



# HANDBOOK FOR EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

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## INTRODUCTION

### Welcome

Thank you for agreeing to be an External Examiner at Queen Margaret University. We hope that you will find the experience rewarding, and look forward to your input.

As you will be aware, the External Examining system has long been the cornerstone of UK quality assurance arrangements. Within this context, the External Examining system has three main purposes, i.e. to:

- assist Queen Margaret University in the comparison of academic standards across awards and award elements;
- verify that standards are appropriate for the award for which the Examiner takes responsibility;
- help ensure that the assessment process is fair and fairly operated in the marking, grading and classification of student performance.

The External Examining system also fulfils the following important functions:

- it supports the enhancement of taught programmes through identification of good practice and innovation;
- it contributes to the information on quality of taught programmes that is publicly available, for example through summary reports on our Quality website.

Each programme that leads to an award of the University has one or more External Examiners who provide informed and appropriate external reference points for the comparison of academic standards as well as objective and impartial judgements on a range of matters.

This Handbook has been developed to provide you with up-to-date information about Queen Margaret University, its assessment practices, and the expectations it has of its

# **1 INFORMATION ABOUT QMU**

## **1.1 Background**

Queen Margaret University (QMU) was established in 1875, and now occupies a distinctive position within the Scottish Higher Education sector. This distinctiveness comes from its key values of enhancement of quality of life and service to the community.

QMU strives to widen access, both at home and abroad, while at the same time providing a supportive learning environment for all its students. Its graduates are much sought after and employment rates in recent years have been amongst the

We value **excellence**: This is embedded in our research, teaching and learning, knowledge exchange and the services we provide. It will be exemplified in the experience of our students, staff and partners.

We value **social justice**: In fact, it underpins our world view. We embrace equality, diversity, inclusion, respect, and supporting our communities. Opportunities and access are open to all and on a fair basis.

### 1.3

## **2 YOUR APPOINTMENT AS AN EXAMINER**

### **2.1 Criteria for appointment**

You have been appointed to an External Examining position having been nominated for approval by the appropriate Programme Committee and approved by the Senate of Queen Margaret University. In coming to a view, the Senate has taken account of the extent to which you:

- have appropriate levels of expertise and experience in relation to the programme to be examined;
- are capable of performing the range of duties required of the role;
- have the capacity to command authority in the field and the respect of colleagues;
- have sufficient recent examining experience, preferably having already acted

## 2.3 Resignation

## **2.6 Overseas travel**

Note that if you are required to travel overseas for an exam board, QMU will normally be responsible for travel arrangements and will cover all expenses. You will be covered by QMU travel insurance. Please notify us if you have any pre-existing medical conditions that might affect your insurance position. We will then be able to check with the insurer how to proceed.

## **2.7 Termination of your contract**

The University reserves the right to terminate the contract of any External Examiner if, in the opinion of the Senate, there has been:

a breach of confidentiality on the part of the Examiner, or  
the performance of the Examiner, in the context of this Handbook, is judged to be inadequate.



### **3 THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S ROLE**

#### **3.1 Your duties**

As an External Exa

there is no formal obligation for you to participate in this type of review, the University welcomes and encourages the involvement of key stakeholders.

### **3.2 Preparing you for your role**

We recognise that, in order to assist you to perform your role effectively, you need to be thoroughly briefed to ensure that you are aware of:

- the expectations of Queen Margaret University regarding your role;
- the regulations governing the programme being examined, including marking practices (e.g. double marking, double marking by sample); arrangements for the sampling of scripts and other assessable work contributing to the final award, including student presentations;
- the assessment structures, assignments and examination papers in relation to agreed learning objectives/outcomes;
- the grading criteria and marking schemes (where applicable);
- arrangements for the access to any work contributing to the final award so as to have evidence that the internal marking has been carried out according to the marking schemes and the classifications are of an appropriate standard;
- principles governing the selection of candidates for viva voce examinations;
- the extent of your authority and role, particularly in relation to the Board of Examiners.

As part of your initial briefing pack, you will be given instructions on where to find all the forms and paperwork you will need in relation to the External Examining role, report, fees and expenses claims. If you have been appointed as an External Examiner with responsibility for multiple iterations of the same programme, for example where this is delivered both in Edinburgh and overseas,

including your prior experience of External Examining and professional background, especially if this is from outside the Higher Education sector.

