

Guidance for External Examiners writing their annual report

Quality and Academic Development  
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## Introduction

We frequently receive enquiries from our External Examiners seeking additional guidance on how to write their annual reports, including requests for example responses. While we are unable to provide an example report due to the differing needs across departments, we have compiled this guide to support the writing process. In its creation, we consulted Faculty Deans, the Apprenticeships Team, the Partnerships Team, and some departments.

This document includes two main sections. The first section provides general advice and guidance for completing the report. The second section provides some optional sentence starters to help you address each sub-section of a question and ease the flow of writing, as well as provide any additional guidance relevant to the specific question. There is also an appendix with some technical guidance.

For the purposes of this document, we have referred to both departments and schools as ‘departments’ for brevity.

### Report submission

External Examiners for internal University of Essex awards and modules should submit their report through the [External Examiner Report Portal](https://www1.essex.ac.uk/external-examiners-report-portal/).

External Examiners for Partnerships awards and modules should submit their report as an email attachment to [external.examiners@essex.ac.uk](mailto:external.examiners@essex.ac.uk).

All reports should be submitted within four weeks of the Exam Board unless a different report submission timeline has been agreed with QUAD and Partnerships.

## FAQ

### What should I do before writing my report?

* **You should make sure that you only have one tab open in the** [**External Examiner Report Portal**](https://www1.essex.ac.uk/external-examiners-report-portal/)**.** The Report Portal loses functionality when writing your report if multiple tabs are open and this may result in loss of work. If you would like a copy of a previous report extracted as a .pdf or .xlsx document, then please request this from [external.examiners@essex.ac.uk](mailto:external.examiners@essex.ac.uk).
* If you are responsible for apprenticeship provision, you should familiarise yourself with the content in the [**Apprenticeship Guidance for External Examiners document**](https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/directories/academic-section/academic-standards-and-quality/guidance-for-external-examiners-on-apprenticeships.docx), as there are specific considerations that you must be aware of.
* You should scan through all questions to ensure that comments are input into the most relevant section, and prevent the need to repeat yourself or signpost to a previous question’s answer.
  + For example, we often get lengthy comments on feedback in early questions when this is better placed in question four regarding marking and feedback standards.
* Check that you are ready to write the report for the appropriate schedule of awards and modules. You should not submit your report until after the final Exam Board at which the awards and modules you oversee are seen. Reports include a question on Exam Board proceedings and therefore those submitted early will be returned for further comment after the final Exam Board.
* Check that you have reviewed everything you need to write the report. If you oversee different types of provision you will need to submit a separate report for each of the following:
  + Undergraduate provision
  + Postgraduate taught provision
  + University of Essex internal modules and awards
  + Partnerships modules and awards: one report for each Partnership you are involved with

### Who will read my report?

* Your report is read by a wide range of people, some of which will not be aware of the intricacies of the provision within the department. As such, please provide context for any points made.
  + For example: *‘The issue with delayed feedback due to staff sickness in LS123 Linguistics in Health was managed well and I commend the team for their efforts in redistributing the marking and communicating with the students’* is more informative than *‘The linguistics issue was managed well and I commend the team for their efforts”.*
* As your report is read by multiple individuals outside your link department it is important that you also include any areas you have discussed separately with the department in your report as the reader is unlikely to be aware of these.
* As your report is made available to students in internal University Committees and department meetings no reference should be made to individual members of staff or students. Student numbers and titles of individual student work should not be referenced. If it is necessary to reference student work due to the nature of the discipline (i.e., presentations, projects, performances) then please comment on these in such a way that students are not identifiable.

