


Introduction to the External Examining Role at QUB



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Introduction

Queen's University Belfast is a Russell Group university that prioritises **academic excellence** to ensure a valuable degree for students.

Key to ensuring a valuable degree for students is the role of **external experts** who can provide '*independent and impartial*' views and can input on '*course design, its management, monitoring, evaluation and review*'.

[UK Quality Code](#)

Staff Charter

At Queen's, our core values of **Excellence, Connectivity, Ambition, Respect and Integrity** support the University's vision, shape our culture and reflect the behaviours that are valued at the University.

Our new [Staff Charter](#) describes the practical application of our core values.



OUR STAFF CHARTER



EXCELLENCE



CONNECTIVITY



AMBITION



RESPECT



INTEGRITY



EXCELLENCE

We strive for excellence within ourselves and others, providing solutions to new and existing challenges.



CONNECTIVITY

We work best when we are collaborative, working together to contribute to the Queen's community.



AMBITION

We strive together for improvement and innovation, looking ahead to see the bigger picture.



RESPECT

We treat everyone in our community equally and how we would want to be treated ourselves.



INTEGRITY

We are open, honest and fair. We take ownership of the way we work and how we treat each other.



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

The External Examining Role

A **single external examiner role** is adopted at Queen's to provide programme oversight.

Key to the external examiner role is the adoption of a **risk-based approach**.

To implement the risk-based external examining role, the work of external examiners is divided into three dimensions, which should be afforded roughly equal time and effort:

- [Assessment Standard Setting](#)
- [Maintenance of Standards and Quality](#)
- [Critical Friend Discussions to Inform Programme Enhancement](#)



Engagement of External Examiners

All programmes and modules will have an external examiner appointed to them. However, not all modules will have assessments sampled each year. A risk-based approach is adopted at Queen's to identify the modules to be sampled each year, and you will be asked to input in this process.

The below models for the allocation and engagement of external examiners will be used. Schools may use a combination of both models across their suite of programmes.

Model 1: External Examiner by Programme

Where possible, programme level external examiners will be identified for each programme as outlined below:

- One external examiner per taught postgraduate programme.
- One to two external examiners per undergraduate subject available as a named component of a bachelor's degree.
- Two external examiners per undergraduate integrated master's degree.

Model 2: External Examiner by Specialism

The allocation of external examiners may be across the suite of programmes within an area (undergraduate and/or postgraduate), rather than for individual programmes.

This enables subject expertise to be matched within and across programmes.

Module Allocation

- A risk-based approach will be adopted to identify the modules within the programme allocation to be sampled each year and the workload of external examiners should be roughly comparable.
- Module allocation to external examiners will be completed by Directors of Education and Directors of Graduate Studies with input from other relevant staff with programme expertise. You will be consulted as part of this process.
- It is anticipated that all modules would be considered across your period of appointment.

Assessment Standard Setting

Throughout the academic year, School colleagues will contact you for input on assessment standard setting on modules within your allocated programme(s).

This element of your role will involve:

- a. Approving draft examination papers and other significant components of assessed work.
- b. Ensuring the types of assessment are appropriate for the subject, the students, the respective level of study and the expected learning outcomes.

Stage 1
Module Coordinators prepare assessments

Stage 2
Assessments shared with scrutinising academic alongside module proforma

Stage 3
Assessments reviewed by scrutinising academic to:

- Ensure the assessment is set at an appropriate standard and accurately reflects the syllabus;
- Review the marking scheme/ grading criteria;
- Review how the assessment maps to programme level assessments;
- Ensure the same learning outcomes are not being repeatedly assessed in the programme;
- Ensure the types of assessment are appropriate for the subject, the students, the respective level of study and the expected learning outcomes.

