

External Examining Summary Report 2021-22

Background

1. External examiners are appointed by Queen Mary to comment on issues of academic content, standards, and process. They review assessment questions, review module results and attend Subject Examination Boards. At the end of the academic cycle, each external completes the report template to outline their experiences that year. This report gives a high-level summary of those reports.
2. The consideration route for external examiner reports is as follows:
 - i. Individual reports are sent to SEBs for consideration and action within the School/Institute.
 - ii. Consideration of all reports by School/Institute through Annual Programme Review/Education Committees.
 - iii. Review of any institution-level issues and recurring themes in the Summary Report (this present report).
3. Reports are received and formally acknowledged by the Directorate of Governance and Legal Services (DGLS). DGLS reads and highlights key issues requiring a response before forwarding reports to the associated Subject Examination Board (SEB). Where a formal response is required, SEBs are asked to respond in writing within 30 days and send a copy to DGLS.
4. All reports and SEB responses are to be presented as part of the Annual Programme Review process and summaries are discussed at SSLC meetings.
5. In addition to SEB level external examiners, Queen Mary also appoints an External Member to review and oversee the final UG Degree Examination Board (DEB) process. The report of the External Member was received and considered by EQSB and the EQSB Assessment Sub-Board in autumn 2022.
6. External examiners have the right to raise any matter of serious concern with the Principal via a confidential report.
7. There were no institutional concerns raised in the 2021/22 reports

Part 1 - Statistical data (as of 25/01/2023)

EQSB should note:

- i) 2021/22 saw UCU industrial action which led to resignations of some external examiners. In total 70 external examiners resigned in February/March 2022, with 18 new appointments made to undertake some of the work of those who had resigned. Mitigation was undertaken by the SEBs to ensure adequate externality across the SEBs. FMD had five resignations, S&E eight resignations, and H&SS 57 resignations.
 - ii) the usefulness of the examiners annual report loses currency if submitted too late, as this doesn't provide Schools/Institutes time to reflect and take action on recommendations proposed.
 - iii) new external examiners are provided with a short introduction to Queen Mary via QMplus, this includes an outline of their role and responsibilities. This QMplus module remains accessible for the duration of their appointment.
8. There has been an increase in non-submission of reports from last year; 54, compared to 25 last year. Reminders are sent to external examiners by DGLS and SEBs are also asked to seek missing reports as part of their usual communication with their external.

9. There has been a sharp decrease in the percentage of SEB responses to external examiners received with 30% of responses still outstanding from PG Boards.
10. Non-submission and late submission, of reports is a concern. As noted in previous years, many externals are appointed to specific programmes rather than whole schools/institutes and we may question whether there is adequate coverage. The report is only one part of the role and there is no suggestion that externals are not considering assessment design and marking, but it is an important part, and the part that allows for institutional consideration beyond the SEB. Externals are not paid if they do not submit the report, but the fee is often nominal and is generally not a major motivator for academics to seek the roles.

Total number of external examiner reports and SEB responses, by level for 2021/22 (2020/21 for comparison):

	UG	(20/21)	PG	(20/21)
Expected Reports	118	143	101	110
Actual received	101	133	64	95
Total of missing reports	17 (14%)	10 (7%)	37 (37%)	15 (14%)
Expected SEB responses	76	87	30	35
Actual responses received	52	72	21	30
Total of missing SEB responses	24 (32%)	23 (26%)	9 (30%)	5 (14%)

Total number of external examiner reports and SEB responses, by Faculty and level for 2020/21 (2019/20 for comparison):

	HSS				S&E				SMD			
	UG (20/21)		PG (20/21)		UG (20/21)		PG (20/21)		UG (20/21)		PG (20/21)	
Expected Reports	49	72	33	40	39	37	18	19	30	34	50	50
Actual received	42	69	24	37	35	34	12	18	24	30	28	40
Total missing	7	3	9	3	4	3	6	1	6	4	22	11
Expected SEB responses	30	44	13	11	30	27	6	8	16	16	11	16
Actual SEB responses received	26	40	12	8	22	24	5	8	4	8	4	14
Total missing	4	4	1	3	8	3	1	-	12	8	7	2

Summary of External Examiner comments 2021/22

11. Broadly, external examiners remain complimentary of the work of colleagues to provide clear and comprehensive feedback.
12. There remained concern from some externals concerning levels of achievement, noting that work should continue to maintain assessment integrity and ensure that the various methods remain sufficiently discriminatory. Again, many noted that this was a sector wide challenge.

Alice de Havillan,
Quality and Standards Officer.

25/01/23