### What is the purpose of my report?

* The purpose of your report is to critically evaluate the quality of our provision. To that end, please **evaluate not state**.
  + For example: *‘The feedback volume was a bit inconsistent across markers with some providing one of two comments and others providing around ten, but overall feedback was supportive of students and of good depth’* is better than *‘Feedback was provided on assignments’.*
* Your report provides an overview of the standards of provision, it is not expected that there will be a detailed module-by-module overview in your answers. Therefore, please aim to be clear and concise in your writing, consolidating comments across modules where possible.
  + For example, instead of *“Module 1: clear feedback and consistent marking, Module 2: clear feedback and consistent marking, Module 3: clear feedback and consistent marking, Module 4: clear feedback but some inconsistencies in applying marking criteria across markers”* you could say *“All modules had clear feedback and consistent marking with the exception of module 4 which had some inconsistencies in applying marking criteria across markers’.*
* Your report provides feedback in multiple key areas including student performance and academic standards and therefore, all questions in the report should be completed in full, including any sub-sections. Please put ‘N/A’ if the question does not apply to you (e.g. for apprenticeship questions if you do not oversee apprenticeship provision). No question should be left blank as it is not clear to the reader whether the question has been left blank in error. Reports with missing information will be returned to you for further completion. If you are unsure whether a question applies to you, please contact QUAD at [External.examiners@essex.ac.uk](mailto:External.examiners@essex.ac.uk).
* Your report will be used to identify areas of enhancement and good practice across the University. Please highlight anything you identify as good practice and provide suggestions for enhancement where applicable. Please note that good practice is anything that goes beyond what is required or expected; following university processes and being responsive to student feedback is standard and expected practice.

## For Partner Institution External Examiners: report details

External Examiners responsible for provision delivered at the University of Essex’s Partner Institutions should please ensure the following table is completed before submission of the annual report to [external.examiners@essex.ac.uk](mailto:external.examiners@essex.ac.uk).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name of External Examiner** |  |
| **External Examiner’s Home Institution** |  |
| **Partner Institution** |  |
| **Appointed as Award or Module External Examiner** |  |
| **Level of provision (UG/PG)** |  |
| **List of courses/modules examined** |  |
| **Date(s) of Board of Examiners** |  |
| **Date of report** |  |