Once you are established in post, you may expect





and preferably within three weeks of the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners. For programmes with a standard calendar this allows the team to consider the report and take action before the start of the next academic year.

## 4 ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Our [Assessment Regulations](#) are available in full from the Quality website

programmes follow the Assessment Regulations in their entirety. However, programme specific regulations also apply for some of our programmes. Often, but not exclusively, this is the case where there is a placement component. Sometimes regulations are informed by Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body requirements.

You will receive, under separate cover, information on the regulations governing the assessment for the programme you are examining. However, the following **extract** outlines the key elements and underlying principles governing assessment at QMU. There is no expectation that Examiners are familiar with the detail of the full regulations provided separately from this Handbook. However, it would be important that you familiarise yourself with the following key extracts.

### General Provisions

- 4.1 The authority for approving programmes and granting awards rests with the Senate.
- 4.2 An award is conferred upon satisfaction of the following conditions:
  - the candidate was a registered student of the University at the time of his or her assessment and has fulfilled all financial obligations to the University;
  - the candidate has completed a programme approved by the University as leading to the award being recommended, and
  - the award has been recommended by a Board of Examiners convened, constituted and acting under regulations approved by the Senate.
- 4.3 Assessment is a matter of judgement, not simply of computation. Marks, grades and percentages should not be treated as absolute values but as symbols to be used by examiners to communicate their judgement of different aspects of a student's work, in order to provide information on which the final decision on a student's fulfilment of programme objectives may be based.
- 4.4 A student's circumstances may influence the procedures for assessment and the consequences of assessment but not the standard of performance expected in a module assessment, or at the end of a programme.
- 4.5 If a student cannot be assessed by the prescribed method for the module, reasonable adjustments will be detailed within an Individual Learning plan. Variations may include the following:
  - a) an extension of the normal registration period for completing an award;
  - b) extra time being allowed for examinations or assessments;

- c) alternative or modified assessments;
  - d) use of scribes in assessments;
  - e) use of viva voce assessment;
  - f) use of appropriate aids (such as word processor, Braille, tape-recorder, large print scripts etc.).
- 4.6 Except where a programme is specifically exempt, all students in undergraduate levels one and two whose first language is not English are eligible for 25% extra-time in examinations.
- 4.7 To pass an undergraduate module, a student must obtain at least 40% overall, and at least 30% in each component of assessment as specified in the module descriptor. To pass a postgraduate module, a student must obtain at least 50% overall, and at least 40% in each component of assessment as specified in the module descriptor. This regulation applies to the first attempt at the module only. Regulations for reassessment and repeat of modules are detailed below.
- 4.8



- c) Continue but required to be reassessed in the failed/deferred module(s) in next academic year
- d) Continue but required to repeat the failed module(s) in next academic year
- e) Offered opportunity to repeat the entire level in next academic year before continuing
- f) Offered opportunity to repeat failed module(s) in next academic year as a part-time student before continuing
- g) Continue in part time registration (applies to part-time students only)
- h) No re-assessment allowed required to withdraw from course
- i) Decision deferred outstanding assessments as a first diet
- j) Decision deferred outstanding re-assessments
- k) Recommendation to the

student must achieve at least 40% in each reassessed component and a weighted average of at least 50%.

- 4.19 A student who has been absent from an assessment, or who has performed badly due to illness or other cause, shall be allowed to take the assessment, and it shall be treated as a first assessment, subject to the reason for absence or poor performance being acceptable to the Board of Examiners or the Extenuating Circumstances Panel.

## **5 MARKS, GRADES AND LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE**

5.1 Assessment is primarily a matter of academic judgement, and the computational structure is designed to facilitate consistent judgements.

5.2 I performance on an

In most cases, the mark is set at the midpoint of the band. However, it is proposed that the mark at Grade A\* should be limited to 85 to reflect the comparatively few marks likely to be awarded over 90%.

5.9

## 6 AWARD

- 6.1 To gain an undergraduate award, a student must normally be a registered student at the University for at least one academic year. Minimum registration periods for postgraduate awards are set out in regulations.

