissertation or project units;
- d. Student feedback and survey metrics indicate that the unit would benefit from further consideration;
- e. There has been a significant change to student performance in unit assessments over time either upwards or downwards;
- f. An element of rotation so that different units are reviewed over time, with all units being reviewed on at least a bi-annual basis.

Schools should be able to plan a matrix and explain to external examiners which units have been selected for sampling of student assessments, marking and feedback. In large or more complex programmes, each unit must be sampled at least every other year. In smaller or less complex programmes (e.g., single year PGT programmes with little unit optionality) it may be more reasonable to expect external examiners to sample most units each year depending upon student numbers.

The Programme Director (or alternative) will discuss and agree with external examiners the method for selecting the examples and volume of students' work within the units chosen for review. It is expected that the sample will cover a range of grades and include any fails or those where marks are close to a classification boundary. External examiners should have access to the full range of assessment methods including coursework, essays, group project work, exam scripts, viewing performances (live or recorded), media or objects. As a general rule not more than 10% of assessments should be sampled (subject to a minimum of 10 scripts and a maximum reasonable number). Schools should ensure that the overall amount of work being sampled is relative to the fee that they have agreed with the external examiner.

Schools will advise external examiners of any timelines for the activity at the start of the academic year or if dates are not available at that point, will advise the external examiner

when the dates are likely to be known. Once dates have been fixed, the School will then contact the external examiner with confirmation.

Sharing the samples with external examiners must be done in a secure way e.g., through the use of a restricted SharePoint folder that the external examiner has access to and not via the postal service or to an external examiner email address. Schools should ensure that wherever possible, samples of student work are anonymised in order to comply with data protection legislation. It is acknowledged that there are some cases where due to the type and design of the assessment, anonymisation may not always be possible. However, Schools should not grant blanket access to non-anonymised samples of student work in the Virtual Learning Environment (e.g., Blackboard Grade Centre) by default and should generally only grant external examiners access to roles in the VLE that do not allow access to student data.

The samples should contain enough information for the external examiner to complete their audit and include:

- the mark scheme or rubric;
- explanation of how a mark was reached;
- any moderation that has been undertaken;
- how any discrepancy between markers has been rectified; and
- the feedback that has been given to the student.

External examiners are not directly involved in marking and should not change individual marks in their review. Schools will ask external examiners to confirm that the standards and rigour in marking are satisfactory ahead of the School exam board. The subject external examiner is **not** required to attend the school exam board, and their confirmation should be given in writing, by email or via telephone/ teleconference with the Programme Director, followed up by a written email as part of the audit trail. In exceptional circumstances the school may consider the use of scaling of marks for a cohort, and this should be discussed with the external examiner ahead of the School exam board. Where an external examiner is not satisfied with the standards of marking and moderation and has suggested an appropriate course of action, the Programme Director will immediately notify the School Education Director. The Programme Director and School Education Director will investigate the concerns of the external examiner and agree any action that can be taken ahead of the relevant exam board, in consultation with the relevant Faculty Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) or their delegate as necessary. The external examiner comments and any corrective action taken will be reported to the relevant exam board to confirm that any action taken is appropriate for the circumstances. The final decision on marks and student outcomes lies with the relevant exam board.

Exceptionally a School may decide that a specific external examiner should be present at the School exam board. The reason for this should be noted within the minutes of the Board (e.g., if further discussion on proposed use of scaling is required) and the external examiner will be a full and equal member of the exam board. The external examiner role and that of the exam board chair shall be made clear to the board.

External examiners with serious concerns can also at any point raise a report of serious concern to the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education Quality Assurance and Enhancement) by emailing exex-admin@bristol.ac.uk. Concerns will be acknowledged and investigated promptly, with a final response following once the matter has been investigated.

6. Reports And Responses

6.1 Reports

External examiners are required to submit a written report using a standard University template, providing a general commentary about the conduct of the assessment processes, academic standards, assessment, and the curriculum delivery and design. The report will also highlight examples of good practice or innovation and document key recommendations that are suggested for action or consideration.