## Part A: Academic Quality and Standards

| Question 1 |
| --- |
| *How do the standards of the courses and modules that you examined compare with other UK Higher Education Institutions and national reference points such as the QAA Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications and professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements (PSRB)? Are you content that UK threshold academic standards are being maintained? Are the rules of assessment for progression and award consistent with sector norms?* |
| When compared to X the standards of the courses and modules I examined were… I am/am not content that UK threshold academic standards are being maintained because… The rules of assessment for progression are/are not consistent with sector norms. |
| Question 1 guidance |
| Please note what you are comparing the University of Essex to (for example, your Home Institution, other institutions for which you act as External Examiner for).  If the rules of assessment are not consistent with sector norms, please elaborate. |
| Question 2 |
| *Please comment on the learning, teaching and assessment strategies, which should include:*   * *the appropriateness of the learning, teaching and assessment strategies* * *the range of assessment methods used* * *the extent to which these strategies enabled students to achieve their learning outcomes and the standards set* * *how effective assessment design is in relation to academic integrity* * *the choice of subject, methods and standards of assessment for dissertations / projects* * *the inclusion of any professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements* |
| The learning, teaching and assessment strategies were… The range of assessment methods used were… With regards to the extent to which the learning, teaching and assessment strategies enabled students to achieve their leaning outcomes and the standards set… With regards to academic integrity, assessment design was… The choice of subject, methods and standards of assessment for dissertations/projects were included by… Professional, statutory, and regulatory body requirements were… |
| Question 2 guidance |
| How do the range of assessments compare to national standards? Is there anything that stands out as good practice? Is there anything we could do to improve?  If there are no professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements for the provision you oversee, this part of the question can be ignored. If there are PSRB requirements, please reflect on how well these have been incorporated into the learning, teaching and assessment strategies. |
| Question 3 |
| *Please comment on the standards of student performance, progression, retention and degree classification profiles in comparison with other UK Higher Education Institutions and national reference points.*  *(General comments and relating to dissertations (or equivalent) specifically)*  *Did you raise any concerns that required action by the Board of Examiners (for example, application of scaling, the consistency of marking)? Are you content that satisfactory action was taken?* |
| In comparison with X the standards of student performance, progression, retention and degree classification profiles were… In addition, relating to dissertations specifically they were… I did not raise concerns that required action by the Board of Examiners/I did raise concerns that required action by the Board of Examiners and my concerns were addressed in the following ways… |
| Question 3 guidance |
| Please ensure that you comment specifically on dissertations (or equivalent) separately from general comments. This can be a simple note that the comments apply to dissertations as well (e.g. the above also applies to dissertations) if there is nothing further to state.  If you did raise concerns that required action by the Board of Examiners, please outline the concern you raised and whether you were satisfied with the outcome. |
| Question 4 |
| *Please comment on the standards of internal marking procedures, which should include:*   * *the marking criteria used and how well they are defined and applied* * *the level of consistency of marking* * *the standard of feedback students receive* * *alignment with the regulations and procedures of the University*   *(General comments and relating to dissertations (or equivalent) specifically)* |
| Overall, the standards of internal marking procedures were… The marking criteria were…and were/were not well defined and applied… The consistency of marking was… The feedback students received was… The internal marking procedures aligned with the regulations and procedures of the University/The internal marking procedures did not align with the regulations and procedures of the University. Specifically… Regarding dissertations… |
| Question 4 guidance |
| Please ensure that you comment specifically on dissertations (or equivalent) separately from general comments. This can be a simple note that the comments apply to dissertations as well (e.g. the above also applies to dissertations) if there is nothing further to state.  Please also consider second marking and/or moderation procedures in your comments.  If marking criteria were not well defined or applied, please specify in what way.  Please refer to the [Marking Policy](https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/directories/academic-section/academic-standards-and-quality/marking-policy-2024-25.pdf) when answering this question if you are not familiar with the regulations and procedures of the University. |
| Question 5 |
| *Please comment on the curriculum and on any curriculum developments that have been introduced since the last report, and whether you were consulted over changes.* |
| The curriculum is… The curriculum developments made since the last report were… I was/was not consulted over curriculum changes. |
| Question 5 guidance |
| Have you identified any particular strengths or areas for enhancement within the curriculum?  Have you been consulted regarding any planned curriculum changes and, if so, what was the extent of your input? |
| Question 6 |
| *Please comment on the following areas relating specifically to courses involving more than one department (joint courses), modules / courses which include a period of study abroad and/or an assessed work-based placement, which should include the:*   * *continuing coherence of the course(s)* * *assessment arrangements, marking standards and the students’ performance* * *availability of / access to work produced during, or as a result of work-based / placement learning or during study abroad* * *the value of the work-based learning, placement or study abroad, or joint degree (for example, notably better or worse academic performance compared to peers on other courses)* |
| The courses are… The assessment arrangements, marking standards and the students’ performance was… The availability of/access to work produced during, or as a result of placement/work-based learning was… The value of the work-based learning, placement or study abroad, or joint degree was… |
