

UWE Bristol Staff interested in becoming an External Examiner FAQs

Student and Academic Services

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Defining the role of an External Examiner

1. What is an External Examiner?

Quoting from the [QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Advice and Guidance - External Expertise](#) Terminology section:

External examiners: Degree-awarding bodies engage external examiners to provide impartial and independent advice, as well as informative comment on the degree-awarding body's standards and on student achievement in relation to those standards. External examiners confirm that the provider consistently and fairly implements their own policies and procedures to ensure the integrity and rigour of assessment practices. They also comment on the quality and standards of the courses in relation to the national standards and frameworks and comment on the reasonable comparability of standards achieved at other UK providers with whom the examiner has experience. External examiners also comment on good practice, and make recommendations for enhancement.

External examiners will have sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers, and where appropriate, professional peers. External examiners do not contribute to delivery through teaching or any other direct capacity.

2. What are the Expectations of an External Examiner?

External Examiners are expected to provide assurance to the institution and other stakeholders that the academic standards and quality achieved are in accordance with the institution's regulation and national qualification frameworks. External examiner should also provide impartial and independent confirmation that the processes of the provider have been followed and that the assessment and classification processes are fair, reliable and transparent.

In particular, External Examiners should focus on the following:

- the maintenance and application of academic standards through internal marking practices
- whether students have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers
- for provision in partnership with other organisations, the standard is consistent with the degree-awarding body's approved practices and, where appropriate, consideration is given to comparison of cohorts across location and provider

- the setting, maintenance and application of academic standards through rigorous assessment processes, to the best of their professional knowledge.
- good practice and possible enhancements.

External Examiners are full members of examination boards and therefore are expected to attend the Award or Field / Exam Board of a particular institution.

External Examiners are also required to submit an annual report considering points made above. In the annual report, External Examiners should also:

- confirm that sufficient evidence was received to enable the role to be fulfilled (where evidence was insufficient, they give details)
- state whether issues raised in previous reports have been, or are being, addressed to their satisfaction
- address any issues as specifically required by any relevant professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB)
- give an overview of their term of office (when concluded).

3. What Quality / Experience do I need to become an External Examiner?

As set out in the QAA UK Quality Code, institutions need to ensure External Examiners can demonstrate the following qualities:

- have a high degree of competence and experience in the fields covered by the course of study, or parts thereof, and have a good understanding of the UK higher education sector
- are appropriately experienced in course design and student assessment at the level of the award
- have the necessary academic experience and subject knowledge to assess standards in an effective manner, identify good practice and recommend enhancements to enable informed course development
- are experienced in acting as an external examiner or are supported by the provider in undertaking their duties, for example, through training and mentoring
- are impartial in judgement and wholly independent of the provider and its staff (including the governing body), and any relevant partners
- do not personally benefit from any student outcomes, nor have any connection to any student being assessed
- have had sufficient experience in quality assurance to enable them to discharge their role effectively

- are drawn from a relevant variety of institutional or professional contexts and traditions in order that the course benefits from wide-ranging external scrutiny
- comply with all relevant employment legislation, including safeguarding, as appropriate
- normally hold a limited number of concurrent external examining engagements (for example either one or two).

For more insight into UWE Bristol's own processes and expectations on External Examiners visit the [Enhancement Framework](#) page on External Peer Review and the [External Examiner Online Resources](#).

Conflicts of Interest/Reciprocal arrangements

Institutions should not appoint an External Examiner who meets any of the following criteria which would breach a conflict of interest:

- anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study
- anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study
- anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study
- anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme(s) or modules in question
- former staff or students of the institution unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s)
- a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution
- the succession of an external examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home department and institution
- the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution

If you want to know more about reciprocal arrangements please contact the External Examiner team at externalsreport@uwe.ac.uk. A member of staff will be able to advise you further on how the University manages reciprocal arrangements.

Please note that if you are due to start tenure as an External Examiner, as a staff member of UWE Bristol we ask that you ensure that your line manager is notified so that the External Examiner Team are able to check for reciprocal arrangements.

Celebrating the role of an External Examiner

4. Why become an External Examiner?

External Examining offers you the opportunity to develop your professional academic practice and contributes to your own personal development. External Examining offers a range of valuable possibilities for greater insight into practice across the sector. It benefits the contracting institution in gaining external input into its standards and provision and rewards the home institution in developing staff with the expertise in evaluating practice. Additionally institutions will in most cases pay a fee to their External Examiners, however, the rate of any fee alters between institutions.

