

Guidance IG (iv)

Rights and Responsibilities of Subject External Examiners

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The Role of the Subject External Examiner

The role of the subject external examiner is to advise the University on whether the academic standards of its modules are consistent with the standards defined by the University, the Sector Recognised Standards, the standards of similar provision in the UK higher education sector and the standards required by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Each subject external examiner should be assigned approximately 8 modules for audit. Some of those modules may be franchised out to collaborative partners or delivered in multiple intakes. The module allocation should be reviewed annually by the faculty in liaison with the external examiner and may be subject to change e.g. where optional modules do not run, or an existing module is franchised out to a new partner.

Consultation on draft assessments (coursework briefs and examination papers).

Subject external examiners should be invited to comment on all draft assessments (coursework briefs and examination papers*) that comprise the major elements of assessment associated with a module and contribute to classification. Subject external examiners should be invited to comment by a specified date that allows the timely publication of coursework briefs to students and the timely presentation of examination papers to the Examinations section for processing. Draft assessments should be accompanied by model answers (where appropriate) and marking criteria. If no comments are received from the external examiner, the draft assessments (coursework and exams) will remain unchanged. Subject external examiners are not required to approve any draft assessments.

**In the case of accredited programmes, PSRB requirements will prevail.*

The audit of assessed work

Subject external examiners are expected to audit a sample of student work for all modules at levels 5, 6 and 7. The sample for each module must include all elements of assessment. Subject external examiners would only be expected to audit sample student work from new level 4 modules in the first year of delivery of a new course or where required by a professional, statutory and regulatory body. If any risk to standards is identified, existing subject external examiners may be allocated level 4 modules as part of any wider remedial action identified through our quality assurance and enhancement processes.

Assessed work of an ephemeral nature (presentations, performances etc.) must also be audited by a subject external examiner regardless of its weighting within a module. A sample of work matching the requirements for written work should either be witnessed by the external examiner or should be recorded and sent to the external examiner for audit. In exceptional cases, where external examiners cannot attend and where, for ethical reasons, it is not appropriate to record (e.g., for confidentiality reasons in healthcare), then a summary of the moderation procedures used and of the discussions between marker and moderator should be supplied to the external examiner.

Subject external examiners are provided with the internally moderated sample of work from each classification (including borderlines and marginal fails) and

representing all sites of delivery. The percentage of work shall reflect the number of students completing a particular assessment but, in all cases, shall meet the minimum of 10% of submitted assessments. The minimum sample size is normally 6 and the maximum sample size is 20. This amount may need to be exceeded where provision is franchised to more than one collaborative partner or where modules are delivered in multiple intakes, to ensure the sample meets the requirements below.

Where external examiners are assigned to modules delivered at more than one partner, or where there are multiple intakes of the same module, the external examiner may be asked to audit more than the maximum sample size of 20 pieces of student work to ensure that the sample is representative of all delivery sites and proportional to the total number of students on each occurrence of the module. For each additional occurrence of the module, the maximum sample size may increase by no more than 10 additional pieces of student work and must not exceed 40 scripts.

Subject external examiners should also receive: the full range of marks within a module to see if the samples are representative of the spread of marks and an overview sheet giving statistics for all the modules (number of students, pass rate, mean mark, number in each classification band) to enable easier identification of modules that fall outside the norm. The guiding principle should be that external examiners have sufficient assessments and related information to assure themselves that internal marking and the resultant classification of awards are of an appropriate and consistent standard.

Subject external examiners may request to meet with students during their audit of work. Normally a member of academic staff would attend such a meeting. Any requests should be fulfilled, unless there is an exceptional reason a meeting with students cannot be organised.

Viva-voce examinations

Where viva voce examinations are part of the assessment process for students, subject external examiners will either audit recordings or audit the documentary evidence e.g. viva sheet.

Audit of Erasmus modules

There is no requirement for subject external examiners to audit Erasmus student work separately if this is completed before the rest of the Kingston University cohort, unless such an arrangement is stipulated in the Erasmus contract with that particular institution. Standard marking and internal moderation processes still apply, but earlier and separate moderation of Erasmus student work is not required as the full sample will be seen later in the year by the subject external examiner and the home institution is the awarding body and will be awarding credit under their own system.

Audit of modules running across multiple programmes

In principle, each module should be uniquely assigned to one subject external examiner. In the case of accredited courses, PSRB requirements will prevail e.g. some PSRBs require both an academic and practitioner external examiner to review student work.