| Question 6 guidance |
| Please note that all work-based placements, regardless of whether they are considered under a placement year or within year (such as nursing practice placements) are included in this question. |
| Question 7 |
| *For External Examiners for Nursing and Midwifery Council accredited programmes ONLY:*   * *Are you currently registered with the NMC? Please confirm in your answers below.* * *Please comment upon any meetings you have attended with students, the academic team or other stakeholders.* * *Please confirm that you are satisfied that NMC standards related to student supervision, assessment and progression in relation to theory and practice learning are consistently met.* |
| I am/am not a registrant of the NMC.  I have attended the following meetings with students/the academic team/other stakeholders and…  **OR** I did not attend any meetings with students/the academic team/other stakeholders because…  I have reviewed the programme against the NMC Standards for Education and can see in the electronic Practice Assessment Document that the NMC’s Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment (SSSA) have been consistently adhered to / have not been consistently adhered to because... |
| Question 7 guidance |
| If the module(s) and/or course(s) you are reviewing are accredited by the NMC, please ensure you complete this question.  An example answer to this question has been provided below.  *I am a registrant of the NMC.  I met with the programme lead on two occasions this year, and have met with the programme team once, having been invited to a team meeting to discuss curriculum updates.  I was also able to observe one student group during the mini-interview assessment in module HSXXX.  I haven’t been able to meet with service users or practice partner representatives yet, but I am aware that this is scheduled in the next academic year.*  *I have reviewed the programme against the NMC Standards for Education and can see in the electronic Practice Assessment Document that the NMC’s Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment (SSSA) have been consistently adhered to.* |
| Question 8 |
| *For External Examiners overseeing Apprenticeship courses or modules only:*   * *Overall, were learners on apprenticeships achieving and progressing in line with the requirements of the apprenticeship standard (either standalone or as part of a mixed cohort)?* * *If you met with apprentices, practice educators, employers, and/or reviewed records of tripartite progress reviews, please comment on discussions regarding the development of learners’ Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours, integration of safeguarding, British Values, and PREVENT, and their experiences of the EPA. Were learners able to demonstrate knowledge and awareness of next steps?* |
| Overall, learners on apprenticeships were/were not achieving and progressing in line with the requirements of the apprenticeship standard. I did / did not meet with apprentices, practice educators or employers. I did/did not review records of tripartite progress reviews. In terms of discussions regarding the development of learners’ Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours, integration of safeguarding, British Values, and PREVENT, and their experiences of the EPA, learners were/were not able to demonstrate knowledge and awareness of the next steps. |
| Question 8 guidance |
| If an apprenticeship is under your remit as External Examiner, please ensure that you are familiar with the [Apprenticeship Guidance for External Examiners](https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/directories/academic-section/academic-standards-and-quality/guidance-for-external-examiners-on-apprenticeships.docx), and bear this in mind when you answer the question. |
| Question 9 |
| *For External Examiners overseeing an End-Point Assessment (EPA) e.g. where the University of Essex is the EPA Organisation for the module or integrated Exam Board, please complete the next question (or leave blank if not responsible for overseeing the integrated EPA module/Exam Board):*   * *Is the EPA suitably assessing occupational competence? For example, did learners meet the standards as outlined in the apprenticeship standard, EPA plan, and meet the requirements of the professional, statutory, or regulatory body for completion of the EPA?* * *If applicable, please evaluate the effectiveness of the Exam Board in managing the integrated EPA, including the adequacy of the processes ensuring apprentices have successfully passed through the gateway as stipulated in the apprenticeship standard.* |
| The Exam Board was/was not effective in managing the integrated EPA because… Specifically, the processes ensuring apprentices have successfully passed through the gateway as stipulated in the apprenticeship standard were/were not adequate because... In general, the EPA was… |
| Question 9 guidance |
| If an integrated EPA is under your remit as External Examiner, please ensure that you are familiar with the [Apprenticeship Guidance for External Examiners](https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/directories/academic-section/academic-standards-and-quality/guidance-for-external-examiners-on-apprenticeships.docx) in relation to quality assuring an EPA. Enhanced examining is required for integrated EPAs (where the University is the EPA Organisation) so it is key that your comments are captured in this report. |
| Question 10 |
| *Are there any other areas you would like to comment on which haven’t been covered by any of the previous questions?* |
|  |
| Question 10 guidance |
| There is no specific guidance for this question. Please include anything you feel is relevant that may not have been relevant under previous questions. Please be mindful not to duplicate other questions. |
| Question 11 |
| *Please comment on the standards of inclusivity and equity within the teaching, learning and assessment you reviewed. Please consider all areas of inclusion for which you are familiar when formulating your response (for example, this could include but is not limited to, ethnicity, cultural differences, neurodiversity, disability, reasonable adjustments for examinations) and in addition advise on the below:*   * *Did you identify any strong practices?* * *Did you identify any areas for enhancement?* |
| Within the teaching, learning and assessment the standards of inclusivity and equity were… I identified the following strong practices… I identified some areas for enhancement, these were… |
| Question 11 guidance |
| If you have seen any strong practices at other institutions, including your own, that you can share as something for us to consider please note them in your answer to this question.  If you are familiar with any frameworks such as Stonewall UK Workplace Equality Index or Athena Swan Charter, please use your knowledge on these to reflect on our practices when answering this question. |

