

External Examining Principles: Reflective Questions

QAA has developed a set of [External Examining Principles](#) and supporting advice with, and for, the higher education sector. The intention is to protect the value of UK degrees. The principles are not regulatory but are part of the UK higher education sector's own quality activity. Further background, along with the principles themselves, is set out on the [QAA website](#).

This set of reflective questions is intended to support examiners and institutions by providing a tool for them to use in evaluating their roles and approaches. The first set of principles are directed to external examiners themselves and the second set are directed to institutions. We encourage both audiences to consider the principles as a whole.

To be effective, external examiners should:

- 1 ...protect standards and ensure comparability and consistency**
 - i Are you comparing the performance of students against local and national reference points? These include the institution's marking criteria, as well as national threshold standards in *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies*, the classification descriptors in Annex D, and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.
 - ii Have you been provided with a suitable representative sample of assessed work?
 - iii Is there anything more that you would like from the institution to carry out the role of assessing standards?
 - iv Are your reports in line with the template provided, and do they provide the institution with sufficient information to allow them to make a judgement about the standards they are applying in practice?
- 2 ...act as an expert in providing independent critical review, performing the role with integrity and supporting enhancement**
 - i How are you considering the information provided by the institution in order to reach an independent view on their application of standards?
 - ii Are you aware of the institution's policies on conflict of interest for external examiners?
 - iii How are you identifying good practice that you can feed back to the course team to enhance student learning opportunities? And what opportunities do you take to provide that feedback?

3 ...ensure fairness and transparency in assessment

- i Are the types of assessment appropriate for the subject, the students, the respective level of study and the expected learning outcomes?
- ii Are marking schemes/grading criteria being properly and consistently applied?
- iii Are assessment processes being carried out in accordance with the institution's regulations and procedures?

4 ...maintain the currency of their knowledge

- i How are you staying up-to-date with developments in pedagogy and assessment as they relate to your subject?

5 ...support inclusivity and equity in teaching, learning and assessment

- i Have you engaged with course teams about course content, reading lists, study environments (including placements) and materials to support the development of inclusive curricula?

To promote an effective external examining system, institutions should:

6 ...appoint the right examiners, ensuring that conflicts of interest are avoided

- i Are your appointment criteria and processes accessible and understandable?
- ii Once appointed, are you clear about the role and responsibilities each external examiner is being asked to fulfil?
- iii Do you set out the situations where a conflict of interest might occur?

7 ...provide adequate training to enable external examiners to fulfil the role

- i What training and support do you offer to your external examiners?
- ii Do your induction activities cover areas such as regulations, assessment strategies and marking criteria?
- iii Do you have any additional support for first-time, industry-based or professional externals, such as mentoring arrangements?

8 ...ensure the role is fully understood

- i What information do you publish for other stakeholders on the role that externals play in your quality processes?
- ii Do you clearly state terms of appointment, and any potential flexibility of those terms?
- iii What ongoing briefings do you carry out with your externals beyond induction?

9 ...enable students to understand the value and purpose of external examining

- i How are you explaining the role of external examiners to your students?
- ii How can students access external examiner reports?
- iii Do you allow students to meet with external examiners? In what forums? And to what purpose?

10 ...engage with and support the external examiners they appoint

- i How do you consider external examiner feedback at module, course or institutional levels?
- ii Do you analyse reports collectively and look for trends across subject areas and/or over years?
- iii How do you decide on the appropriate levels of remuneration for the external examiners you appoint?

11 ...engage with and support their own staff acting in the role elsewhere

- i What recognition is there for your staff acting as external examiners at other institutions?
- ii How do you engage with your staff performing the role elsewhere to identify emerging good practice and cross-sector challenges?

12 ...review their policies and practices against these principles on a regular basis

- i What will be the most effective way of reviewing your current activities against these principles and when do you plan to carry that out?

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