Where project, dissertation or work placement modules span across multiple subject areas, it is recommended that different occurrences of the modules are set up for

each area of subject expertise so that the appropriate subject external examiner can be allocated to each occurrence. Where this is not possible and there is only one module occurrence being reviewed by multiple subject external examiners, the Module Leader must receive confirmation, via the Confirmation of Audit form, that all subject external examiners are satisfied with marking and moderation processes before they can ratify on OSIS. Where possible, one external examiner should be assigned to one module.

Responsibility for agreeing marks and grades

The University has agreed that it is the responsibility of its academic staff, who are fulfilling the stated responsibility for maintaining the standards of awards, to determine the marks/grades to be awarded for assessed work. The University expects subject external examiners, in their independent auditor role, to advise the University on whether the standards set are appropriate, that the conclusions reached by internal examiners are fair and equitable, and that approved procedures have been followed. Consequently, the University does not expect subject external examiners to act as second or third 'markers', to arbitrate between unresolved internal marking differences, or to approve or agree marks. Subject external examiners can audit a sample of the student work and it is clearly inequitable to consequently change marks relating only to that sample or to special cases presented by internal examiners.

Internal marking and moderation procedures

The University has adopted the term internal moderation for procedures used by staff within the University to verify assessment standards. All levels (4-7) must be internally moderated i.e. a sample of marked work will be reassessed by another member of staff in order to ensure that the first marker has applied the marking criteria appropriately and fairly. The sample to be internally moderated must match the guidelines for the sample to be provided for the subject external examiner as detailed above.

Where a sample of work is internally moderated, no student mark should be changed by the moderator unless errors in calculation or omissions are identified. Where there is evidence from the internal moderation sample of inappropriate or inconsistent marking then either the work of the whole cohort should be remarked or the whole run of marks should be recalibrated if there is evidence of systematic over-marking or under-marking e.g. by adding /subtracting a certain percentage across the whole cohort, up to a maximum of 10%.

Where other methods of verifying academic standards are used e.g. double marking, the subject external examiner will be notified by the course team.

Markers and internal moderators should make a brief record of their discussion for subject external examiners. If their discussion has given any cause to return to the whole cohort and reconsider the first marking, an explanation of this should be supplied to the subject external examiner.

Student feedback should show a single mark. If the whole cohort has been double marked, student feedback should show the agreed mark and a synthesis of comments from both markers.

Communication between module leaders and subject external

examiners

Module leaders should maintain an open dialogue with their respective subject external examiners throughout the year to ensure that the external examiner has all the necessary information to undertake their duties. It is expected that module leaders will take serious note of advice received from subject external examiners and take action, where appropriate.

Visits to the University and UK-based collaborative partners

Subject external examiners are encouraged to meet with staff each academic year. For external examiners appointed to Kingston University provision or courses delivered by UK-based collaborative partners, the visit can be held face-to-face or remotely. External examiners should book their own travel and claim back via Unified, with the exception of flights and accommodation which must be approved and booked by QAE. For external examiners appointed to courses delivered at overseas collaborative partners, please see section below.

Visits to Overseas Collaborative Partners

External examiners responsible for provision being delivered by collaborative partner institutions located overseas, where more than 50% of the modules within their remit are delivered by the partner, are permitted to visit the collaborative partner twice during their tenure. Visits in the final year of tenure would not normally be approved. The visit should facilitate a tour of the facilities available to the staff and students, meet the course team and hold moderation and course-enhancement discussions. Where an examiner audits modules across multiple collaborative partner institutions, the examiner must select the collaborative partner institution(s) to visit during their tenure, bearing in mind that the maximum number of visits cannot exceed two. External examiners are encouraged to have interim online meetings each year that they do not physically visit the partner institution.

Visits to overseas partners must be approved and booked by QAE.

Subject External Examiners' feedback on their audit of sample student work and confirmation of module marks

Subject external examiners are required to submit formal feedback on their audit of sample student work, by completing a Confirmation of Audit form prior to the Programme Assessment Board and confirming their agreement to the marks for all modules within their remit.

Programme Assessment Boards and subject external examiners

Subject external examiners are not required to attend assessment boards. The University has a single tier assessment board structure. The Programme Assessment Board (PAB) is responsible for recommending progression, awards and exclusions. The PAB will receive confirmation that all the sample student work (to which that PAB relates) has been internally moderated and externally audited (the latter by the respective subject external examiners). Clear processes are in place for dealing with academic misconduct, mitigating circumstances and compensation etc. to ensure that double counting does not take place and full details are provided in the University's academic policies and regulations.