Within the general commentary section, external examiners may wish to comment on:

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

The standard University template for external examiner reports will be provided by the AQPO ahead of the annual deadlines each year. The external examiner will usually attend the APR meeting and provide their input directly to the meeting. However, the written report must be submitted to the University as a written record of the main points raised by the external examiner. Schools shall then respond in writing to the points that have been raised by the external examiner and provide any update on actions taken.

Reports are normally submitted during May/ June for undergraduate programmes or in November/December for postgraduate taught programmes.

The maximum deadlines are set out below:

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

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

If an external examiner has been asked to be the external examiner for both UG and PG programmes, they will normally submit separate reports. The University is phasing out having cover across UG and PGT levels because of the difficulty in administering the different cycles and HMRC payment rules.

If an external examiner covers a programme that is delivered at more than one campus site (e.g., The UK and India), a single report will cover both versions of the programme. Within the single report, the external examiner will highlight whether specific recommendations or commendations are relevant to delivery at one or both sites so that these can be appropriately addressed.

6.2 Responses

The School will review the external examiner report and provide a short overall response, followed by detailed individual responses to all recommendations using a standard University template. Generally, external examiners 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**

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 – although this should still be within four weeks from receipt of the report.

AQPO will review all reports to identify common themes in external examiner recommendations and where any reports have flagged that there is concern in the section marked 'Academic Standards Summary Overview' AQPO shall refer this for investigation to the relevant Faculty Officer and the A-PVC Education Quality Assurance and Enhancement. If an external examiner has raised a concern relating to the section marked Academic Standards Summary Overview, the external examiner may subsequently receive a further response from a Faculty or University representative.

6.3 Disclosure of External Examiner Reports and Responses and University Consideration of Content

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. All main staff of the University have access to the reports and responses via the External Examiner App and SharePoint site. The report and response can also be made available to members of the public under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act.

The report (and the response form) will also be made available by the School to students via Blackboard or at Student Academic Representation Forums. Students are made aware of the identity and current position of external examiners appointed but are advised not to contact external examiners directly.

External examiners must not identify, directly or indirectly any individual students in their reports and shall in general comply with the confidentiality and data protection provisions at sections 9 and 10 below. Where Schools become aware of inappropriate content that identifies individual students, they can contact AQPO to request that a report is redacted to remove this content.

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 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.

6.4 Reports of Serious Concern

In the event that an external examiner has a serious concern relating to academic standards and internal procedures during the term of office which is unable to be resolved with the appropriate academic staff, these can be referred to the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education Quality Assurance and Enhancement) by submitting a special report to them at any time. The Associate PVC, or their appointee, will acknowledge the receipt of the report and investigate the points raised.

The University shall provide a timely response to the report received, which will describe the actions that have been taken to address the concerns. The Associate PVC, or appointee, will consider whether changes to policy or process are required and report the receipt of the report of special concern to the University Academic Quality Committee once the investigation has taken place and any actions to resolve the issues have been agreed.

External examiners with serious concerns should email exex-admin@bristol.ac.uk where the concern will be logged and referred to the Associate PVC.



7. Further details regarding external examining tasks and engagement

Further details regarding the timings of external examining tasks and engagement are contained in Appendix 1, which shall form part of this Handbook.

All information, data, materials and documents (or anything else of such nature) (**Shared Data**) shared with external examiners in order to allow them to perform their duties pursuant to the Appointment Letter, the [Policy for External Examining of Taught Programmes at the University of Bristol](#) and this Handbook will be shared in accordance with this Handbook and Appendix 1 only. External examiners must not download any Shared Data from the secure sharing systems set up by the University.



8. Fees

The fee payable will be agreed at the time of 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 at the start of the academic year. The fees are based on fee bands which are available to Schools on [BEAM](#) (Bristol Education Administration Manual). The band that is selected will reflect the amount of work and input required from the external examiner.

