

St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London

**GUIDELINES
FOR
EXTERNAL
EXAMINERS
2023/24**

Guidelines for External Examiners

Introduction

These guidelines are provided to assist External Examiners and all University staff involved in marking, moderation and Programme Examination Boards. They outline the marking process, the role of the External Examiners and also the conduct of the Programme Examination Board, with an explanation of the general regulations.

The purposes of the external examining system are to ensure that:

- The standards are appropriate for the award elements which the External Examiner has been appointed to examine
- All qualifications awarded are comparable in standard in different universities and institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom;
- The system of assessment is fair and operated appropriately in the determination of marks awarded to students.

The guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Academic Regulations 2022-23
<https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/policies/academic-regulations.aspx>

and

Part 6: External Examiners of the QAE Handbook.
<https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/ctess/qs/quality-assurance-and-enhancement-handbook/about.aspx>

A copy can be obtained from QS Office by emailing qateam@stmarys.ac.uk

ASSESSMENT

1 Assessment Policy

Full details of the assessment policy and regulations are to be found on the University website at
<https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/ctess/docs/assessment/assessment-policy.pdf>

2 Modes of assessment

Assessments for each module are taken during the semester in which the module is completed. Programmes are required to align assessment with the stated learning outcomes and to regard assessment as an integral part of student learning.

3 Coursework hand-in dates

All pieces of coursework are required to be submitted by set deadlines before the relevant examination period. Students receive advance notice of these dates. Work submitted after these dates will be given a zero grade unless the student has received approval for a late submission via programme-level extenuating circumstances' and supported by appropriate evidence.

4 Organisation of examinations

- 4.1 The administration of examinations is the responsibility of the Head of Registry Services and they are organised by the Assessments & Examinations Office. The examination schedule is published around four weeks prior to the January and May examinations and around one week before the July re-sit examination. Each student receives an individual examination timetable. Reasonable adjustments are available for students with specific support needs such as disabilities or temporary medical condition or injuries. Formal examinations are subject to invigilation at all times. Invigilators ensure that the published instructions to candidates are observed. Any deficiencies in the general arrangements or in the observance of the instructions is brought to the attention of the Chief Invigilator.
- 4.2 Written examination papers are, for the most part, unseen although some programmes do employ disclosed/open book or case-study based examinations.

5 Marking and moderation

5.1 Responsibility for marking

Only academic staff, who are members of the Programme Examination Board and/or the University's Examination Boards, will be responsible for the marks awarded to students. Where postgraduate students, part-time visiting lecturers, demonstrators and teaching assistants are employed, established and experienced members of staff shall systematically scrutinise and oversee any marking carried out by these members of staff.

5.2 Anonymous marking

All written assessment (e.g. coursework and examinations) is marked anonymously, i.e. the identity of the student is unknown to the marker. This is to promote and maintain fairness in marking and academic rigour.

- 5.3 Where a student breaches his or her own anonymity (e.g. by writing his or her name visibly on an examination script), the student forfeits his or her right to anonymity and the University is absolved from the requirement to observe and maintain that student's anonymity.

5.4 Double marking

Programmes may determine that double (second) marking is to be applied universally, or according to 5.5 below. The purpose of double marking is to have an internal check on the marking process to ensure that the criteria are applied in a fair and consistent manner. This is particularly important where there are teams of markers for the same assignment.

- 5.5 With the agreement of the Programme Examination Board, double marking may be undertaken for a sample of scripts. At Level 4 the minimum sample should be all scripts which either marker considers a fail; at other levels a sample should include at least one script from each degree class. It is considered good practice, and may save time, to mark a small number of scripts and discuss them in order to agree parameters before the majority of scripts are marked.

- 5.6 Double marking may be applied in cases where the assessment component has a significant impact on the final degree mark or where explicitly required by Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body. Dissertations and major projects should

always be double marked. Where dissertations or projects have been marked by several different members of staff, moderation should take place by means of a sample from all markers to ensure consistency and fairness.

5.7 **Ephemeral Assessments**

In the case of ephemeral assessments (i.e. those assessments of which there is no permanent record, such as presentations, oral exams, critiques, performances etc.), the assessment level moderation shall take the form of an internal moderator sitting in on the assessment, observing the sample sizes. Where the ephemeral assessment is recorded as part of the assessment process, it then becomes a Permanent Assessment

5.8 **Reconciling marks**

Once both markers have completed the marking they should then meet and resolve any inconsistencies and reconcile the marks before provisional marks are given to the students. Where there is disagreement between markers, the general consistency of marking should be considered. If the first marker is too harsh or marked too generously for example, the marks for all students on the module should be re-scaled accordingly.

