

# External Examining Policy and Procedures

Related Regulations from the Academic Manual are shown in this policy in boxes like this.

Ownership	Head of Quality
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# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Scope

- 1.1.1 This Policy provides the framework for Goldsmiths' practice in relation to all aspects of external examining.
- 1.1.2 This Policy applies to all undergraduate, taught postgraduate and taught research programmes delivered by Goldsmiths or by an approved partner institution. Where this is the case, references to the academic department also describe the role of the academic partner.
- 1.1.3 Any divergences or additional requirements to those described in this policy relating to programmes delivered with an approved partner institution will be set out in the agreed regulations governing delivery of those programmes.
- 1.1.4 Information on External Examining arrangements for Postgraduate Research provision can be accessed via the Graduate School.

## 1.2 External Reference Points

- 1.2.1 Goldsmiths considers its arrangements for external examining to be an integral part of the quality assurance systems it employs to ensure it meets the Office for Students' ongoing Conditions of Registration. They are of particular importance in relation to following the Conditions for Quality and Standards:
- B1 The provider must deliver well-designed courses that provide a high quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.
  - B4 The provider must ensure that qualifications awarded to students hold their value at the point of qualification and over time, in line with sector recognised standards.
  - B5 The provider must deliver courses that meet the academic standards as they are described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualification (FHEQ) at Level 4 or higher.
- 1.2.2 It is also consistent with the expectations and practices of the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) and informed by the associated advice and guidance on the use of external expertise.

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# 2 The Role of External Examiners

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## 2.1 General

- 2.1.1 The primary aims of the Goldsmiths' external examining system are to ensure:

- Its awards meet sector recognised standards, as set out in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and other relevant external sector reference points, and informed by practice in other UK higher education institutions.
- The assessment process measures student achievement reliably, fairly and transparently, against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and in line with Goldsmiths' policies and regulations and sector recognised standards, ensuring that awards hold their value at the point of qualification and over time.
- The quality of the learning, teaching and assessment provided to students on its programmes and modules is enhanced and gives students the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level.

## 2.2 Categories of External Examiner and Boards of Examiners

2.2.1 The term External Examiner, as used in this document, encompasses both:

- Intercollegiate Examiners who are members of the academic staff of a College of the University of London, provided no students from that College are being examined with the Goldsmiths' cohort.
- External Examiners who are examiners from outside the University of London who is not a member of staff of any College of the University of London.

2.2.2 Each Board of Examiners must include at least one External Examiner. Goldsmiths operates a two-tier system of Boards of Examiners consisting of:

- **Programme Boards of Examiners**, which are based in academic departments and are responsible for assessing students' performance and considering results, progression and degree awards.
- **College Boards of Examiners**, which are divided by School and are responsible for ratifying the recommendations made by Programme Boards of Examiners, specifically considering those relating to non-standard student profiles, ensuring that decisions have been reached in accordance with the relevant Goldsmiths Regulations.

2.2.3 The External Examiner's role is dependent on the type of Board to which they are appointed. Duties of External Examiners are set out in Section 5 of this document.

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## 3 Nomination and Appointment of External Examiners

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### 3.1 Responsibilities and General Requirements

3.1.1 External Examiner nominees should meet the requirements of the Person Specification and Conflicts of Interest set out below.

3.1.2 In nominating External Examiners, consideration should be given to the balance of the expertise of the members of the Board of Examiners and the

relative workloads of the External Examiners across programmes should be broadly consistent.

- 3.1.3 Nominations for the appointment of Programme Level External Examiners are the responsibility of the relevant academic department. The Quality Office can provide support in sourcing nominees by advertising vacancies through professional networks and external examining mailing lists.
- 3.1.4 Nominations for External Examiners for programmes delivered in collaboration with an approved partner will be made following discussions between the partner and the International Development and Academic Partnerships (IDAP) Office. Where possible, it is preferable that an External Examiner for programmes delivered at Goldsmiths is also appointed as the External Examiner for cognate programmes delivered at partner institutions.
- 3.1.5 Nominations for the appointment of College Level External Examiners are the responsibility of the Academic Registrar and Director of Student Experience.
- 3.1.6 Nominations must be submitted to the Quality Office on the [standard form](#) no later than the start of the academic session in which their appointment will commence.