When external examiners submit their annual report, they should complete a fee/ expense claim form which can be downloaded from the Finance Services website:
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/directory/finance/receive-payments/forms/>

The completed claim form should be returned by email to the SAM/ GAM in the School who will finalise internal details on the form such as budget codes. 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 by exception external examiners work for programmes at both UG and PG levels, they will need to submit two claim forms; one for the work completed at each level, adding up to the total agreed fee.

The School is responsible for responding to any queries related to fees or expense claims and, if the total claim is over the stated threshold, is responsible for sending on the claim form to colleagues in Finance Services authorise. Once authorised by the School budget holder and, if necessary Finance Services, the form will then be sent to either UoB Payroll (UG) or Accounts Payable (PG) who will arrange payment. Schools should ensure that they send the correct form to the correct team (as stated on the form) to prevent delays in processing.



9. Data Protection

9.1 For the purposes of this section 9 the terms **controller**, **processor**, **data subject**, **personal data**, **personal data breach** and **processing** will have the meaning given to them in the UK GDPR.

9.2 Data Protection Law means all applicable data protection and privacy legislation in force from time to time in the UK including the UK GDPR; the Data Protection Act 2018 (and regulations made thereunder) and the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 (SI 2003/2426).

9.3 UK GDPR has the meaning given to it in section 3(10) (as supplemented by section 205(4)) of the Data Protection Act 2018. Both the University and the external examiners will comply with all applicable requirements of Data Protection Law.

9.4 In respect of any personal data that is shared or collected in connection with the nomination, appointment and performance of duties by external examiners:

9.4.1 the University is the data controller of such personal data;

9.4.2 the external examiners will process this personal data in accordance with the instructions of the University provided within this Handbook; and

9.4.3 no such personal data shall be transferred outside of the European Union, European Economic Area and countries that benefit from a European Commission adequacy decision ("**Adequate Countries**").

9.5 All personal data that is supplied to the University for the purpose of appointment and subsequent engagement as an external examiner will be held by the University securely for no longer than necessary and in accordance with the University's records retention schedule:

<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/secretary/documents/information-governance/records-retention-schedule.pdf>.

The University will use external examiners' personal data for necessary communications, for payment of fees and expenses, and for the operation of the external examining system. This data may be shared, if necessary, with Schools and other internal departments of the University who need to process the data. The University will not disclose personal details to third parties (i.e., outside the University) without an external examiner's consent unless there is a legal requirement to do so. For further information about how the University processes personal data, please see <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/data-protection/privacy-notice/general-privacy-notice>.

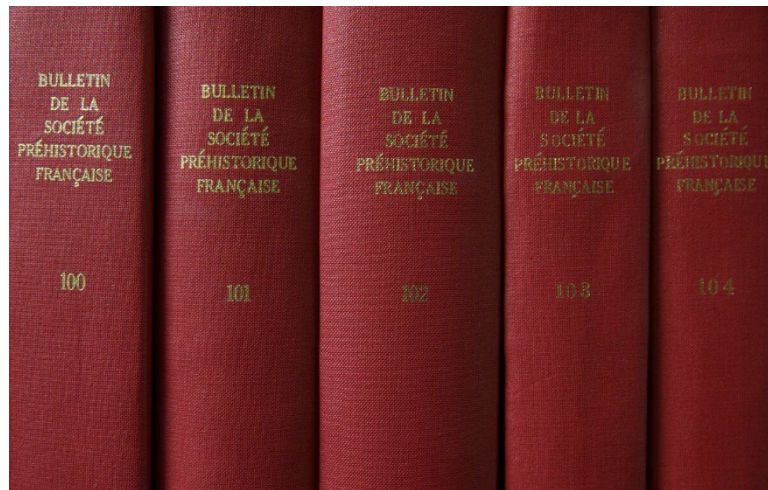
9.6 Submitted reports from external examiners and responses provided by the School will be held in accordance with the University's records retention schedule:

<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/secretary/documents/information-governance/records-retention-schedule.pdf>.

