

Core duties, and resignation from / termination of an External Examiner appointment

Revised extracts from the '*Guidance on External Examiner Procedures*' (version 2.0, February 2016)

Section 2 of the Guidance: Duties of Programme External Examiners

- 1 The work of a Programme External Examiner relates to a degree programme (or group of cognate programmes), and the Examiner has specific responsibilities for the whole programme or group. Where more than one Programme Examiner is engaged, one of them should be assigned to the role of Chief Programme External Examiner and will be responsible for resolving any disputes or differences of opinion amongst the other Programme Examiners.
- 2 A Programme External Examiner may also be a Subject External Examiner. When there is only one Programme Examiner per programme, these roles are combined and this has an impact on the duties the Programme Examiner carries out.
- 3 The duties of Programme External Examiners are to (see **Figure 1**):
 - A. where appropriate, review project reports and dissertations, or a sample thereof, to check whether marking is consistent across the programme;
 - B. have responsibility for the moderation of dissertations when engaged for postgraduate taught programmes;
 - C. attend Award Boards at which the student achievement in the programme/s for which they are responsible is classified and degree awards are recommended;
 - D. ratify and endorse, by signature, all award decisions and decisions where students have not been allowed to progress;
 - E. be involved in any decision taken by Chair's Action following an Examination Board that could affect a student's progression and/or classification. This includes actions taken as a result of the consideration of student appeals and complaints cases.
 - F. submit an annual report(s) using the pro-forma that is relevant to their role (see paragraph **35**);
 - G. where appropriate, give viva voce examinations to one or more students;
 - H. where appropriate, provide evidence to demonstrate that the requirements and standards of professional bodies are being met, including in practice;
 - I. highlight and encourage good practice;
 - J. comment on the programme's relationship to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and any relevant Subject Benchmarks;
 - K. advise the Examination Boards on dealing with difficult cases.

Programme Examiner's role in Classification Review

- 4 Programme External Examiners can also have a role in 'Classification Review' when deciding a student's final award or classification.

- 5 Classification review is used when students fall into the boundary zone of a classification and does not satisfy the additional criteria for increasing the class of the award. Schools can undergo a process of internal classification review for that student, overseen by the Programme External Examiner. In this case the Programme External Examiner oversees the process by which the classification review is undertaken and can make recommendations with regards to the final classification. The process of classification review cannot change individual unit marks.
- 6 In addition, Schools may decide to viva students where 'Classification Review' has proven to be inconclusive. This must also be overseen by a Programme External Examiner whose role is to comment on the equity and transparency of the process. The Programme External Examiner can make recommendations with regards to the final classification. The viva can only influence classification, not change individual unit marks.

Assessment of Dissertations for Postgraduate Taught Programmes

- 7 The assessment of dissertations for postgraduate taught programmes is carried out by two internal examiners and reviewed by a Programme External Examiner.
- 8 The role of the Programme External Examiner is to comment on the overall standard of the assessment of dissertations by reviewing:
 - A. a sample, which mirrors the internal sample as set out in the University's [Policy on Marking](#), of all dissertations;
 - B. any dissertation that has been assessed as a fail;
 - C. any dissertation that was the subject of substantial disagreement between the internal examiners;
 - D. the dissertation of any student who may be considered for the award of a distinction.
- 9 The Programme External Examiner should not change any individual marks.

