

External examining in HE: Rigour and inclusion

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Background/reflections

Rigour

- Expectations
- Processes
- Experiences
- Fees

Inclusion

- Appointment processes
- Diversity of examiners



What is an external examiner's role? (QAA indicators 1-3)

- Provide informative comment and recommendations on whether...
 - Academic standards are maintained, including meeting applicable subject benchmark statements;
 - Assessments are rigorous, fair and assess the programme outcomes;
 - Standards are comparable with other institutions.
- Share good practice and recommendations for innovation and learning enhancement.

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To what extent do you think externals do the following for your department?



Never		Always
	Check for alignment between learning outcomes and QAA subject benchmarks.	
	Check assessments across modules are of comparable standard.	
	Ensure the curriculum remains current.	
	Check appropriateness and consistency of marking schemes/criteria.	
	Provide critical feedback and suggestions for improvement.	



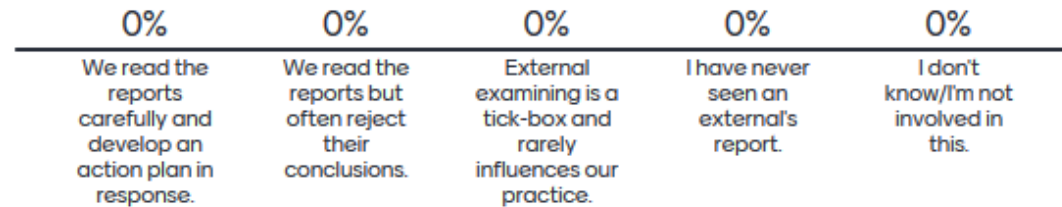
What should happen to the reports? (QAA indicators 14-16)

- Reports should be available in full to students.
- The department and institution should 'give full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations'.
- Student reps should be involved in the process.

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How seriously does your department take feedback from externals?

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Training and expectations for externals

- Dearing report (1997) recommended formal training, ‘including a trainee/apprentice model for new external examiners’.
- But [research commissioned](#) by the QAA and HEA (now Advance HE) of experienced externals found:
 - ‘Few clear patterns emerged’ (p. 5);
 - ‘Where similar constructs were shared, they were interpreted differently, appearing to result in manifestly different standards’ (pp. 5-6);
 - ‘Analysis of [the overall marks externals assigned to student pieces] revealed little inter-examiner agreement’ (p. 6);
 - ‘A number of often contrasting standpoints with regard to what external examining entails and what standards should be used in examining processes’ (p. 6)



How are external examiners appointed?

The HEA's own [External Examiners' Handbook](#) acknowledges:

“

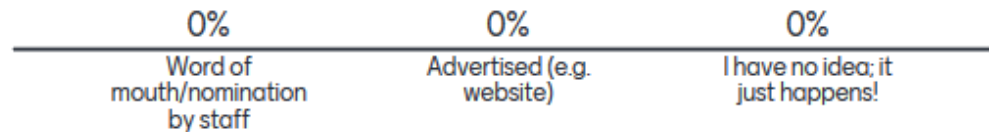
Institutions rarely advertise in the press for external examiners and the knowledge of availability of posts may still rely heavily on **word of mouth** and **networks** within a discipline area...[T]he most effective way of becoming an external examiner is through **networking** with discipline colleagues at **conferences** and **meetings** or through links developed in research and teaching.

”

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How does your institution appoint external examiners?

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What proportion of your externals are...

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Sources/guidance

- QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B7: External Examining
https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/chapter-b7_-external-examining.pdf?sfvrsn=2101f781_8
- Advance HE Fundamentals of External Examining
<https://documents.advance-he.ac.uk/download/file/8651>
- Advance HE Guide to the Process of Academic External Examining
<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/guide-process-academic-external-examining>
- HEA Handbook for External Examining
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/downloads/HE_Academy_External_Examiners_Handbook_2012.pdf