Copyright in all external examiner reports will be owned by the University. External examiner reports will be made available to University staff, students and/or collaborative programme partners as part of the quality assurance framework procedures. External examiner reports may also be circulated as part of an internal or external audit e.g., by a Professional, Statutory, and Regulatory Body (PSRB).

9.7 The University is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and may be required to disclose the content of external examiner reports and responses to any party or person

who submits a lawful request.



10. Confidentiality

10.1 Confidential Information means all confidential information (however recorded or preserved) disclosed by the University or its employees, officers, contractors, subcontractors, representatives, students or advisers to the external examiners, including any information that would be regarded as confidential by a reasonable person relating to:

- i. business, statistical, financial, marketing and personnel and student information of the University or plans, intentions, or market opportunities of the University or the students; and
- ii. the data, specifications, drawings, films, designs, samples, models, equipment, computer readable media, knowhow, trade secrets or software of the University or the students,

and shall include, but not be limited to, information that would be regarded as confidential by a reasonable person, contained in reports, written material, papers, exam papers, recordings, and other materials of similar nature of the students.

10.2 Subject to section 10.4 below, external examiners shall keep Confidential Information which they receive or otherwise obtain (directly or indirectly) from the University confidential for a period of five (5) years following its disclosure (except in respect of personal data which must be kept confidential indefinitely).

10.3 External examiners will not use (or grant any third party permission to use) the University's Confidential Information for any purpose other than to perform their functions as external examiners pursuant to the terms of their Appointment Letter.

10.4 The provisions of this section 10 will not apply or extend to any information which:

- 10.4.1 is shown by written or other tangible evidence to have been in the possession of the external examiner before disclosure by the University (otherwise than by reason of any breach by the external examiner or any third party);
 - 10.4.2 is or becomes public knowledge or (otherwise than by reason of any breach by the external examiner) becomes public knowledge;
 - 10.4.3 was, is or becomes available to the external examiner from another person on a non-confidential basis from a person who, to the external examiner's knowledge, is not bound by a confidentiality agreement with the University or otherwise prohibited from disclosing the information to the external examiner;
 - 10.4.4 is disclosed by the external examiner in compliance with a legal requirement of a governmental agency or competent authority or where disclosure is required by court order or by operation of law, provided that insofar as is legally possible, the University is given written notice of any such requirement seven (7) days prior to any disclosure of Confidential Information so that it may make written representations in respect of such requirement, if necessary; or
 - 10.4.5 the University agrees in writing is not confidential or may be disclosed.
- 10.5** If requested to do so by the University, the external examiner shall enter into a separate confidentiality agreement with any industrial partners whose confidential information may be revealed to the external examiner in the course of their appointment (e.g., for external examiners who cover programmes with Year in Industry or industrial related projects).



11. Institutional External Examiner

The University will appoint an institutional external examiner to provide external input on exam board processes and matters of educational policy. The institutional external examiner will work with colleagues from the University's Academic Quality & Policy Office, liaising with the A-PVC (Education Quality Assurance and Enhancement), Head of Assessment, Deputy Director of Education Quality and Policy as necessary. They will report to the A-PVC (Education Quality Assurance and Enhancement).

This is a new role for an initial term of two years which may be extended up to four years.

This section 11 sets out an overview of the role and duties of the institutional external examiner for transparency purposes. However, the remainder of this Handbook shall not apply to the institutional external examiner and the details and terms of their appointment and engagement will be specified in their letter of appointment/ contract of engagement.