Programme External Examiner Duties within the Assessment Life Cycle

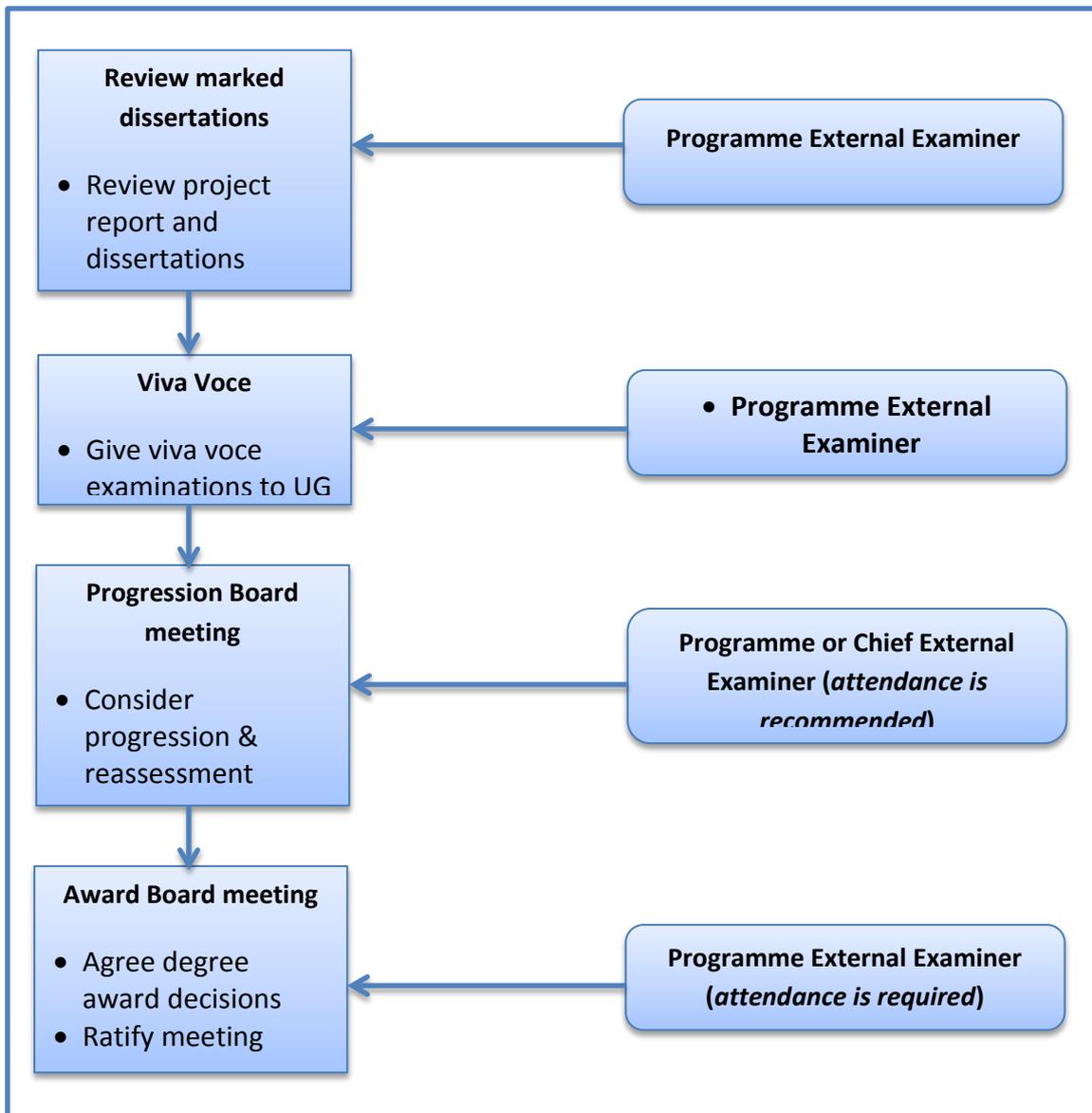


Figure 1: Programme External Examiner duties within the assessment life cycle

Section 3 of the Guidance: Duties of Subject External Examiners

- 1 A Subject External Examiner has responsibility for a set of units that may contribute to more than one programme, which could cover both Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught provision.
- 2 All significant assessed work that leads to the degree class is to be considered by the Subject External Examiner before it is completed by students. This includes all draft core assessment, including examination papers, and any other significant assessment at the discretion of the School or at the request of the Subject External Examiner.
- 3 The duties of Subject External Examiners are to (see **Figure 2**):
 - A. before their completion by students, review all assessment briefs for all elements of a unit that contribute to the degree class;
 - B. moderate the sample of marked examination scripts that has already been moderated internally in line with the Policy on Marking;
 - C. moderate the sample of assessed coursework, including any online assessed coursework, that has already been moderated internally in line with the Policy on Marking;
 - D. attend Moderation Boards that consider unit results and endorse, by signature, the agreed outcomes of the meeting;
 - E. submit an annual report(s) using the pro-forma that is relevant to their role (see paragraph **36**);
 - F. where appropriate, give viva voce examinations to one or more students;
 - G. where appropriate, provide evidence to demonstrate that the requirements and standards of professional bodies are being met, including in practice;
 - H. where appropriate, examine OSCEs (Objective Structured Clinical Examinations) in the Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences;
 - I. highlight and encourage good practice;
 - J. comment on the discipline's relationship to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and any relevant Subject Benchmarks;
 - K. advise the Examination Boards on dealing with difficult cases.

