

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' GUIDANCE 2025/26



Contents

Introduction	3
Section 1: The Role and Responsibilities of the External Examiner	4
Rights of the External Examiner	5
Section 2: Appointment and Induction	7
Section 3: Examination Boards and External Examiner Reports	8
External Examiners for Collaborative Provision	9
How External Examiner Reports are used	10
Section 4: Fees and Expenses	10
Section 5: Termination of Contract	11
Section 6: A typical year and Useful Information	12

To support the University in upholding quality and standards, the External Examiner system is fundamental to the University's key aim of providing an outstanding student experience. It provides essential insight into existing practices from a unique and impartial perspective, and helps the University to ensure that awards delivered in its name meet threshold academic standards.

This guidance aims to ensure that policies, processes and practices are transparent to all involved in the process, including External Examiners, academic and professional services staff at the University and collaborative partner institutions. It aims to summarise the way the University interprets and implements the [QAA Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: External Expertise \(Nov 2018\)](#).

The purpose of this Handbook is to:

1. Outline the roles and responsibilities of External Examiners (see Section 1)
2. Detail the appointment and induction arrangements for External Examiners (see Section 2)
3. Outline the expectations for Examination Boards, requirements for External Examiner reports, how External Examiner reports are used throughout the University and how feedback is provided to External Examiners (see Section 3)
4. Outline the administrative procedures for the submission and payment of External Examiner fees and expenses (see Section 4)
5. Termination of Contract (see Section 5)
6. Links to useful information (see Section 7)

For any queries concerning details in this handbook, please contact Academic Services via email: quality@rau.ac.uk .

Director of Academic Services

August 2025

Section 1: The Role and Responsibilities of the External Examiner

1. External Examiners play an important role within the quality assurance mechanisms by assuring comparability of academic standards within the University and across the higher education sector. They ensure programmes are fairly assessed and the quality of learning, teaching and assessment meet sector wide expectations.
2. External Examiners are expected to be familiar with the Royal Agricultural [University Quality Code of Practice: External Examiners for Taught Programmes](#) which summarises the requirements of conduct of external examining of taught programmes and the [RAU Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes](#). These documents can be found on the University's [website](#).
3. The role of the External Examiner comprises of the following expectations:
 - External Examiners should check and assure themselves that programmes and modules satisfy the [QAA Quality Code](#) and that outcomes are aligned with the relevant [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#) level descriptor and with reference to the [QAA Subject Benchmark Statements](#), where applicable.
 - External Examiners should quality assure the decisions in relation to University policy and procedures, ensuring that the types of assessment are appropriate for the level of study, subject, meet the expected learning outcomes, and suggest appropriate amendments where necessary.
 - Act "critical friends": External Examiners should provide challenge via recommendations for key areas of development of academic programmes/modules and support, whilst also providing support and sharing best practice, in order to support continual development."
 - Review and approve draft examination papers that contribute to a final award and ensure that assessment criteria, marking schemes and arrangements for classifications are set at an appropriate level.
 - Review assessment briefs and confirm the assessment(s) meet the expectations in line with level of study and intended learning outcomes.
 - Programme / subject teams agree with External Examiners a schedule of external scrutiny of assessment items and assessment criteria (including marking schemes/grids or model answers or similar).
 - In addition, External Examiners should expect to be consulted on proposed changes to provision (including content, structure, changes to learning outcomes and assessments), or any other advice and guidance deemed necessary through the period of appointment.

- Inform the University of any matter which, in their view, affects the maintenance of academic standards, assessments or student performance.
- Raise, where appropriate, any issues or concerns in relation to collaborative arrangements or Professional, Regulatory or Statutory Body (PSRB) accreditation and/or requirements.
- Attend Module boards at the end of semester 1 and semester 2, and the Progression and Award Board meetings in June (UG) and October (PG) (as appropriate) at which results of assessments are agreed. External Examiners are expected to comment on the standard of programme delivery at the University.

Please note: the University currently carries out examination boards online. Where no form of attendance is possible, External Examiners will, exceptionally and as a minimum for an individual year, provide written comments to the Chair of the Progression and Award Board and Examinations Office, outlining the satisfaction with marks in advance of the Board.