To qualify for the following awards the student must fulfil the subject specific requirements for the name of the award and:

Cert HE	120 credit points of which a minimum of 100 are at SCQF level 7 or higher
Dip HE	240 credit points of which a minimum of 100 are at SCQF level 8 or higher
Degree	360 credit points of which a minimum of 100 are at SCQF level 9 or higher
Honours degree	480 credit points of which a minimum of 220 are at SCQF level 9 and 10, including at least 100 at level 10
Graduate Certificate	60 credit points, at minimum of SCQF level 9
Graduate Diploma	120 credit points, at minimum of SCQF level 9

Second Class: Upper division  
Second Class: Lower division  
Third Class

- 6.3 The award of an Ordinary Degree can include an award with distinction, in cases where the average mark for the 120 credits (or equivalent) at SCQF level 9 or above is 65% or higher. Any modules undertaken below SCQF level 9 and any modules taken whilst on an exchange arrangement will not be counted towards the distinction calculation.
- 6.4 The award of taught Masters Degrees and Postgraduate Diplomas may include an award with distinction or merit. The award of Postgraduate Certificate is without distinction or merit. A distinction is granted automatically if the weighted average mark (each module being weighted in relation to its size) -

- 6.12 Additional viva voce examinations involving the External Examiner should not be used in the consideration of borderline cases.

### **Postgraduate degrees**

- 6.13 All weighted average marks falling 0.5 per cent or less below the distinction boundary are automatically reclassified at the higher level.
- 6.14 All weighted average marks falling between 0.6 per cent and two percent below the distinction/merit boundary are deemed borderline cases. In these cases the award of distinction/merit is determined by consideration of marks across all SCQF level 11 credits contributing to the Programme.

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## **7 QMU BOARDS OF EXAMINERS**

### **Operation and powers**

#### **7.1 The Senate**



- 7.10 The focus of the Board of Examiners will be on the students (as individuals and as a cohort), the module and the programme. In making decisions on assessment and progression, the Board of Examiners will take account of:

the performance of each individual student on a module by module basis leading to recommendations as laid down in the definitive document concerning progression, re-assessment, repeat, withdrawal or final award; the grades achieved in the current academic year in comparison with previous years;

the distribution of grades and outcomes in similar programmes in other departments and other institutions;

reports from staff on any special circumstances affecting student performance;

whether every marginal or fail case has been given full consideration for every possible alternative programme of action open to the Board according to the programme and/or University regulations;

any scaling that has been applied to the marks or grades for an individual, or a module, either by the examiner or the Board of Examiners;

any deviation from the programme regulations and/or the University general assessment regulations by the Board of Examiners, leading to a change in progression status or final classification; all deviations from the University's general assessment regulations should be referred to the Student Experience Committee for decision;

any comments the Board may wish specifically to make to any of the following: Programme Committee; School Academic Board; Student Experience Committee; or the Senate.

- 7.11 Decisions on extenuating circumstances for individual students should be approved in advance of the Board of Examiners in line with University guidelines. Details of individual cases should not be discussed at the meeting of the Board of Examiners.

- 7.12 All cases of suspected academic misconduct (including plagiarism) should be investigated by the Programme Leader and the Dean of School in line with the

Investigations should be made in advance of the Board of Examiners and certainly no later than seven days following the meeting of the Board of Examiners. Where the allegation has been upheld, a summary of action taken should be recorded in the Board of Examiners minutes and on the electronic student record for future reference.

### **Composition**

- 7.13 The typical composition of a main Board of Examiners concerned with student progression and awards is as follows:

**Convener:** Dean or Head of the Division in which the programme is based (unless the Head of Division is also programme/subject leader, wherein alternative arrangements are made).

**Internal Examiners:** Members of staff with assigned responsibility for the assessment of those components of the programme on which the Board of Examiners is taking decisions.