## 3.2 Person Specification

- 3.2.1 Goldsmiths applies the following criteria for the appointment of External Examiners to ensure their suitability and independence:

**Programme Level External Examiners** should be able to show appropriate evidence of:

- Knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
- Competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof;
- Relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate;
- Competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures;
- Sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers;
- Familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed;
- Fluency in English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that External Examiners are provided with the information to make their judgements);

- Meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies;
  - Awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula;
  - Competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.
- 3.2.2 Where the nominee has no previous experience as an External Examiner for any institution, the appointment should, wherever possible, be made to a team of External Examiners and with agreement that a more experienced External Examiner will act as a mentor. The details of the mentoring scheme are set out in section 4 of this policy.
- 3.2.3 Programme Level External Examiners may normally hold no more than two External Examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time (i.e. the nominee should only have one other existing External Examiner position whilst appointed as a Goldsmiths External Examiner).
- 3.2.4 **College level External Examiners** should be able to show appropriate evidence of:
- Knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
  - Competence in and experience of designing and operating academic regulations governing the award of undergraduate and/or taught postgraduate degrees in a higher education setting;
  - Sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience at other higher education providers to command the respect of academic and professional peers in the context of participating in College Boards of Examiners.

### 3.3 Conflicts of Interest

- 3.3.1 To avoid any conflict of interest, anyone in the following categories or circumstances should not be appointed as an External Examiner:
- A member of the governing body or committee or a current employee of Goldsmiths or one of its partner institutions;
  - Anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student at Goldsmiths;
  - Anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study (**Programme Level External Examiners only**);
  - Anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study (**for College level External Examiners this extends to any programme of study at Goldsmiths**);
  - Anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme(s) or modules in question

**(for College level External Examiners, this extends to any member of staff at Goldsmiths);**

- Former staff or students of the institution unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the External Examiner have completed their programme(s);
- A reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at Goldsmiths and the External Examiner's home institution **(for College level External Examiners, involving the same role);**
- The succession of an External Examiner by a colleague from the examiner's home department and institution;
- The appointment of more than one External Examiner from the same department of the same institution.

3.3.2 Nominees who have been employed as an external reader in the approval of a programme or as an external adviser on a reapproval panel are not automatically debarred from immediate appointment as an External Examiner to that programme. However, departments should balance the benefits of engaging someone who is familiar with the programme and its rationale with any risk to their ability to provide a fully independent perspective.

3.3.3 External Examiners or Goldsmiths are required to inform the other party immediately should either become aware of any possible conflict of interest that arises during the term of office.

3.3.4 An External Examiner may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.

### **3.4 Terms of office**

3.4.1 The duration of an External Examiner's appointment will be for four years. Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances, such as to ensure continuity where a programme is being brought to an end, and then for no longer than one year.

3.4.2 An External Examiner may request to temporarily cease their appointment, for a period of no more than one academic cycle, for example due to illness or maternity leave. In these circumstances another External Examiner will be sought to temporarily cover the absence. The period of temporary absence will not be included in the four-year duration of the appointment. The External Examiner should liaise with the Quality Office and the relevant academic department, or Academic Registrar (in the case of College External Examiners) to agree the period of absence and arrangements for a temporary replacement as required. The temporary cessation of appointment and replacement must be approved by the Chair of the Quality and Standards Committee on behalf of Academic Board.

### **3.5 Exemptions to the Criteria**

3.5.1 Exemptions from the criteria will only be approved where exceptional

circumstances can be demonstrated. In these instances, a fully argued case should be made by the proposer in their supporting statement on the nomination form.