Stage 4
Assessments with comments returned to Module Coordinator for relevant amendments to be made

Stage 5
Assessments sent to external examiners to:

- Ensure the assessment is set at an appropriate standard and accurately reflects the syllabus;
- Review the marking scheme/ grading criteria;
- Review how the assessment maps to programme level assessments;
- Ensure the same learning outcomes are not being repeatedly assessed in the programme;
- Ensure the types of assessment are appropriate for the subject, the students, the respective level of study and the expected learning outcomes.

Maintenance of Standards and Quality

This element of the role will involve:

- a. Reviewing the moderation approach and ensuring that internal moderation is consistent, by reviewing a limited selection of moderated scripts* within your allocated modules.
- b. Reviewing programme and module outcome data to confirm the consistency of module and programme outcomes over time, identifying potential issues with module assessment, where required, and ensuring outcomes are in line with sector comparators.
- c. In exceptional circumstances, advising on any proposed scaling of marks at a cohort level in advance of the Board of Examiners meeting.
- d. Confirming adherence to relevant assessment policies and procedures.

**To review the internal moderation approach, you will be provided with access to all moderated work. The sample size should be adequate to provide assurance that the work has been properly marked across a range of student performance. It is expected that external examiners sample 10% of assessments. In the case of very small/large numbers, a minimum of 10 scripts and a maximum of 50 scripts are suggested for external consideration.*

Critical Friend Discussions to Inform Programme Enhancement

This will involve meeting with School/University colleagues, student representatives, and with other external examiners (where applicable) for facilitated discussions on programme-level and sector issues/ enhancements.

School colleagues will arrange these critical friend touch points when appropriate and the agenda will be dictated by current issues within the School and feedback provided to date. This facet of the role will include:

- a. Reviewing degree programmes (the sequence, nature and assessment of the modules necessary to complete a degree) and confirming their alignment with the [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#) and any relevant [Subject Benchmark Statements](#).
- b. Making recommendations for programme enhancement.
- c. Highlighting and encouraging good practice, and innovation in learning, teaching and assessment.

Reporting Requirements

To provide assurances on the maintenance of standards and quality, you must submit an [annual Quality Assurance report](#) to the University.

Where you have reviewed undergraduate programmes, reports for 2023-24 should be submitted by **30 June 2024** after all relevant meeting(s). Where the you have been assigned to postgraduate taught programmes, reports for 2023-24 should be submitted by **30 November 2024**.

If you require a University response to your annual report, this will be provided by the Chair of Education Committee (Quality and Standards). The School with which you are associated will be provided with a copy of the Quality Assurance report and will be expected to provide a response where an issue has been identified.

Confidential Reports

You may submit a confidential report to externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk. A confidential report will not be shared with the School unless you provide permission. You should continue to complete a standard report as far as possible.

Queries should be directed to externalexaminers@qub.ac.uk.

Serious Concerns

If you have serious concerns in relation to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme and have exhausted all published applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report, you may invoke the QAA's Concerns scheme or inform the relevant PSRB. The QAA Concern Scheme can be accessed here: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/qaa-concerns-scheme.pdf?sfvrsn=c13dfd81_6



Academic Year Timeline 2023-24

Date	Event
18 September - 15 December 2023	Weeks 1-13
18 December 2023 - 5 January 2024	Winter (Christmas) Break
8 January - 15 March 2024	Weeks 14-23
18 March - 5 April 2024	Spring (Easter) Break
8 April - 31 May 2024	Weeks 24-31

Deadline for the Publication of Results

Date	Event
Thursday 9 November 2023	Winter Graduation Results Deadline
First Semester Exam Results	Tuesday 6 February 2024
Second Semester Exam Results	Thursday 13 June 2024
Supplementary Exam Results 2024	Tuesday 27 August 2024

Future [Semester Dates](#) are available on the QUB Webpage.