- Satisfy themselves that the work and decisions of the Module Board, Progression and Award Board of which they are a member are consistent with best practice in Higher Education.
- Ensure that academic standards and the achievement of students are comparable with those in other UK Higher Education institutions of which External Examiners have experience.
- Report annually to the University on the standards attained by students on the programme, through the External Examiner Report.
- Handle all assessment and any other personal data in accordance with Data Protection Regulation 2018, the University's Information Handling Policy and Information Security Policy, accessible from at:
https://intranet.rau.ac.uk/DepartmentsSchools/IT_Services/Pages/Policies.asp
[X](#)

Rights of the External Examiner

4. External Examiners have the authority and responsibility to report directly to the Vice Chancellor of the University any case that s/he believes there to be serious concerns about an award; if assessments are conducted in a way that jeopardises either the fair treatment of individual students or the standards of the University's awards; or any other issue of confidential nature, may also be referred in writing to the Vice Chancellor.
5. The University aims to address and resolve any issues notified in a speedy manner. Upon receipt of a report raising serious concerns, an investigation is carried out by the Director of Academic Services, and a written response provided to the External

Examiner within ten working days.

6. In the event of an External Examiner expressing serious concerns about systemic failings, following submission of a report to the Vice Chancellor, and having received a response, External Examiners may consider invoking the QAA's [Concerns Scheme](#).
7. In addition, External Examiners are able to
 - Request a sample of all draft assessment items (including examination papers and coursework assessments) before they are given to students in consultation with the appropriate internal marker(s)
 - Inspect any material relating to the course including course handbooks, examination papers, scripts, coursework and project reports
 - Meet students
 - Discuss curriculum developments with academic staff
 - Withhold their endorsement for the recommendation of an award.
8. Personal information provided as part of the appointment process will be used by the University only for the purposes stated below:
 - To enable the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) in deciding as to whether to appoint;
 - To set up staff payroll and IT accounts;
 - Please note the name and institution will be shared with students via their programme page on Gateway (VLE);
 - The University will process personal data in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and its enactment into UK law. View our full [Data Protection Policy](#) and [Data Breach Policy](#).
 - Our full privacy notices can be viewed on the following link: <https://www.rau.ac.uk/privacy-notices> .
9. University data and Commercial confidentiality
 - External Examiners will receive, in the course of their duties, information that can be considered personal data of students (including scripts, marks, comments). This information should not be shared with people outside of the University and examination boards, and the expectation is that this data is stored securely at all times under the postholders data protection responsibilities.
 - Upon completion of the External Examiner role, the postholder should securely destroy all information relating to individual candidates or specific cohorts, in line with data retention policies provided.
 - The Dean of Subject is responsible for ensuring that any potential intellectual property issues that may require commercial confidentiality agreements (e.g. industrial placements) be resolved prior to the appointment being made.

Section 2: Appointment and Induction Arrangements

10. External Examiners are nominated by Programme Leaders and require support from Deans of Subject. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee approves nominations and appointments. Upon appointment, External Examiners are sent an appointment letter which confirms and provides the following information relevant to the appointment:
- The award (or award element) to which the External Examiner is appointed
 - Duration of the appointment
 - A reminder that the appointment is subject to the appropriate Right to Work check by the University's HR Department (which should be carried out before any work on behalf of the University is undertaken)
 - Completion of appropriate HR forms
 - Contact details for the programme leader and other key contacts
 - Agreed annual fee
 - The link to the External Examiner Guidance
 - The link to the University's Academic Regulations.
11. All appointments are subject to appropriate Right to Work checks undertaken by the University's HR Department in compliance with Right to Work legislation in the United Kingdom (see details of [Right to Work documentation](#)). The University is required to complete this check **before** any work is undertaken and typically requires sight of your original passport and/or any visa-related documentation.
- These may be carried in person at the University or online. The University's Human Resources will contact appointees upon confirmation of appointment.
12. The tenure of appointment for External Examiners shall normally be for a period of four academic years and four months (UG) or four academic years and one semester (PG), thus allowing for a handover period between the outgoing and incoming External Examiners. Appointments normally start in September of year one.
13. Programme Leaders are responsible for providing External Examiners with programme specific information including programme and module specifications, details of PSRB information (where appropriate), a schedule of key dates for the moderation of student assessments, and dates of module boards, and progression and award boards.
14. Work to be moderated includes a (min) 10% sample of coursework, including highest and lowest marks, borderline marks, and failed marks.
15. External Examiners appointed to provision with collaborative partners will receive a briefing from the programme team and link tutor on the nature and extend of the partnership, including expectations of visits to partners sites in the UK or overseas.
16. Academic Services will provide incoming External Examiners with a copy of the previous year's outgoing External Examiner's report and annual programme

monitoring report.