Subject Examiner's role in moderating draft assessed core work

- 4 All draft assessed core work that leads to the degree class is to be considered by the Subject External Examiner prior to it being completed by the students. This can normally be done via correspondence.
- 5 The draft question paper should normally be accompanied by outline answers except in disciplines for which more discursive answers are appropriate, alongside marking/grading criteria. In these latter cases, the Subject External Examiner should, on request, be given an indication of the expected length, style and content of the desired answer.
- 6 Subject External Examiners should satisfy themselves that the question paper:
 - A. is appropriate to the level of the unit;
 - B. is an appropriate means of testing whether students have achieved the intended learning outcomes of the unit;
 - C. covers the scope of the unit content appropriately;

D. is fair, i.e. that some students will not be at an advantage other than by virtue of their academic ability and commitment.

Subject Examiner's role in moderating marked assessments

- 7 Marked examination scripts will be subject to internal processing that may range from simple checking to blind double marking, as appropriate; Subject External Examiners will *not* be involved in marking except in the case of OSCEs. Samples of the range of scripts will be provided for the Subject External Examiner to moderate, either before or during their visit for the Moderation Board meeting. Subject External Examiners will wish to discuss with internal examiners the arrangements for moderating the internal marking to satisfy themselves that standards are appropriate and that students are being treated fairly. This discussion should take place at the earliest opportunity and both internal and Subject External Examiners should work together to monitor the effectiveness of the arrangements. The sample will normally mirror that which was marked internally, based on the University's [Policy on Marking](#).
- 8 The scripts must be accompanied by the comments of the internal examiners and the overall mark-sheet covering all students.
- 9 In the majority of cases the Subject External Examiner will be able to confirm the agreed internal marks for the whole group of students. Where moderation by the Subject External Examiner indicates concern over the marking of an individual script, then the whole unit should be internally remarked. **Subject External Examiners must not change individual marks.** The Subject External Examiner's role is primarily to benchmark overall marking standards. Any changes must be reported to the relevant board.
- 10 Where moderation of scripts, or an analysis of the distribution of the marks, indicates the need to review the marks for the whole group, the Subject Examiners have discretion on whether to:
 - A. request that all the scripts in the cohort be re-marked;
 - B. scale the marks for all students in relation to agreed benchmarks. Any recommendations for scaling must be approved by the Moderation Board.
- 11 The marks agreed by the Subject External Examiner after any moderation will not be altered by a Programme External Examiner or any of the Examination Boards.
- 12 Subject External Examiners have the right to see any items of coursework produced by a student by any method. However in practice they normally only see a sample of coursework. The process for sampling and moderating coursework is set out in paragraphs **7** to **11**. Subject External Examiners may also ask to vet draft substantial coursework tasks.
- 13 Where assessment is online, the programme team must ensure that the Subject External Examiner has access to the work, in order to make informed judgements on the marking and standards.

Subject Examiner's role in Classification Review

- 14 Subject External Examiners can also have a role in 'Classification Review' when deciding a student's final award or classification.
- 15 Classification review is used when students fall into the boundary zone of a classification and does not satisfy the additional criteria for increasing the class of the award. Schools can undergo a process of internal classification review for that student, which is overseen by the Subject External Examiner, who can make recommendations with regards to the final classification. The process of classification review cannot change individual unit marks.
- 16 In addition, Schools may decide to viva students where 'Classification Review' has proven to be inconclusive. This process must also be overseen by a Subject External Examiner whose role is to comment on its equity and transparency. The viva can only influence classification, not change individual unit marks, and the Subject External Examiner can make recommendations with regards to the final classification.