An Introduction to the General Regulations

The General Regulations are the policies and procedures that govern the University. They include:

- Regulations for Students
- Study Regulations
- Academic Appeal Regulations

The QUB General Regulations can be accessed via:
[General Regulations | Academic & Student Affairs | Queen's University Belfast \(qub.ac.uk\)](#)

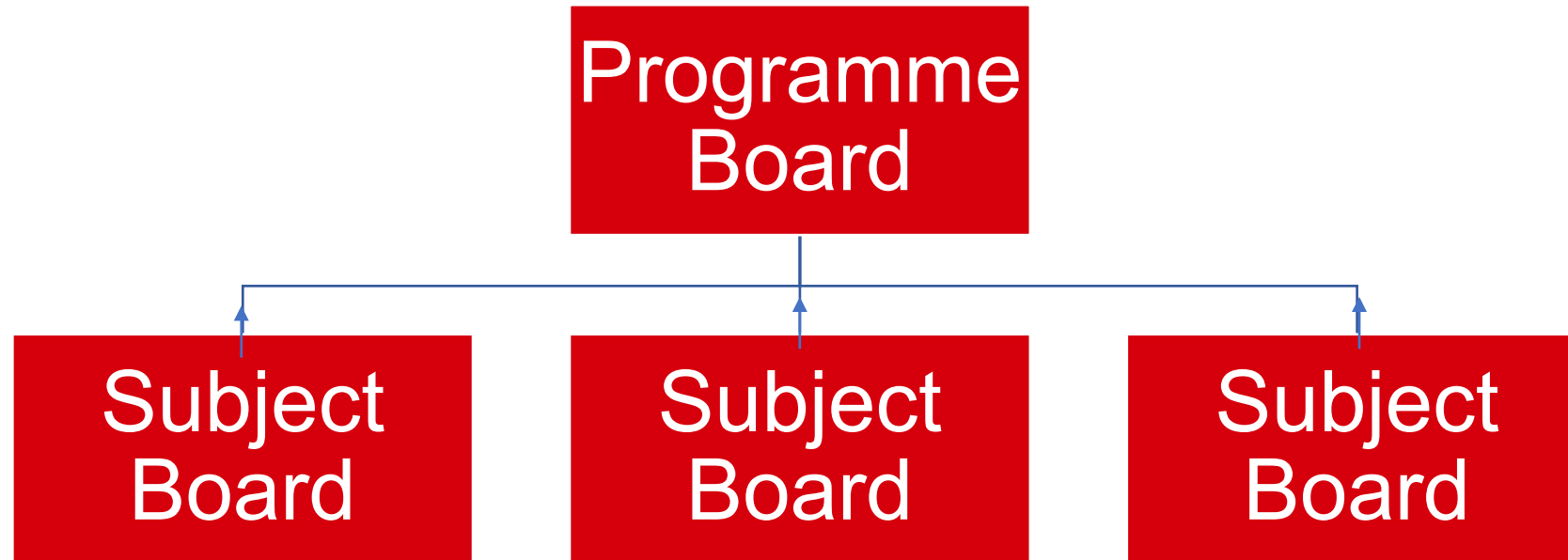


Authority and Structure of Boards of Examiners

Subject Board	Programme Board
Agrees marks for all modules in the subject.	Receives confirmed marks from subject boards and has no authority to change marks.
Awards academic credit where modules have been passed.	On the basis of the decisions taken by the contributing subject boards, makes decisions on progression and on final awards (including classifications).
Membership is drawn from the academic staff teaching the subject (usually module co-ordinators).	Membership is drawn from the contributing subject boards.

**External examiners are not required to attend either subject or programme board meetings. However, where they do, they are full members of the Board.*

Authority and Structure of Boards of Examiners



Subject Boards

Responsibilities

- Agree marks for all modules in that subject and award academic credit where modules have been passed.
- Must not change marks which have been approved by a previous Board.



Subject Boards

Awarding Credit and Resit Requirements ([Study Regulation 5.4](#))

Where students have been given an opportunity to undertake all module assessments, and there are no exceptional circumstances, the Board must confirm one of three outcomes for each module:

- Pass (Regulation 5.4.3)
- Incomplete (Regulation 5.4.4)
- Fail (Regulations 5.4.5-7)

Subject Boards

Pass ([Study Regulation 5.4.3](#))

- To pass a module, students must:
 - Achieve a module mark of the pass mark or greater; and
 - Achieve a satisfactory performance in all of the module's specified compulsory components.
- Students are not permitted to re-sit, or take as a first sit, modules which they have passed, or to take additional modules to substitute for modules already passed.