17. The University holds annually an External Examiner Induction Day during which External Examiners are provided with an overview of their duties, role and rights, and general academic regulations. The event also provides an opportunity to meet with programme teams. Further details will be provided by Academic Services.
18. External Examiners are expected to visit programme teams and students at the RAU and collaborative partners annually, either in person or online.

Section 3: Examination Boards and External Examiner Reports

19. Academic Services will provide annually in April of each year an External Examiner Report template, which is to be completed and submitted to quality@rau.ac.uk within four weeks of the Progression and Award Board taking place.
20. External Examiners are expected to attend Module Boards, Programme and Award Boards for all programmes for which they are responsible, and where awards are due to be made.
21. External Examiners that are unable to attend an examination board must notify the Examinations Office at examinations@rau.ac.uk of the board and written comments need to be provided to the Chair of the Module Board, Progression and Award Board outlining their satisfaction with marks in advance of the Board taking place.
22. The Progression and Award Board, on behalf of Academic Board, has the responsibility for the standards and conferment of University Awards. Any dispute between External Examiners which cannot be resolved through less formal mediation before or during a Programme and Award Board will be referred to the Director of Academic Services for adjudication. Such a referral will always be made in any case where an External Examiner asserts their opinion that the standards of an Award may be compromised and indicates their inability to sign a recommendation for an Award.
23. External Examiner reports are shared via the Student Gateway and discussed with programme representatives. With this in mind, the formal report to the University should preserve the anonymity of students and staff. The report covers the following areas:
 - Programme quality
 - Subject Standards and Quality
 - Recommendations for programme / module improvements based on the experience of the examined documentation
 - Activities undertaken during the year
 - Any institutional issues

- In the case of External Examiners completing their final term of office, any additional comments.
24. It's a condition of employment that all External Examiners provide a written annual report using the University report template within four weeks of their attendance at the awarding board. The complete report should be sent electronically to Academic Services via quality@rau.ac.uk .

External Examiner for Collaborative Provision

25. The general examination arrangements and regulations for programmes, delivered in collaboration with a partner organisation of the University, are the same as those for the University's own provision. As an External Examiner for a collaborative programme, the University expects that External Examiners will formally meet online with the partner programme team and/or students annually. This is in addition to attendance at the examination board.
26. The RAU link tutor should liaise with the External Examiner and the collaborative partner for the arrangements to visit the partner organisation at suitable times during the academic year and arrangements for the examination boards.
27. Where External Examiners are appointed to act as an External Examiner for a programme which is delivered by multiple partner organisations and/or multiple sites, the External Examiner should expect to see clearly identified samples for external scrutiny.
28. In such cases, the University expects the External Examiner to comment on both the comparability of standards and quality of the learning experience and consistency in assessment practice, as delivered at each partner site of delivery and any specific issues for the programmes as a whole throughout the report.

How External Examiner Reports are used

29. External Examiner reports form an essential aspect of quality assurance and enhancement processes as practiced by the University. Discussions of External Examiner reports are incorporated specifically within the processes of annual evaluation and periodic review, and in discussion with student representatives at Programme Committee meetings.
30. Upon receipt of the External Examiner report, reports are sent to the Dean of Subject, Programme Leader, Collaborative partner (where applicable) and Chair of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) who produces an overview report to Academic Board.
31. An initial response to programme related issues raised in the report will be provided by the Dean of Subject and/or Programme Leader within two weeks from the receipt of the report.

32. External Examiner comments and concerns will be addressed in greater detail in the Annual Programme Monitoring Report (APMR) due in October each year. It is therefore essential that External Examiner reports are received in a timely manner.

33. The below table provides an overview of information provided by the University:

Appointment letter	Programme specification
Induction day	Module specification
Previous years' report from outgoing External Examiners	PSRB information (where applicable)
Annual Programme Monitoring Report (action plan)	Link tutor briefing (for collaborative arrangements where appropriate)
University regulations (Academic Framework, marking criteria, APL regulations)	Key dates for academic year including dates for moderation, module boards, progression and award boards
	Assessment and Moderation schedule

Section 4: Fees and Expenses

34. All External Examiners receive an annual fee payment that covers all duties that have been carried out on behalf of the University. In order to receive the annual fee, the University expects an External Examiner to have completed the following:

- Attendance at the Module Boards and the Programme and Award Board
- A visit (in person or online) to campus each year to meet with programme staff, and where possible, with students
- Completion of the External Examiner Report
- Sign off examination papers and coursework for the programmes they are appointed to
- Respond to consultation on material and non-material changes to programmes

35. Fee payments are made through the University payroll and Academic Services will forward fee payments requests upon receipt of the formal External Examiner Report for that year. All new External Examiners must complete a Bank Detail Request Form.