5.9 **Sampling prior to marking the whole cohort**

It is recommended that where there are teams of markers, they should meet to agree the marks for a few scripts at the beginning of the process in order to sort out any inconsistencies prior to marking the whole cohort. If this method of sampling is adopted, all fails should be checked once marking has been completed.

5.10 On discretionary basis, external examiners may be asked to adjudicate on or otherwise resolve differences between marks awarded by different markers, or employed as arbiter in case of marking dispute but not supposed to be second or third marker, however, the final judgement on, or approval of marks must be undertaken at the relevant Programme Examination Board.

6 **Dealing with extenuating circumstances**

6.1 During a period of study, students may encounter significant personal difficulties that impact on their ability to study for or complete academic assessment(s), including examinations. The University refers to these personal difficulties as Extenuating Circumstances. Students who are unable to take all or part of an examination or submit coursework, must submit an Extenuating Circumstances form with sufficient evidence in support of their EC claim i.e. a medical certificate or other supporting evidence, to the Registry by a specified deadline, normally before the end of the examination period. This information is then provided to the Extenuating Circumstances Board. The Extenuating Circumstances Board decides whether the students are allowed to resit without penalty. No additional marks are given to students who have extenuating circumstances.

6.2 Students who are unwell or have other circumstances which mean that they cannot hand in coursework on time can apply for

- (i) **PROGRAMME LEVEL - Request for Extension to Submission Deadline** that deals with short-term situations which require a short delay to the submission of coursework of no more than 10 working days after the original deadline.

and/ or

- (ii) **UNIVERSITY LEVEL - Extenuating Circumstances claim** which recognises longer-term situations which will affect main examination periods and/or a delay to the submission of coursework of more than 10 working days.

6.3 Extenuating circumstances affecting students as a group

Where students' performance as a group has been significantly affected by an error in the assessment process, a problem during an examination or some other such circumstance beyond their control they should either as a group or individually write to the Head of Registry Services with documentary evidence where appropriate. Alternatively, the Subject Lead may inform the Head of Registry Services in writing of any known issue. The Programme Examination Board will determine the action to be taken on the advice of the Head of Registry Services and the External Examiner.

Further information on Extenuating circumstances can be requested from Registry Office.

7 Academic misconduct

- 7.1 Any candidate (or student) subject to academic misconduct proceedings in accordance with the academic regulations may obtain advice and guidance from the Registry or from the St Mary's Students' Union.
- 7.2 A candidate against whom academic misconduct is alleged shall be sent a written statement setting out the grounds of the alleged misconduct, and shall be given the opportunity to defend himself/herself against the allegation.
- 7.3 The case against the candidate will be considered by a Panel acting on behalf of the Programme Examination Board and comprising the Chair and a member of the Academic Misconduct Panel as nominated by the Academic Board, both of whom are independent of the student's programme. Normally the Panel shall make recommendations to the appropriate University Examination Board, which shall consider what action, if any, to take.
- 7.4 If the candidate wishes to defend himself/herself against the allegation, he/she shall be given at least five days' notice in writing of the meeting of the Panel at which the allegation will be considered. He/she shall be permitted to attend to submit evidence on his/her behalf and to be accompanied by a supporter who is a fellow student or officer of the Students' Union.
- 7.5 The process and possible outcomes of the Academic Misconduct Panel can be found in the Academic Regulations (Section 29 and 30). Further details on the process can be obtained from the Registry Office.

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

8 Role of the External Examiner

- 8.1 The role of the External Examiner is to ensure the following aspects of the University's provision. External examiners play a key role in maintaining the standards of programmes within the University.

- i) ensure the comparability of the University's standards with those in peer institutions and as set out by national benchmarks;
- ii) provide assurance for the University that its assessments and marking practices are fair and operated equitably and consistently;
- iii) provide assurance that the assessment process appropriately measures student achievement against the intended learning outcomes for the programme/module;
- iv) provide advice on the content, balance and structure of programmes and modules of study and on assessment processes, including the conduct of examination boards (which they attend) at Programme and institutional level.
- v) review the operation of the assessment process and to approve academic standards set by Programme team.

External examiners may also attend other assessment-related activities such as performances and workplace practice where relevant.