Subject Boards

Incomplete ([Study Regulation 5.4.4](#))

A module should be recorded as incomplete if:

- The student has attained an overall module mark of the pass mark or greater; and
- The student has not achieved a satisfactory performance in all of the specified compulsory components.



Subject Boards

Reassessment of an Incomplete Module

- If the student completes the specified compulsory component(s) satisfactorily, the module will be recorded as Pass **without altering the original mark.**
- If the student does not complete the specified compulsory component(s) satisfactorily*, the module will be recorded as a Fail with a mark of pass mark less one.
- This is treated as a second attempt.

Subject Boards

Fail ([Study Regulations 5.4.5-7](#))

A module is failed:

- When the overall module mark is less than the pass mark; or
- When reassessment of an incomplete module results in a fail (further reassessment may not be permitted as this is seen as a second attempt).

Subject Boards

Reassessment of a Failed Module

To pass a module on reassessment following failure, the student must:

- Reattempt any compulsory components which have not met the required standard; or where a module consists of only non-compulsory components, reattempt the components required by the Board.
- Achieve the required standard in these components, if compulsory.
- Achieve an overall pass mark for the module.

The module mark will be capped at the pass mark for the purposes of determining the final programme mark/degree classification.

General Regulations - Late Submissions

The regulations governing late submissions are contained within [Study Regulations for Undergraduate Programmes](#) and [Study Regulations for Postgraduate Taught Programmes](#).

These regulations note that:

*3.2.1 Continuous assessment/coursework, including dissertations, submitted after the deadline will be **penalised at the rate of 5% of the total marks available for each calendar day late up to a maximum of five calendar days, after which a mark of zero shall be awarded** [...] The late penalty will apply to the continuous assessment/coursework component mark only and not to the overall module mark.*

3.2.2 Exemptions shall be granted to 3.2.1 only if there are exceptional circumstances.

General Regulations – Exceptional Circumstances Procedure

The Exceptional Circumstances Procedure can be accessed via the [General Regulations webpage](#).

The **School Exceptional Circumstances Committee (SECC)** is responsible for considering exceptional circumstances applications, determining whether the circumstances are accepted, and making recommendations to the relevant Subject Board of Examiners regarding the next assessment opportunity (where applicable).

May be used to address:

- i. Absence from an examination or non-submission of coursework/continuous assessment.
- ii. Requests for extensions to deadlines for submission of coursework/continuous assessment.
- iii. Consideration of significant disruption during an assessment.

The University operates a **‘Fit to Sit’** regulation whereby it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that they undertake assessment only if they are fit to do so.

Programme Boards

Responsibilities

- Programme Boards receive confirmed marks from Subject Boards, and must not change marks.
- On the basis of the marks received, Programme Boards make decisions on progression and award for each student.



Programme Boards

Progress between Stages ([Study Regulation 5.6](#))

- Students' progress is considered at the end of each Stage by the relevant Programme Board of Examiners.
- For undergraduate students, to progress from one Stage to the next, they must have passed a minimum of five modules (100 credit points) in the current stage of study (Study Regulation 5.6.3).
- For postgraduate taught students, there are no general progression regulations. However, some Master's programmes have programme regulations which stipulate credit requirements in order to proceed to the dissertation.