36. **Expenses:** expense claims for visits to the Royal Agricultural University or collaborative partner institutions (where applicable) incurred in the course of External Examiner duties will be reimbursed. Receipts must be produced to ensure payments will be made and all expenses should be submitted to Academic Services via email to quality@rau.ac.uk. Expenses should be submitted at the time they incur. Please note there is a restriction in place where expenses will not be accepted for claims that are older than three months.

37. [External Examiner Expenses claim forms](#) are available on the website and should be submitted to quality@rau.ac.uk shortly after the Board. Payment of expenses does not depend on the submission of an External Examiner's Report.

Section 5: Termination of Contract

38. The appointment of an External Examiner may be discontinued by the University or by the individual External Examiner before the completion of the period of appointment.
39. Should an External Examiner wish to resign, this would normally be after the submission of the External Examiner Report at the end of the annual cycle. The External Examiner should inform the Dean of Subject in writing before the end of the academic year, 31 July, cc. quality@rau.ac.uk .
40. Should the External Examiner wish to resign during the academic year, this should occur in writing to the Dean of Subject, giving a three-months notice period, cc. quality@rau.ac.uk .
41. In the event of unsatisfactory performance, the University reserves the right to terminate the appointment at any time. Unsatisfactory performance could cover a range of issues which include the failure to attend appropriate examination boards without making alternative arrangements, failure to engage with external examiner processes, and the failure to submit completed reports. Termination of appointment may also be necessary where a conflict of interest arises during the term of office.

Section 6: A typical year and Useful Information

Useful Information

[QAA –UK Quality Code for Higher Education; Advice and Guidance – External Expertise](#)

[QAA –UK Quality Code for Higher Education; Advice and Guidance – Assessment](#)

[QAA Subject Benchmark Statements](#)

[AdvanceHE External Examiner resources](#)

A typical year in the life of a (newly appointed) external examiner

One way of sketching the role and responsibilities of an external examiner is to review the activities across an academic year. The activities described below relate to a traditional type of three-year undergraduate degree programme in an institution with a two-semester modular system of delivery and assessment, and an external examiner appointed to review a typical arts, science or humanities discipline.

Appointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nomination and appointment takes place prior to the start of the academic year Role starts in September of academic year Appointment process and External Examiner Guidance sets out the responsibilities and expectations Right to Work check and completion of payroll information is completed upon appointment by Human Resources
Semester 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme Leaders provide programme specification(s); assessment details; key dates including scheduled assessments, moderation schedule, visits to the University (or collaborative partner), Module Boards, Progression & Award Board dates Academic Services provide copies of two previous External Examiner reports External Examiners will be asked to comment on examination papers and assessments
End of Semester 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme Leader provides a selection of Semester 1 student assessments for moderation Arrangements are made for one visit to the University to meet students (this may also be done online) Module Boards Programme Leaders request comments on examination papers and assessments for Semester 2 Academic Services will invite all External Examiners to attend an Induction Day in April (presentations include details of University expectations, academic regulations, the role of the External Examiner, examination boards)
Semester 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme Leader provides a selection of Semester 2 student assessments for moderation Arrangements are made for one visit to the University to meet students (if not already done so in Semester 1; this may also be done online) Attend Progression & Award Board (online)
End of Semester 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit External Examiner Report within 4 weeks after the Undergraduate Progression and Award Board in June Submit External Examiner Report by end of November, following the Postgraduate Progression and Award Board in October

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Leaders will request comments on examination papers and assessments for next academic year
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Version Control

Version number	Purpose/change	Name and job title	Date
V1.0	Updated guidance to reflect operational and policy changes (this replaces the 2019 EE Handbook v1)	Susanne Wilson, Assistant Registrar – Quality, Assessment and Partnerships	22/02/2022 and 29/10/2022
V2.0	Removal of Section 6: Institutional External Examiner; change to attendance of module boards	Susanne Wilson Head of Academic Quality	21/04/2024