- 8.2 The External Examiner is a full member of the Programme Examination Board.
- 8.3 External Examiners are entitled to receive and comment upon the assessment of all Levels 3 to 7 modules which are subject to external moderation. They are entitled to see all answer scripts and coursework although may receive a sample between 10% - 25% of the total and shall include work of students across full range of marks.
- 8.4 Each University Examination Board (i.e. institutional-level as opposed to programme-level) has an External Examiner attached in order to monitor process and provide feedback. This External Examiner may be concurrently attached to a programme.
- 8.5 External Examiners should be provided with the relevant programme/module specifications and full schedule of assessment. The tabulation of all marks for all students in the module must be provided besides making available the University Academic Regulations, and the University Assessment Policy, to provide context for their duties. External examiners are entitled to review any piece of module assessment within their remit

9 Approval of assessment

- 9.1 External Examiners should receive and approve the form and content of all draft examination papers and coursework assignments at the request of the Programme Team. Where there is more than one External Examiner for a programme, an External Examiner will usually receive only the papers for the modules for which they are responsible.
- 9.2 External Examiners have the right to be present at and to be involved in the conduct of any viva voce examination, presentations or performances.

10 Sample of coursework and examination scripts for External Examining

10.1 The size of the sample to be scrutinised with the External Examiner should be agreed with them in advance. External Examiners do have the right to access all examination scripts/coursework and some may prefer to do so immediately prior to the Programme Examination Board rather than having them sent to them for scrutiny in advance. Any sample should, however, contain those that have been double marked. The sample should contain a range from the top, middle and bottom and first class or distinction marks, fail marks and borderline pass/fail marks.

10.2 **Scrutiny of the sample**

When looking at the sample, External Examiners do not act as a second marker. Their role is to ensure that the marking is consistent as follows:

- If they consider that the marker has been too harsh, the marks for all students, not just the sample, should be scaled upwards;
- If they consider that the marking is too lenient, all marks should be moved down;
- If they consider that the marking is erratic, they should discuss how to rectify the situation with the Subject Lead.

10.3 External Examiners should not make changes to the marks for individual students.

11 **Attendance at the Programme Examination Board**

11.1 External Examiners are full members of the Programme Examination Board and should be present at the meetings either in-person or via online meetings (zoom, Teams, Skype).

11.2 To show their approval of the proceedings, External Examiners should sign an approval form and the marksheets for the module(s) for which they are responsible. Regarding situations where agreement cannot be reached, please see section 14.4.

12 **Advice to the programme team**

The External Examiner has a role in the continued development of a programme by giving advice on an annual basis – for instance, as to where improvements may be made to the assessment and/or content of modules. Their approval is also important in supporting revalidations, and the introduction of new modules and programme/module changes or modifications which do not require revalidation. Any queries or issues raised by External Examiners, or suggestions/recommendations made by them, must receive a formal response by the Programme Team.

13 **PROGRAMME EXAMINATION BOARDS**

Composition of the Programme Examination Board

13.1 Each subject or programme of study which leads to or contributes to an award of St Mary's University has a Programme Examination Board. The membership of the Board comprises all academic staff in the programme including visiting lecturers who have responsibility for the modules, the Subject Lead and the External Examiner(s). A secretary must be appointed and each programme also has an Examination Co-ordinator who is responsible for collating the marks and liaising with the Examinations Office. The attendance in person of at least one External Examiner is required where marks are ratified. Attendance is not required for the resit board.

13.2 The Programme Board is chaired by an experienced member of staff of the University normally from a different School to that in which the subject/programme is located.

13.3 The quorum for the Programme Examination Board is 50% of members.

Programme Examination Board meetings

14.1 The Programme Examination Board is responsible for provisionally approving marks of all assessment of its sponsored modules including allowing resits for individual students.

14.2 Each Programme Examination Board makes recommendations to the appropriate University Examination Board on the following issues:

- (i) in respect of compulsory programme requirements, recommendations for termination where students have no right of resit or retake;
- (ii) where students who have as a group been disadvantaged through errors or some other circumstance beyond their control under Section G: Assessment Regulations
- (iii) recommendations on internal module compensations
- (iv) Any other recommendations about individual students that the Board deems appropriate.

14.3 A significant number of Single Honours undergraduate students at St Mary's University undertake inter-disciplinary modules. It is therefore not possible for any one University Examination Board to establish the degree classification for candidates (as the final mark on which the classification is based comes from more than one Examination Board). Honours classification is therefore undertaken at the appropriate University Examination Board (to each of which is attached an External Examiner who acts in an oversight role).

14.4 Programme Examination Boards should make every effort to reach a decision by consensus. If it proves necessary to vote on any matter, it shall be determined by majority; each member present shall have one vote and in the case of equality the chair shall have an additional casting vote. The views of the External Examiner(s) should carry particular weight in cases of dispute and External Examiners have the right to refuse to sign a mark sheet if they believe that a Board has not acted in accordance with the academic regulations. If an External Examiner is unable to sign a mark sheet this shall be reported to the Head of Registry Services and, if necessary, to the Chair of the University's Examination Boards.