## Part B: Preparation for the External Examiner Role

| Question 12 |
| --- |
| *Please comment on the information and support you were provided with to enable you to carry out your role, which should include:*   * *the management of Boards / pre-Boards and whether they operated fairly* * *the administrative arrangements for the assessment process and your role within it* * *whether anything more could be done to help you carry out your duties* * *whether decisions on extenuating circumstances were appropriate* |
| The information and support provided to enable me to carry out my role was… The management of Board/pre-Boards was… Boards/pre-Board operated… Nothing further could be done to help me carry out my duties/To help me carry out my duties the University could… Decisions on extenuating circumstances were… |
| Question 12 guidance |
| Please consider the communications you have received both from the Quality and Academic Development Team and Department when responding to this question.  Please consider guidance documents, training you have been given, including the webinars hosted by the Quality and Academic Development team, when responding to this question. |

## Part C: Enhancement

| Question 13 |
| --- |
| *Did you identify any examples of good practice and/or innovation?* |
| I did not identify any examples of good practice or innovation / I identified the following examples of good practice… |
| Question 13 guidance |
| Please reflect on why the area(s) you have highlighted constitute good practice and not expected/standard practice. For example, releasing all feedback on time would be considered standard practice but having clear structures in place for the marking of work which enables feedback to be regularly released early could be considered as good practice.  Please consider whether there is any shareable good practice which could be considered across other awards/modules or across the wider University. |
| Question 14 |
| *Did you identify any opportunities for enhancement? Did any of the modules or courses pose particular issues which should be addressed?* |
| I identified the following opportunities for enhancement… I have already discussed enhancements with the department (note them here) and have nothing further to add… No modules or courses pose particular issues which should be addressed / The courses and modules post the following issues which should be addressed… |
| Question 14 guidance |
| Please consider how you would address any particular issues or areas for enhancement raised using your experience from your home institution and other institutions for which you have worked at for reference. |
| Question 15 |
| *Are you satisfied with the actions taken in response to your previous report (or to the comments of the previous External Examiner) and that the issues raised have been addressed?* |
| I am satisfied with the actions taken in response to my previous report/comments of the previous External Examiner and that the issues raised have been addressed / I am not satisfied with the actions taken in response to my previous report/comments of the previous External Examiner because… |
| Question 15 guidance |
| If you are not satisfied, please include why you are not satisfied with the response and what could be done to address any outstanding issues. |
| Question 16 |
| *If this is your last report as an External Examiner with the University, we would welcome your comments on your experience and on any areas you would like to highlight either to the University and/or the next External Examiner.* |
| I have the following comments on my experience as an External Examiner at the University of Essex… I would like to highlight the following to the University and/or the next External Examiner… |
| Question 16 guidance |
| Have you seen any large-scale changes or developments that span across multiple years, positive or negative, over your time as an External Examiner with us? |

## Part D: Department Response

| Question 17 |
| --- |
| *A reply should be sent to the External Examiner in response to their report. This should refer to actions taken and explain the reasons where it's been decided no action will be taken. Please add your responses below, or attach a copy if sent separately.* |
| External Examiners should receive an automated email to notify them once the department has added a response on the External Examiner Report Portal. |

## Appendix: Technical Support

Guidance on how to use the [External Examiner Report Portal](https://www1.essex.ac.uk/external-examiners-report-portal/) can be found in the [External Examiner User Guide](https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/directories/academic-section/academic-standards-and-quality/external-examiner-user-guide-nomination-taught.pdf).

### Technical support FAQs

#### Access Denied 403 error message

There are sometimes problems accessing the Report Portal when Essex sites automatically populate log-in credentials with e.g. home institution details or expired passwords. If you receive the error message stating ‘access denied’, please try opening the following link: [https://www1.essex.ac.uk/external-examiners-report-portal](https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=https%3a%2f%2fwww1.essex.ac.uk%2fexternal-examiners-report-portal&c=E,1,JTENormYVNbvqljHSqNqZ51MtW-EfGNipN1gy9PtSZz50ggc3HTxC8-4Ql5Ign5208wKr-IDxLX_l9E-GAoLZ7-5huWywIwm0uSWI6xUGaGX4ako&typo=1) - in a private browser (Ctrl + Shift + n in Windows, Linux or Chrome) or incognito window and entering your credentials.

If you are still unable to access the Report Portal, you may require a password reset. If so, please see the below section.

#### Password reset

If you require a [password reset](https://www1.essex.ac.uk/password/login.aspx) for your Essex IT account, please follow the link and enter your Essex username, then select the option that sends ‘a link to my external email address’. You will then be asked to enter your PRID code. This will have been provided to you in the original email regarding your Essex IT details. Once this is entered, please add your date of birth and select continue. This should trigger a separate email to be sent to your external email address.

If you would like clarification on the above, please email [external.examiners@essex.ac.uk](mailto:external.examiners@essex.ac.uk) and we will be happy to help.