**Programme/Subject Leader**

**Year/Level Tutors**

**External Examiner(s) [see paragraph 7.14 below]**

**Co-optee(s):** at the discretion of the Convener of the Board of Examiners

**Secretary:** Appointed by the University Secretary

- 7.14 External Examiners must attend Boards of Examiners concerned with decisions on progression and awards. External Examiners may be invited to attend subsidiary/module Boards of Examiners.
- 7.15 For those Boards of Examiners that External Examiners are required to attend, the agreement of all External Examiners is required to ratify the decision of the Board. In the case of award recommendations made by Convener's action, the criteria for the proposed award(s) are determined at the appropriate Board of Examiners. If such criteria have not been determined in advance, Convener's Action in respect of awards must have the written agreement of External Examiners.
- 7.16 All student work must normally be moderated by the relevant External Examiner(s) prior to the meeting of the Board of Examiners. This applies to both subsidiary and main Boards of Examiners.
- 7.17 The membership of the re-assessment meeting of the Board of Examiners will include the Convener, all Internal Examiners responsible for the assessment of the modules involved in the re-assessments, and at least one External Examiner.
- 7.18 Where an External Examiner is unable to attend a main Board of Examiners due to unforeseen circumstances, and where no other External Examiner is present at the meeting, written confirmation of their agreement with the marks and the progression/award recommendations must be sought. Written confirmation of decisions will

## 8 KEY CONTACTS

## APPENDIX ONE

The full academic structure of the University is set out below.

School	Principal Officers	Divisions / Subject Groups
<b>Arts Social Sciences and Management</b>	Dean: Professor David Stevenson  School Manager: Sheena Watson	Business, Enterprise and Management Media, Communication and Performing Arts Psychology and Sociology
<b>Health Sciences</b>	Dean: Professor Fiona Coutts  School Manager: Jenny Ansett	Dietetics, Nutrition, Biological Sciences, Physiotherapy, Podiatry and Radiography Nursing and Paramedic Science Occupational Therapy 3.38 130.22



## EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT 2020-21

Examiner's name	
Programme	

### SUMMARY

Please provide an overview of positive practice and recommendations in the space

ching team. Teams are expected to share reports with students. As a minimum, we will make this summary available on our Virtual Learning Environment, but more usually we will share your full report with all students on the programme.

#### Recommendations to be addressed urgently

#### Other recommendations

**Positive practice** Please highlight up to three features of positive practice that you would like to share with the Programme Team and wider University community. Such examples might include good practice in teaching, programme content, assessment or feedback that has been implemented in response to COVID-19.

## 1 CURRICULUM

*Please answer the following questions by ticking the appropriate answer. Any*

## 2 ASSESSMENT

Please answer the following questions by ticking the appropriate answer. Any comments may be made below.

		<b>Please tick:</b>		
		<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>
a)	Did you receive adequate information relating to QMU regulations and assessment procedures?			
b)	Are the assessment processes and schemes for classification and progression clear?			
c)	Did you receive all the draft exam questions and other assessment instruments with sufficient time to review?			
d)	If not, was this agreed with you previously?			
e)	Was due consideration given to your feedback on draft exam questions and other assessment arrangements?			
f)				



observe and moderate practical performances?

- p) Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board of Examiners to Senate?
- q) Were you satisfied with the administration of the assessment process?
- r) Did you attend the meeting(s) of the Board of Examiners?  
(if no, please disregard questions s and t below)
- s) Were you satisfied with the extent to which you were able to


### 3 STUDENT PERFORMANCE

*Please answer the following questions by ticking the appropriate answer. Any comments may be made below.*

***Please tick: YES NO***



**6 OVERVIEW OF PERIOD OF TENURE (to be completed only by Examiners submitting their final report to QMU)**

*Please provide an overview of your period of tenure as Examiner for QMU. You are asked to comment on your overall experience of the role, including development of the curriculum, changes to assessment and feedback practice and student performance since you took up post. Please also include any points that you would like to highlight to your successor or suggestions that might assist the University in developing its procedures for External Examining.*

**EXTERNAL EXAMINER CONTACT DETAILS**

*Please confirm your contact details – you are asked to provide a business (rather than home) address where possible*

**Name:**

**Address:**

**Telephone:**

**Email:**

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**Signature .....** **Date.....**

*(if you have an electronic signature, please include it)*

**UNDERGRADUATE GENERAL MARKING CRITERIA BY GRADE AND LEVEL**

**Approved by the University Senate on 30 June 2021**

**Applicable to all new and existing modules being delivered from September 2021 onwards**

**Grade A\* 80% and above Outstanding performance, exceptionally able – pass**

Articulates an outstanding understanding and interpretation of the relevant information, key theories and concepts presented by the assessment  
Demonstrates outstanding knowledge of appropriate reading through extensive references to appropriate scholarly sources  
Shows outstanding problem solving, creativity, originality, critical thinking, analysis and evaluation  
Presents outstanding discussion in a logical, connected and progressing structure, and valid conclusions  
Displays an outstanding ability to appraise evidence and synthesise concepts, knowledge and theory  
Shows an outstanding reflexive awareness of value judgements and assumptions embedded in the subject or discipline