Subject External Examiner Duties within the Assessment Life Cycle

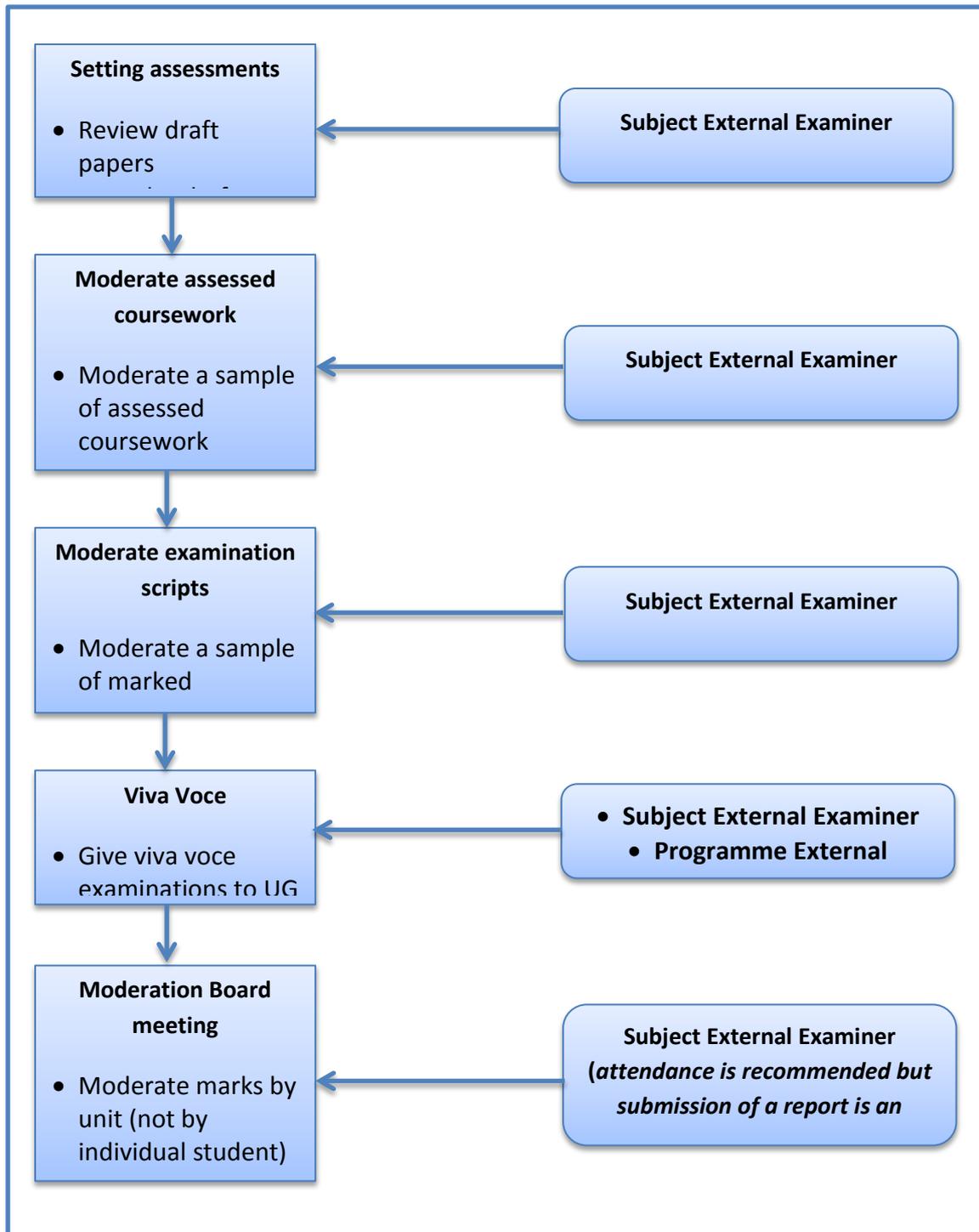


Figure 2: Subject External Examiner duties within the assessment life cycle

Resignation from and termination of engagement

- 1 External Examiners who wish to resign before the end of their normal period of engagement should write to the Head of Academic Policy in the TLSO, giving at least four months' notice to allow for a replacement to be identified. The TLSO will then inform the relevant School (if the External Examiner has not already informed them) and Faculty. If Schools are made aware of an External Examiner's intention to resign early from their period of office, they are asked to remind External Examiners of this procedure and advise them to inform the TLSO as soon as possible.
- 2 External Examiners must notify the School and the TLSO immediately of any changes in their circumstances that could lead to a conflict of interest that cannot be resolved satisfactorily and that may, therefore, require an engagement to be terminated. This is particularly important in cases where an External Examiner changes their home institution since this may result in more than one External Examiner in an area being based there, or to reciprocal External Examining arrangements between Manchester and the new home institution. Neither of these scenarios is permissible. Similarly, an External Examiner must resign from their External Examiner post if they take up other employment at The University of Manchester.
- 3 In exceptional circumstances, the School may recommend the early termination of an External Examiner's engagement. Such circumstances may include:
 - A. failure to attend specified Examination Boards without good cause. The University recognises that it must give sufficient advance warning of the dates of Examination Boards so that External Examiners are able to confirm their attendance and carry out their responsibilities;
 - B. failure to submit an annual report within three months of the Examination Board. The University values and requires full and informative reports which follow the guidelines provided;
 - C. failure to undertake the External Examiner duties to the satisfaction of the University by providing inadequate scrutiny of proposed assessment tools and/or assessment outcomes and/or an unacceptable delay in corresponding with Programme/Subject Teams on matters concerning examinations and assessment;
 - D. cessation of, or non-recruitment to, a programme;
 - E. changes to the level of a programme on re-validation that mean that the External Examiner no longer meets the criteria for engagement;
 - F. unprofessional conduct;
 - G. failure to disclose a relationship, contractual or otherwise, which may impair the integrity of the assessment process and the independence of the External Examiner.
- 4 Before a recommendation for the termination of an External Examiner's engagement is brought forward, strenuous attempts should be made by the School and programme team to work with the External Examiner to identify and address the underlying issues. Should this fail, the Associate Dean in the Faculty should write to the External Examiner and request that they resign. This request should be accompanied by a full account of the issues encountered and their impact on the student experience.