14.5 For further information on Programme Examination Boards, please see Section G: Assessment Regulations Part 9 of the Academic Regulations.

UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS BOARDS

15 Role and composition of the University Examinations Boards

- 15.1 Decisions on the overall assessment of students are the responsibility of the appropriate University Examinations Board. The University Examination Boards will determine awards, approve Programme Examination Board recommendations for programme progression or programme termination or compensation credits as appropriate, and consider recommendations from Extenuating Circumstances and Academic Misconduct Panels.
- 15.2 The University Boards comprise of a Chair or Deputy Chair appointed by the Provost, the University External Examiner appointed by the and the Subject Leads (for PG programmes) of the constituent programmes or Chairs of UG Programme Examination Boards (UG only). The quorum for the Board is 50% of eligible members. Programme Examination Co-ordinators, the Head of Registry or nominee will normally be in attendance. The Secretary to the Board will be the Assessments Officer or nominee

16 University Undergraduate Examination Board

16.1 The University Undergraduate Board meets three times a year: in February, June and July. The volume and nature of business will depend on the time of the year, as follows:

16.2 June
This is the University Board which approves majority of degree classifications.

16.3 July
This Board considers the results from the resits. It is the Board at which progression decisions are made for those students who have failed modules, and it approves recommendations for suspension and termination of programmes.

16.4 February
This board will only:

- consider final awards for students who have completed the requirements for their degrees;
- review failure for students suspended the previous year;
- review failure for students who were allowed to progress with insufficient credit.
- consider Programme Terminations

17 University Foundation Degree Examination Board

17.1 The Board meets twice a year: in May and November

18 University Postgraduate Examination Board

18.1 The board meets twice annually in May and November

19 University PGCE Examination Board

19.1 The Board meets twice a year: in July and December.

19.2 July

The Board receives the results for the award of the PGCE for successful full-time and part time candidates.

19.3 December

The Board receives the results for the award of the PGCE for successful full-time, part-time. In addition to, full-time students resitting from the previous academic year.

20 Informing students of results

20.1 Undergraduate students: the majority of students will receive their Semester 1 marks at the start of the second semester. The marks will have been ratified by the University Examination Board. For second semester and resit results students will be informed of the ratified results as soon as possible after the University Examination Board.

20.2 The marks will be provisionally released to students via VLE, however, official assessment results will be made available through Personalised Assessment Report. It will be students' responsibility to view their results on receiving the notification email from Registry.

20.2 PGCE students receive their results at the end of the second semester as soon as possible after the University Examination Board.

20.3 Postgraduate students receive their results after the University Postgraduate Examination Board at the end of November.

20.4 For full details on the procedures and consequences of non-submission of work, module failure, resitting, penalisation of marks, internal module compensation, extenuating circumstances, academic misconduct and programme termination, please see Section G, Parts 14-32 of the Academic Regulations.

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION FOR EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

The following section offers information on the role of the External Examiner at St Mary's University. External Examiner nominations are put forward by the Programme Team and approved by the Faculty Quality, Curriculum and Student Experience Committee (QSCE) for a maximum period of four years.

21 Guidelines for External Examiners

21.1 All External Examiners receive these Guidelines for External Examiners on appointment. This document, as well as other documentation relevant to the post of External Examiner, are available on the University website at <https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/ctess/qs/external-examiners/appointment-and-guidance.aspx>

The password for accessing these guidelines and other documentation is: "externalexaminer"

Copies of these documents are also available on request from:

Quality & Standards Office

21.2 Letter of Appointment

The letter of appointment will detail the following:

- The programme(s) of study and/or module(s) for the appointment;
- The period of appointment and the starting date;
- The annual fee and the position with regard to the deduction of tax;
- The requirements of the annual written report, to be submitted to the Quality and Standards Office.

21.3 On appointment, External Examiners will also be sent a **Starter Information Form**, which must be returned to the QS Office. The details provided on the form will enable External Examiners to be paid through the University's payroll system. In signing and returning the Starter Information Form, the External Examiner is agreeing to the terms of the appointment as outlined in the appointment letter and the Guidelines for External Examiners.

21.4 Each External Examiner, prior to commencement of their tenure as part of the appointment process is required to evidence eligibility to work in the UK. Instructions in how to submit this evidence will be detailed in the appointment confirmation email.

22 Programme Specific Information

22.1 More detailed information, including the programme handbook and validation document (if requested), will be provided direct to the External Examiner by the Programme Team. **It is also vital that the External Examiner is given the dates of all relevant exam board meetings and any others visits they are expected to make.** If an External Examiner does not receive the above information on request from the Programme they should contact the QS Office. External Examiners are urged to book travel well in advance, on receipt of the relevant dates, in order to minimise costs as fares will usually rise significantly close to the date of travel.