The University appoints Programme Assessment Board external examiners to

ensure that the board is conducted as per the University's guidelines and that there is equity of treatment to all students. PAB external examiners are not drawn from the pool of subject external examiners.

Involvement of external examiners in validation and consultancy activity

External examiners may be used in an external panel member or external subject expert capacity for some 'low risk' (re)validation activity, subject to approval by the Head of Quality Assurance & Enhancement.

Experts who have served as external panel members for validations can be subsequently appointed as external examiners if they meet the appointment criteria.

External examiners may also be consulted regarding proposed changes to modules and courses as part of the course and module modification process. The University does not require that external examiners approve or be consulted about such changes.

Course teams should inform subject external examiners at the earliest possible date about changes to the curriculum and may wish to seek their advice where changes arise directly out of the audit of assessment.

Subject External Examiners' reports

All subject external examiners, as part of their contract with the University, are required to submit an annual report. The University has adopted a standard report format which must be completed on-line. In addition to responses to key questions about standards, processes and procedures, subject external examiners are asked to detail any areas of good practice and/or recommendations for enhancement.

Subject external examiners with responsibility for collaborative provision will be required to comment on each partner (as appropriate) that offers the course. This may take the form of questions within one report or separate reports. The precise format will depend upon the nature of the collaboration and external examiner arrangements. The reporting requirements will be made clear at appointment and at induction by the relevant Head of School or nominee.

The University regards the external examiner's report as a critical part of its quality assurance procedures. It is part of the contract with external examiners that the required report is produced annually. If an external examiner, following a reminder, does **not** submit a report within one month of submission of the Confirmation of Audit form, or the report is considered to be too cursory to be of value and requests for amplification are not responded to, the contract may be terminated forthwith. The report will be regarded as a public document within the University and forms part of the documentation for KCEP (substantive review) panels, professional bodies and Student Voice Committee meetings. Individual students can also make an email request to QAE for an external examiner's report.

If necessary, subject external examiners can submit a separate confidential letter to the Vice-Chancellor. The confidential letter should be submitted in addition to the annual report, but the latter can refer to the fact that a confidential letter is also being sent without disclosing the details. An acknowledgement letter will be sent to the examiner from the VC within one week of receipt of the letter. The examiner will

receive a formal response, following a detailed investigation into the matter, within four weeks of receipt of the letter.

Feedback to external examiners

The key course contact should discuss any issues arising from the external examiner's audit of a sample of student work and the annual report appropriately during the academic year. This could be at the annual schedule of work meeting or at other designated points in the year through correspondence, meetings or calls. The key course contact should involve the University and/or Partner Liaison Officer as needed for franchised or validated provision.

Data protection, freedom of information and copyright

The University will use personal data submitted by the external examiner for the payment of fees and expenses, and for other necessary communication in connection with the external examiner's contract. Where required for these purposes, this data will be shared with other departments of the University and/or colleagues at collaborative partner institutions.

In accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy which is based upon the Data Protection Act 2018, staff members must not disclose external examiners' personal data, including contact details, to any person or body outside the University without the consent of the external examiner.

An external examiner's report will be made available to University staff, students and/or collaborative programme partners as part of the quality assurance/annual monitoring and enhancement procedures. External examiners' reports may be circulated as part of an internal or external audit.

Comments and opinions expressed by an external examiner about individual students during the assessment process may be disclosed to the student concerned, if the student makes a Subject Access Request under the Data Protection Act.

An external examiner is entitled to make a Subject Access Request under the Data Protection Act to see memoranda, emails and other communications relating to their appointment, including opinions expressed in a professional capacity about their appointment.

Under the Freedom of Information Act, the University will provide copies of external examiners' reports to third parties who make a lawful request for these. Reports will normally retain examiners' names. The University will consider any reasonable request from external examiners to anonymise their reports. Such a request should be made in writing and submitted with the report.

Copyright in all external examiners' reports will be owned by the University. Examiners will not be permitted to retain their moral rights (under the Copyright Act) in the reports as the University may choose to anonymise the reports, as appropriate.

External examiners will be granted access to the University's External Examiners' Reporting System (EERS), Canvas (the University's virtual learning environment) and SharePoint (file sharing system). Further guidance on access to module material and sample student work will be provided by the department/school. External examiners are not permitted to add, remove or delete material from module boxes.