# Things to consider when applying for the role of External Examiner

The role of external examiner is essential for all UK HE programmes (as defined by the QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education). External Examiners are approved by the University but are nominated at Department, School or Faculty level according to criteria set out by the QAA and by each individual institution. It is important to enjoy the opportunities being an external examiner gives you to take part in the wider academic community, to act as a 'critical friend' and to play a key role in the assurance of quality and standards of higher education.

## Questions

Before you accept the role of an External Examiner, ensure that you understand what is required.

Some general questions to ask might include:

* Which courses / modules will I be responsible for? At what level?
* How many students are enrolled on the courses or modules?
* How and when are the course/modules assessed?
* What is the mechanism and timeframe for receiving and returning moderated assessments?
* When will I receive exam questions / assessment instruments to scrutinize?
* What are the Assessment Regulations, Extenuating / Mitigating circumstances policies of the individual institution?
* How long will I be appointed for? (Typically, EE tenure is for 4 years)
* Under what circumstances can an EE contract be terminated?
* When are Examination/Progression/Award boards held and will I be required to attend? (Consider whether your own academic commitments are likely to clash with the timings for the Boards as most institutions will expect the EE to be in attendance for the main boards each year).
* Will you expect me to view any exam scripts or other student work when I attend for the boards?
* What systems will I be expected to use to access students' assessments and other information (e.g. Blackboard, Sharepoint, online EE portal, etc)?
* What induction is offered to prepare me for my role as External Examiner?
* How will I be remunerated?

## Understanding Moderation

Normally the role of the EE is to moderate the assessment of a cohort rather than mark individual scripts and coursework. Moderation means that you are asked to ensure and confirm that assessment and assessment practice is in line with both institutional policy and national quality assessment thresholds. This is usually undertaken by sampling a cohort (e.g. you might be sent 10% of a cohort’s work, sampled at random as well as any borderlines, firsts, and fails).

### Questions you might ask when undertaking moderation include:

* Is the marking appropriate and fair, and has it been conducted in line with the institution’s own guidelines and national benchmarks?
* Does the written feedback awarded match the mark and/ or classification? (Markers should not, for instance, award work a lower mark than their written feedback suggests)
* Does the overall spread of marks look reasonable? (noting that small group sizes can skew distribution significantly, and take into account random variation).

If you have any concerns about marking practice or assessment processes, these should be raised with the relevant academic contact and/or officer responsible for assessment and award (e.g. Academic Registrar). Make sure that you are fully informed of any action taken as a result of your concerns. How an institution responds is an important part of the bigger picture to be discussed in your annual EE report.

## Attending the Institution as an External Examiner

When you attend the institution as an EE, be prepared to attend any or all of the following boards, depending on the system in place: internal, departmental, School or Faculty, Progression and Awards, joint honours, Undergraduate, Postgraduate, etc. The specific type of Board will depend on the individual institution. Remember that your role is to ensure fairness and parity of treatment in the assessment process, in line with the institution’s own policies and guidelines, and to discourage personalised discussion about individual students. You may wish to make suggestions about the institution’s assessment regulations and policies, but try to avoid prefacing suggestions with the phrase ‘in my own institution…’ as this not regarded as helpful. EEs are usually given an opportunity to speak to the Award/Exam Board at the end of proceedings, during which time you can also raise any concerns or to offer praise, highlight areas of good practice and give thanks where due.

## The External Examiner's Report

Be prompt with your annual report (usually submitted shortly after the main Award/Exam Board, according to deadlines set by the individual institution) and be constructive in your feedback. Remember that the EE report is read by senior staff as well as the main academic contact (in some cases, Heads of Department or even the Vice-Chancellor and /or Executive body of the University). The views of EEs are taken extremely seriously and are regarded as a 'cornerstone' of any institution's quality and standards system.

## Other Useful Information

### The UK Quality Code (QAA, revised 2018)

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education has been substantially revised, updated and republished by the QAA during 2018. The Code is divided into 'expectations', core and common practices and advice and guidance. The advice and guidance section of the Code is divided into 12 themes and is designed to support new and existing providers in meeting the mandatory requirements of the Quality Code. It has been developed in partnership with the higher education sector and includes guiding principles, practical advice and further resources. Advice and Guidance is not mandatory for providers, but illustrative of possible approaches. National regulators and QAA are not bound by the information in the Advice and Guidance and will not view it as compliance indicators. The guidance does not interpret statutory requirements.

The following sections of the Code are particularly relevant for External Examiners:

[**UK Quality Code for Higher Education (QAA)**](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code)

[**UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance: External Expertise**](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/external-expertise)

[**UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance: Assessment**](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/assessment)

See also:

[**A Handbook for External Examining (HEA, 2012)**](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/downloads/HE_Academy_External_Examiners_Handbook_2012.pdf)