The Institutional External Examiner Person Specification

- The role holder will be a senior academic or professional services person from another UK Higher Education Institution.
- The role holder will have extensive experience of working in a quality assurance or quality enhancement role and be aware of sector reference points such as guidance from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and Office for Students (OfS).
- The role holder will have direct experience of designing and implementing academic regulations and related educational policy usually as a member of relevant committees either at their own institution or as a consultant elsewhere. They will also have significant experience of chairing or supporting exam board processes.
- The role holder must be reasonably available to attend and observe a selection of exam boards across the institution and to engage with members of staff at the University of Bristol working within a quality assurance role.
- The role holder must be reasonably independent from the University of Bristol and not have undertaken work for the University within the last five years so that there is not a conflict of interest position.
- The role holder should not hold another external examiner appointment during the term.
- The role holder should be resident in the UK (or other Adequate Country for data sharing purposes) and have the right to work in the UK (and be willing to undergo a Right to Work Check as part of the onboarding process).

Key Activities of the Role

The University of Bristol is appointing an institutional external examiner during a period of significant change in order to provide external oversight and opinion of the processes used across the institution for determining progression and the award of degree classifications and other student outcome decisions.

External Oversight of Exam Boards

The institutional external examiner will prepare for their role by familiarising themselves with the Regulations and Code of Practice in place at the University. They will receive exam board materials to read ahead of the selection of boards that they are asked to attend. They will attend a selection of School exam boards and complex outcome boards as an observer. They

will not actively input into discussions of the boards but follow and observe procedure ensuring that award and progression decisions are made in line with University policies and regulations and that decisions (particularly where there is an element of academic discretion) are justified. After each board meeting, they will review any documentation such as minutes circulated.

Should the institutional external examiner have serious concerns about the conduct of an exam board, they should submit a report of serious concern to the A-PVC Education Quality Assurance and Enhancement by email (exex-admin@bristol.ac.uk) and copy to the exam board chair.

Critical Friend for the Quality Team

A second key aspect of the role is to act as a critical friend for the Quality Team so that when needed, they can provide input, external opinion and feedback on proposed policy and/ or regulation changes. As critical friend to the quality team, the institutional external examiner will be invited to comment on certain matters where external expertise could be valuable, but they are not required to approve or sign off on proposed changes.

The institutional external examiner will produce an annual report of their findings to the A-PVC (Education Quality Assurance and Enhancement).

The fee available for the role is £1750 plus reasonable expenses for travel.



12. Appendix 1: External Examining Tasks and Engagement:

The table below is a list of potential interactions with the external examiner in chronological order showing how the external examiner will complete Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Enhancement (QE) activities:

Task	QA	QE	When	How	Required/ Optional
Attend an induction: Outline of academic year – key dates, highlight key changes from last year, highlight priorities and challenges for programme (as per EAP), agree plan of work for external examiner.		X	Start of academic year...before or within a few weeks.	School email– follow up with MS Teams or phone call.	Required
Review of TB1 individual assessments, their briefs and mark schemes (including any proposed reassessment).	X	X	At/ near start of TB1 for TB1 and TB4 units - before assessment and scheme shared with students.	Share via secure SharePoint link.	Required
Meet with staff and students from TB1 and some TB4 units.		X	During TB1. Could vary year on year or do both teaching blocks each year – depends on programme size/ complexity.	Online but could be in person.	Optional – recommended to meet with staff and students once per year
Review of TB2 individual assessments, their briefs and mark schemes (including any proposed reassessment).	X	X	At/ near start of TB2 for TB2 units - before assessment and scheme shared with students.	Share via secure SharePoint link.	Required

Task	QA	QE	When	How	Required/ Optional
Sampling student work from TB1 and checking mark scheme applied and standards in marking and moderation are appropriate. Which ones reviewed to be based on risk-based approach to Unit selection and then sampling within that Unit.	X		Coursework could be done earlier but work from TB1 and winter assessment period done early in TB2. Identify which units based on risk-based approach. Review of feedback could follow and feed into feedback practices for TB2.	Share via secure SharePoint link	Required
Review of feedback given on TB1 assessments to consider if it's likely to help students to improve. This could be done with work above – but might want to do on more units and give more time		X		Share via secure SharePoint link	Required
Meet with staff and students from TB2 and some TB4 and AYEAR units		X	During TB2/ AYEAR. Could vary year on year or do both teaching blocks each year – depends on programme size/complexity. Could combine with final showcase event in some programmes such as PGT e.g. student presentations.	Online but could be in person	Optional – recommended to meet with staff and students once per year