Furthermore the personal links that open up as an External Examiner provide greater networking opportunity and valuable insight into practices that may inform enhancement of the External Examiners own practice.

Included below is some feedback from UWE Bristol Staff previously undertaking the role:

“Being invited and/or accepted as an external examiner is evidence of national recognition as an expert in your field and can contribute to a leadership profile that can enhance promotion prospects. It is also seen as an important part of scholarly activity – keeping abreast of developments in the field, through networking with colleagues in other universities and can lead to the sharing of good practice goes both ways. Engaging with another institution through external examining can stimulate new ideas for curriculum development, approaches to assessment and feedback practice. In my own case, also, the networking relationships have led to joint research and publication ventures.”

Dr Billie Oliver, Former Academic Director Department of Health and Social Sciences, Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences

“Being an External Examiner is a great experience, if you think of yourself as a critical friend in getting to know how things work and making sure that they work properly. You are essentially comparing the teaching, programme delivery and assessments, marking and board operations and general wellbeing of a course in line with similar courses elsewhere. It’s a very good opportunity to hear what students have to say about their studies and the ways in which they are taught. I have always found it really interesting, and often inspiring to talk to students and staff about the work that they do.

It’s always refreshing to see how similar subjects are taught in other institutions, and to meet with the staff teams responsible for delivering them. Overall, I have found it to be a very positive experience and would recommend the opportunity it brings to anyone thinking of undertaking the role.”

Sarah Bodman, Programme Manager MA Multidisciplinary Printmaking / Senior Research Fellow, Department of Art and Design, Faculty of Arts, Creative Industries and Education

Interest in the Role of an External Examiner

5. How do I become an External Examiner?

To become an External Examiner you must be able to satisfy the criteria noted in section 3 and must be an academic member of staff within the University. Available External Examiner posts are usually advertised by an institution when previous tenure of an External Examiner is due to end. This is done through various platforms such as sector networks and Higher Education Academy Subject Centres.

Additionally, an [External Examiners Jiscmail](#) list hosts adverts which you are able to view. These are also filtered to relevant Heads of Department who will then further disseminate these posts to the rest of the department.

It is likely that an application or nomination form would have to be completed and a CV submitted to the institution as supporting evidence when applying for the role.

It is also likely for the institution to ask for your original documentation to proof your right to work in the UK before the start of your tenure. All UK institutions have to comply with UK visas and immigration rules and that no exceptions are made as this will pose a significant risk to the institution.

As a new External Examiner the contracting institution should provide a mentor who will usually be an experienced External Examiner and will be able to offer support and guidance while you undertake your role.

6. Who should I contact to talk about this role?

You should liaise with your line manager in the first instance to discuss the role and time commitments and workload. If you wish to know more about the role within UWE Bristol contact the External Examiner Team at externalsreport@uwe.ac.uk and a member of the team will be able to provide you with more information. The role and the expectations are clearly set out in the [QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Advice and Guidance - External Expertise](#).

7. How does UWE Bristol support its staff in External Examining roles?

The University holds an obligation to its staff to ensure that the training needs of individuals are supported and that development for staff is maximised. The University has set out its objectives for staff learning and development within the [Learning and Development Policy](#). UWE Bristol also recognise that the role of an External Examiner may be engaged with through scholarly activity, which all academic staff are assigned through the workload allocation model.

Each faculty set their own objectives for staff development and you are advised to seek further clarification from your line manager for more information on faculty objectives in learning and development.

The External Examiner Team will be able to provide guidance should you require further clarification on the quality aspect of the role or would like to gather further insight into the University's own processes for External Examining.

For more insight into UWE Bristol's own processes and expectations on External Examiners visit the [Enhancement Framework](#) page on External Peer Review and the [External Examiner Online Resources](#) page. UWE Bristol holds an annual External Examiner conference for all newly appointed External Examiners. UWE Bristol staff who are interested in the role or who have started tenure in their first term as an External Examiner are welcome to attend. For more information you can see previous years' presentations on the External Examiner Online Resources and please contact the External Examiner Team if you are interested in attending.

8. What are the expectations of the University on staff undertaking the role?

In order for the University to fully assure that it meets expectations set out in the QAA UK Quality Code, the University must check for any conflicts of interest when appointing its own External Examiners. We ask that you notify your Line Manager when taking up a new tenure as an External Examiner so that reciprocal arrangements can be checked.

As an employee of the University you have an obligation to ensure that you are able to manage your workload and any external activity does not interfere with your work for the University.

Please be aware that the university offers a number of support platforms and training opportunities for staff regarding [time management](#) and [work related stress](#) should you have any concerns.