

An overview of external examining arrangements at Leeds Trinity

What is external examining in UK higher education?

Universities are autonomous institutions that are responsible for the quality of the education that they provide and therefore design and assess their own awards. Academic standards at universities are monitored and safeguarded by an independent agency (the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)) using a code of practice (the UK Quality Code for Higher Education) and a system of institutional reviews*.

External examining plays an important role in assisting universities to assure the quality and standards of their awards, helps them to ensure that students are treated equitably and fairly and has a chapter dedicated to it in the Quality Code.

Most external examiners work at other UK universities and this enables internal and external examiners to compare courses across the sector and make sure that the degrees awarded meet UK threshold standards and are comparable. Some external examiners may be practitioners working in specialist areas of industry and this adds an additional perspective to the examining team.

*Information about the QAA is available from its website at www.qaa.ac.uk.

What does an external examiner do?

Leeds Trinity University employs two types of external examiner – subject external examiners and a procedural external examiner.

Subject external examiners are discipline specialists who are appointed to provide informative comment and recommendations on programmes, and their constituent parts, and on student achievement against intended programme learning outcomes. Every programme of study has an external examiner to consider programme-level outcomes and there may be additional external examiners appointed to look at specific areas or modules.

Subject external examiners:

- Look at samples of students' work to ensure that the assessment is set at the appropriate academic level and that internal examiners apply the marking criteria consistently and fairly. They do not examine every piece of student work and cannot change individual marks.
- May meet with students to discuss their experiences and progress to help them reach judgements on assessment processes.
- Provide feedback on the design and content of assessments.
- Are consulted on changes to the design of modules and programmes.
- Attend meetings of the Panel of Examiners, which agrees final module marks to be submitted to the University Board of Examiners.

- Produce a formal annual report for the University on their findings.

The procedural external examiner – oversees the operation of the University Board of Examiners, which makes decisions on whether students can progress to the next level of study and determines final awards. The procedural examiner is someone who is highly experienced in managing assessment processes in higher education, who is familiar with the national quality assurance framework set by the QAA and who has experience of applying regulations. S/he does not look at student work or offer advice on the content of the work as this has already been agreed at subject-level. The procedural examiner attends meetings of the University Board of Examiners and produces a formal annual report for the University on the integrity and fairness of how degrees are awarded.

What happens to external examiners' reports?

External examiners produce a formal written report every year on a template that is agreed by the University's External Examining Group of the Learning and Teaching Committee. The reports play an important role in our quality assurance and enhancement processes and are used to routinely monitor the quality of the programmes that they relate to and to contribute to more comprehensive reviews of the subject area.

The reports are submitted to the Academic Quality and Standards Office, which distributes them to staff in the relevant academic school and to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Academic Registrar, amongst others.

At school-level the reports are shared with the Student-Staff Academic Committee providing an opportunity for student representatives to help the programme team decide how to address any issues raised. The report is also considered by the School Board, which also contains student representatives, as part of its annual review of programmes.

At institutional-level all external examiners' reports are considered by the University's External Examining Group, which reports its findings to the Learning and Teaching Committee. The Academic Registrar scrutinises all the reports and produces an overview report, which identifies common themes and any issues of institutional significance for action. Once approved by the Learning and Teaching Committee the overview report is submitted to the Academic Board. The overview report is sent to all external examiners to provide them with further insight into the University and so that they can see what has happened at institutional-level as a result of their report.

External examiners reports are also accessible from the University's intranet and through the Programme Information and Handbooks section of the Moodle VLE.

Further information

Full details of Leeds Trinity's external examining arrangements can be found in the External Examiners' Handbook, available at: <http://www.leedstrinity.ac.uk/external-examiners>

If you would like further information please contact the Academic Quality and Standards Office at ex-ex-admin@leedstrinity.ac.uk.

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