**Grade A 70-79.9% Excellent performance – pass**

Articulates an excellent understanding and interpretation of the relevant information, key theories and concepts presented by the assessment  
Demonstrates an excellent knowledge of appropriate reading through frequent references to appropriate scholarly sources  
Shows excellent problem solving, creativity, originality, critical thinking, analysis and evaluation  
Presents excellent discussion in a logical, connected and progressing structure, and valid conclusions  
Displays an excellent ability to appraise evidence and synthesise concepts, knowledge and theory  
Shows excellent reflexive awareness of value judgements and assumptions embedded in the subject or discipline

**Grade B 60-69.9% Very good performance – pass**

Articulates a very good understanding and interpretation of the relevant information, key theories and concepts presented by the assessment  
Demonstrates a very good knowledge of appropriate reading through references to appropriate scholarly sources  
Shows very good problem solving, creativity, originality, critical thinking, analysis and evaluation  
Presents very good discussion in a logical, connected and progressing structure, and valid conclusions  
Displays a very good ability to appraise evidence and synthesise concepts, knowledge and theory  
Shows very good reflexive awareness of value judgements and assumptions embedded in the subject or discipline

**Grade C 50-59.9% Good performance – pass**

Articulates a good understanding and interpretation of the relevant information, key theories and concepts presented by the assessment  
Demonstrates good knowledge of appropriate reading through some references to appropriate scholarly sources  
Shows good problem solving, creativity, originality, critical thinking, analysis and evaluation  
Presents a good discussion in a logical, connected and progressing structure, and valid conclusions  
Displays a good ability to appraise evidence and synthesise concepts, knowledge and theory  
Shows a good reflexive awareness of value judgements and assumptions embedded in the subject or discipline

**Grade D 40-49.9% Satisfactory Performance – pass**

Articulates a satisfactory understanding and interpretation of the relevant information, key theories and concepts presented by the assessment  
Demonstrates satisfactory knowledge of appropriate reading through some references to appropriate scholarly sources  
Shows satisfactory problem solving, creativity, originality, critical thinking, analysis and evaluation  
Presents a satisfactory discussion in a logical, connected and progressing structure, and valid conclusions  
Displays a satisfactory ability to appraise evidence and synthesise concepts, knowledge and theory  
Shows satisfactory reflexive awareness of value judgements and assumptions embedded in the subject or discipline

**Grade E 30-39.9% Unsatisfactory performance – fail**

Articulates partial understanding and interpretation of the relevant information, key theories and concepts presented by the assessment  
Demonstrates partial knowledge of appropriate reading through limited references to appropriate scholarly sources  
Shows insufficient problem solving, creativity, originality, critical thinking, analysis and evaluation  
Presents limited discussion of logical, connected and progressing structure with incomplete conclusions  
Displays a limited ability to appraise evidence and synthesise concepts, knowledge and theory  
Shows insufficient reflexive awareness of value judgements and assumptions embedded in the subject or discipline

**Grade F 0-29.9% Unsatisfactory performance - fail**

Articulates little or no understanding and interpretation of the relevant information, key theories and concepts presented by the assessment  
Demonstrates little or no knowledge of appropriate reading or references to appropriate scholarly sources  
Shows ineffective or no problem solving, creativity, originality, critical thinking, analysis and evaluation









**Grade D 40-49.9% Unsatisfactory performance – fail**

Partial knowledge, understanding and interpretation of the relevant information, principal theories, concepts and current discipline developments

Partial understanding of the breadth and depth of the discipline

Limited ability to critically appraise scholarship and evidence, and synthesise concepts, knowledge and theory

Insufficient application of specialist and/or professional skills, techniques or practices aligned with the discipline

Demonstrates insufficient ability to communicate knowledge (written, verbal, practical, visual)

Demonstrates a limited critical awareness of the scope and application of disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship

Shows insufficient reflexive awareness of value judgements and assumptions

**FEES AND EXPENSES**

**1. Scale of fees**

For information on the current fee structure, please contact the [Division of G](#)