- 5 Should no response be received to the resignation request, or if the External Examiner does not agree to resign from their post, the Faculty should then make a formal request to the Head of Academic Policy in the TLSO to recommend that the engagement be terminated. This recommendation must be endorsed by the relevant Associate Dean and must include all the information that has been collected and considered relating to the underlying reasons and the impact on the student experience. The agreement of the Vice President (Teaching, Learning and Students) and the President to the termination will then be sought via the TLSO and, if it is received, the Vice President (Teaching, Learning and Students) will write formally to the External Examiner to terminate their engagement. Such recommendations will be given full and careful consideration and may be referred back to the School and Faculty at any stage.

The role of the *viva voce* examination

- 1 *Viva voce* examinations may be held for Undergraduate students only and only in circumstances of which students have been informed in advance, through their programme handbooks or other means. Programme Directors should ensure that such information is clearly documented. Internal and Programme/Subject External Examiners do not have discretion to ask a student to attend an oral examination outside such documented circumstances.

- 2 It is normal practice for an internal examiner to be present with the External Examiner(s) who conduct the *viva voce* examination. The result of the *viva* may influence the class of degree awarded.

The role of External Examiners at an Examination Board

- 1 External Examiners are full voting members of all Examination Boards. External Examiners may advise the Board on the general standard of student performance in relation to those elements of assessment that they have scrutinised. They should be made aware of the outcome of any previous meeting to consider mitigating circumstances. They should be satisfied that all decisions are appropriate and consistent, and that the management of the assessment and the decision-making process is appropriate and consistent.
- 2 Programme External Examiners should sign the list of results relating to the award of degrees and such results, once signed, will not normally be changed without the consent of the Programme External Examiners.
- 3 The Chair of the relevant Board should invite the External Examiners to comment generally on their view of the examining process once the detailed discussion of cases has been completed. This oral report must be recorded in the minutes of the Examination Board.
- 4 If there is disagreement among the External Examiners then the Chief Programme External Examiner shall seek to resolve the conflict by agreement. Where this cannot be achieved, the opinion of the Chief Programme External Examiner overrides that of other External Examiners.
- 5 On rare occasions, an External Examiner may not be prepared to endorse the outcome of the examination process or the decision of an Examination Board. If such occasions do occur, then every attempt should be made to resolve the conflict through discussion and negotiation. If such attempts are not successful, then the Chair of the Examination Board should contact the Vice President (Teaching, Learning and Students), who will review the circumstances and attempt to broker an agreement between the Chair of the Examination Board and the Chief External Examiner, who shall have powers to sign on behalf of all internal members of the Board and all External Examiners, respectively. Failing agreement, the Vice President shall have powers to determine the matter and sign the results.

The role of External Examiners in dealing with mitigating circumstances

- 1 Under the University's Policy on Mitigating Circumstances (<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=4271>), Mitigating Circumstances Panels consider requests for mitigation submitted by students and make a decision as to whether to accept the request and, if accepted, what recommended mitigation should be applied by the Examination Board. Mitigating Circumstances Panels operate on the delegated authority of Examination Boards and are constituted in accordance with a common Terms of Reference (<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=23163>). External Examiners, as members of Examination Boards, may contribute to the discussion/ratification of recommendations from Mitigating Circumstances Panels.
- 2 Either a Subject or Programme External Examiner may be asked to conduct a *viva* for a student claiming mitigating circumstances (in accordance with paragraphs **30** and **31**).