23 Advice

23.1 Advice regarding examination procedures, the appointment of External Examiners, etc should be sought from the Quality and Standards Office at gateam@stmarys.ac.uk.

24 External Examiner Online Induction

24.1 At the time of appointment all new External Examiners will be directed to an online briefing, which will be maintained by Quality and Standards Office This online induction will usually provide information on

- Roles and responsibilities of the external examiner
- The University's Academic Regulations for taught programmes (UG and PG)
- The University's assessment policies and practices
- The operation of Programme Exam boards and University Exam boards

The External Examiner FAQs will be provided to new and existing external examiners to help answers generic queries.

25 Visiting the University

- 25.1 External Examiners will generally find it useful to visit the University during their first year, in advance of the assessments which they are being asked to moderate. They may wish to meet staff and students, to discuss the programme(s) and/or modules in question to understand better the School and/or programme strategies for both teaching and learning and assessment. Such visits should be arranged directly with the relevant Subject Lead.

26 Nomination and Appointment Procedures

- 26.1 In line with the QAA Advice and Guidance, the University has defined policies and regulations governing the appointment of External Examiners, and premature termination of their contract. Full details of the nomination procedures can be found in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook, of which these guidelines form an appendix. The statement of eligibility and nomination forms are available from the Quality and Standards Office.

27 External Examiners' reports

- 27.1 Annual written reports from External Examiners are an important feature of the University's quality assurance procedures. For all programmes, both undergraduate and postgraduate, the report is required after the meeting of the Programme Examination Board, held at the end of the second semester/academic year. Reports should be submitted annually within two weeks of the final meeting of the Programme Examination Boards.

The prescribed report form may be downloaded through the website and password stipulated above under point 21.1 of these guidelines.

The completed report forms should be sent to the QS Office. The Quality and Standards Office has a delegated responsibility from the Provost to scrutinise the External Examiner reports and update the Faculty Quality, Curriculum and Student Experience Committee (QSCE) via respective Quality and Standards Managers and University Academic Strategy, Portfolio and Student Experience Committee (SPSE) via Head of Quality and Academic Partnerships. They are circulated to the Heads of School and the relevant Subject Leads by the QS Office with a request for a response to the external and QS Office.

- 27.2 The report forms an appendix to the annual monitoring report (Programme Review). The programme is required to show in their statement how they are addressing any issues raised in the report. The QCSE and SPSE receives these annual statements and ensures they are acted upon.
- 27.3 External Examiners' reports form part of revalidation documents and may be viewed by External Advisors, University Validation Panel, QAA reviewers and OFSTED inspectors. Relevant parts of the reports must be made accessible to all students of the programme in question. It may in rare cases be necessary to redact the reports

for them to be viewed by students. The reports form a standing item on the agenda of the semester 1 Programme Board (staff-student) meeting.

28 Payment of Fees

- 28.1 The University processes fees payable to External Examiners once the annual written report has been received. The fee for external examining comprises a number of elements, depending on the specific remit of the examiner. These elements may include:

Basic fee including attendance at the final Examination Board plus;
Moderation, including project /dissertation modules;
Allowance for attendance at additional meetings of Programme Examination Boards;
Attendance at assessed performance, displays or other moderation-related visits.

28.2 Variation of fees from year to year

An examiner should receive the same fee for each year of the appointment except for the fee for the actual number of day's attendance. Inevitably, one or two modules may be introduced or may not run owing to too few students selecting them. Only if there are major changes in circumstances will a revised contract be offered to an examiner.

29 Payment of Expenses

- 29.1 All claims for reimbursement for travel and subsistence expenses should be submitted to the QS Office at St Mary's University.
- 29.2 The reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses will, ordinarily, be made as and when they occur on submission of a claim form, copies of which are available online at via the website and password stipulated in these guidelines above, under point 21.1.

Travel and subsistence expenses may be claimed, together with fees, at the end of the academic year following submission of the annual written report. For travel, standard class rail and economy class air fares will be reimbursed. The University Finance Policy does not permit reimbursement of alcoholic beverages.

All claims for food and drink must be supported by receipts subject to the maximum of the following limits:

- Breakfast £10.00
- Lunch £10.00 (generally provided at the meeting)
- Dinner £25.00

At the start of the academic year programmes must, as mentioned above, provide External Examiners with all dates of exam board meetings and other expected visits for which the examiner will need to book travel. The Examiner will need this in order to book their travel as far ahead as possible and thus minimise costs.