Programme Boards

Undergraduate Programme Requirements ([Study Regulation 2.1](#))

Honours Degrees	Integrated Masters
Based on results of 360 CATS	Based on results of 480 CATS
Minimum 320 CATS passed*	Minimum 440 CATS to have been passed*
Minimum of 120 CATS to be taken at Level 3 (FHEQ Level 6)	Minimum of 120 CATS to be taken at Level 4 (FHEQ Level 7)
Maximum of 120 CATS at Level 1 (FHEQ Level 3)	
To qualify for the award of a specific degree, the credits gained must satisfy the requirements of the programme for that degree as set out in the Programme Specification.	
*Where stricter requirements apply, these will be stated in the relevant programme regulations .	

Programme Boards

Ordinary Degrees ([Study Regulation 2.2](#))

- An Ordinary degree is a non-subject-specific, unclassified award.
- No direct entry
 - Can be permitted or required to transfer by the relevant Programme Board of Examiners.
 - Transfer not permitted before the student has attempted 120 credit points above Level 1 (FHEQ Level 4).
 - Cannot transfer back to an Honours programme.
- Credit requirements:
 - Based on 300 CATS (must be passed)
 - Minimum of 180 CATS above Level 1 (FHEQ Level 4)
 - Minimum of 60 CATS at Level 3 (FHEQ Level 6)
- A mark of 35% or above for a Level 3 (FHEQ Level 6) module may be awarded a pass at Level 2 (FHEQ Level 5) (for the purposes of awarding an Ordinary Degree only).

Programme Boards

Postgraduate Taught Programme Requirements

Programme	Credit Requirements
Master's Degree	180 CATS (minimum of 150 CATS at FHEQ Level 7)
Postgraduate Diploma	120 CATS (minimum 90 CATS at FHEQ Level 7)
Postgraduate Certificate	60 CATS (minimum 40 CATS at FHEQ Level 7)

Must also meet the requirements of the relevant [Programme Specification](#)

Programme Boards

Calculating Programme Mark

- The programme mark is calculated from the weighted average of the module marks, truncated to one decimal place.
- Only marks from modules undertaken at Queen's or as part of an approved arrangement may be counted towards the classification.

Degree Classifications and Postgraduate Awards

- Mark scales are outlined in:

[Study Regulations for Undergraduate Programmes, Regulation 7.1](#)

[Study Regulations for Postgraduate Taught Programmes, Regulation 7](#)

Programme Boards

Determining Degree Classification or Award

For students first enrolled in 2020-21 (including UG direct entry students and PGT students) and thereafter: The programme mark must be used for the purposes of degree classification or award (i.e. this should not be rounded to an integer). For example, a weighted average mark of 59.7 is retained to determine the degree classification or award. For UG classified degrees this mark would allow the student to be considered for predominance.

For students enrolled prior to 2020-21: The programme mark is rounded to an integer for the purpose of determining degree classifications or award. For example, a weighted average mark of 59.7 is rounded up to 60, giving the student a 2.1.

Programme Boards

The Predominance Rule (Undergraduate Programmes only)

- The Predominance Rule must be applied by all Boards of Examiners except where the Director of Education and Student Services has granted exemption from its use.
- **For students who first enrolled in 2020-21 (including UG Stage 3 direct entry students) and thereafter:** They are eligible to be considered under the predominance rule where their programme mark is within 1% of the higher classification.
- **For students who were enrolled prior to 2020-21:** They are eligible to be considered under the predominance rule where their programme mark is within 3% of the higher classification.

Programme Boards

Awarding a Pass with Distinction (Master's Degrees only)

- For Master's Degrees, the following three conditions apply to award a pass with distinction:
 1. an overall average of 70+ is achieved;
 2. a mark of 70+ is achieved in the dissertation module;
 3. a weighted average **(truncated to an integer)** of 65+ is achieved in the other modules.

Programme Boards

Non-Standard Procedures

Aegrotat Awards ([Regulation 9](#)).

Posthumous Awards ([Regulation 10](#)).

Revocation of Awards ([Study Regulation 12](#)).

Online Resources

- [External Examining Standard Operating Procedures](#)
- [Regulations for Students](#)
- [Study Regulations](#)
- [Semester Dates](#)

Contact Details

Quality Assurance and Regulations Team

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