Task	QA	QE	When	How	Required/ Optional
Sampling student work from TB2 and TB4 checking mark scheme applied and standards in marking and moderation are appropriate. Which ones reviewed to be based on risk-based approach to Unit selection and then sampling within that Unit.	X		Coursework could be done earlier but sampling of marks work from TB2 and summer assessment period done prior to school exam boards. Review of feedback could follow and feed into APR.	Share via secure SharePoint link	Required
Review of feedback given on TB2 and TB4 assessments to consider if it's likely to help students to improve. This could be done with work above – but might want to do on more units and give more time.		X		Share via secure SharePoint link	Required
Provide confirmation to Programme Directors/ SED that the assessment, marking and moderation processes that have been reviewed have operated appropriately. Provide input into consultation on action to remedy any issues with the performance of assessment (e.g. scaling).	X		In the immediate run up to Exam Boards in early summer for UG or later for PGT. (Carried out as part of pre-board checks)	Email confirmation or online meeting with PD/ SED to confirm.	Required

Task	QA	QE	When	How	Required/ Optional
UG: Writing annual report to highlight commendations and recommendations plus general commentary.	X	X	Summer deadline for UG reports is 1 st July annually.	AQPO will share report templates with external examiners via MS Forms ahead of the deadline.	Required (for all UG external examiners)
Sampling of student re-assessment work if the school wish for external examiner input.	X		Sampling of work and feed comments in ahead of Reassessment exam board in July (including confirmation to Programme Directors/ SED that the assessment, marking and moderation processes that have been reviewed have operated appropriately).	Share via secure SharePoint link	Optional – EE will have already sampled work from a selection of units earlier in year, but school may wish to share any particular complex or borderline cases for EE input.
Review of curriculum, teaching methods and assessment portfolio across year/ programme or external's area of responsibility. Check alignment with ILOs and whether fits with discipline and FHEQ expectations. How this works in practice will vary year on year as external becomes familiar with programme. Initial year might require more work but then will be more familiar in subsequent years.	X	X	During early summer with external examiner attending APR (typically late July/August) with these items all within agenda. Providing input on enhancement activity plus confirming appropriateness of curriculum and approach for discipline and level.	In person meeting to meet staff for discussion or could join online/ hybrid to discuss outputs from APR if unable to attend for any reason.	Required

Task	QA	QE	When	How	Required/ Optional
Share student survey results – NSS/PTES, Blue Insight reports		X		Share via secure SharePoint link and then discuss at APR in-person meeting or in a call (online) with PD.	Required
Metrics and analytics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> unit/programme marks over previous years to look for patterns/drift etc engagement data Award gaps B3 and benchmarking 		X		Share via secure SharePoint link and then discuss at in-person meeting or in a call (online) with PD.	Required
PG: Sampling of PGT Dissertations. Provide confirmation to PD/ SED that marking and moderation processes are appropriate	X		Ahead of Autumn PGT finalist boards	Share via secure SharePoint link and email confirmation to confirm satisfied or telecoms discussion for any issues.	Required (for all PG external examiners)
PG: Writing annual report to highlight commendations and recommendations plus general commentary.	X	X	Winter deadline for PG reports is 20 th December annually.	AQPO will share report templates with external examiners via MS Forms ahead of the deadline.	Required (for all PG external examiners)
PG: Participate in PGT APR Review of Outcomes	X	X	APR Review of Outcomes (possible deadline of February depending on how school structure the APR).	Programmes may do this differently depending in part on the format of the APR in summer. Information should be shared via secure SharePoint link and then discussed at a meeting (potentially online) with PD or via email.	Required (for all PG external examiners)

Abbreviations:

APR – Annual Programme Review

EAP – Education Action Plan

PD – Programme Director

SED – School Education Director

TB1, TB2, TB4, AYEAR – Teaching Blocks