- 3.5.2 When a Programme Level External Examiner drawn from business, industry or the professions possesses considerable professional experience but not the formal qualifications anticipated, the academic background, or sufficient experience of assessment, they may be considered as exceptions. In such circumstances they should not be the sole External Examiner for the award and should be complemented by others who do satisfy the criteria. They should be appointed with a mentor in the first year, the details of which are set out in section 4 of this policy, and the academic department should continue to provide appropriate support in relation to academic expectations throughout the term of office.

### **3.6 Approval of Nominations**

- 3.6.1 Nominations should be submitted to the Quality Assistant and will be scrutinised within the Quality Office in the first instance to determine whether they meet the criteria set out above and/or additional information is required. Suitable nominations will then be referred to the Chair of the Quality and Standards Committee for approval and subsequent reporting to Academic Board. While the nominee's agreement should be sought in order to put their name forward, under no circumstances should a commitment to an appointment be made by the Department in advance of approval.

### **3.7 Early Termination of Appointment**

- 3.7.1 If an External Examiner is unable to continue in their role, they should confirm their resignation from the position in writing to the Head of Department (for Programme Level External Examiners) or to the Academic Registrar (for College level External Examiners) who, in turn, should notify the Quality Office. External Examiners are requested to give at least six months' notice of their intention to resign to allow sufficient time for a replacement to be found.
- 3.7.2 If, whilst serving their notice period, the resignation of the External Examiner is withdrawn before the appointment of a replacement has been arranged, then the External Examiner may, with the agreement of the relevant academic department, continue in their role. In these circumstances the maximum duration of the appointment will remain unchanged.
- 3.7.3 The Quality Office or Head of Department or Academic Registrar (in respect of College External Examiners) may recommend to prematurely terminate an External Examiner's appointment in any of the following circumstances:
- Their annual report is incomplete or has not been submitted;
  - They have not attended two consecutive meetings of the Board of Examiners;
  - They are subsequently found to be ineligible for appointment;
  - A change of role of the External Examiner or of a Goldsmiths' member of



staff results in a new conflict of interest.

- 3.7.4 In such circumstances the Head of Department (or Academic Registrar for College External Examiners) should, in the first instance, discuss the matter with the External Examiner to establish whether the situation can be resolved.
- 3.7.5 Should this be unsuccessful, the Head of Department should contact the Quality Office to discuss the situation. If it still proves impossible to resolve the situation satisfactorily a request will be made to the Chair of the Quality and Standards Committee to formally approve the early termination of the appointment. The Quality Office will write to the External Examiner to confirm the decision.

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## 4 Induction of External Examiners

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### 4.1 Letter of Appointment

- 4.1.1 On confirmation of their appointment, all External Examiners will receive an email and letter of appointment stating:
- The award bearing programme(s) for which they have been appointed;
  - The period of appointment and starting date;
  - A request to provide at least 6 months' notice if resigning from the role;
  - The fee they should receive and an explanation of Goldsmiths' position with regard to the deduction of tax at source, etc;
  - A request for evidence of their right to work in the UK;
  - A specification that attendance at Boards of Examiners and the submission of an annual written report be a condition of appointment and payment;
  - The ways in which the College will make use of their personal data, including any comments they make about the performance of students, either individually or generally in their reports and, in particular, that their name, position and institution will be included within student handbooks;
  - An explanation that, if they so wish, they may, in the case of serious concerns make a separate, confidential report to the Warden.
- 4.1.2 The following information will also be included with the letter of appointment:
- A copy of the previous External Examiner's report (where applicable);
  - A copy of the Boards of Examiners Guidance Procedures;
  - A link to the relevant regulations and policies within the Goldsmiths Academic Manual;
  - A link to Goldsmiths' External Examining web page containing the College's Policy and Procedures and associated documentation including the annual report form and the fees and expenses claim forms;
  - A copy of the programme specification;

- Details of the mentoring scheme (where appropriate).

## **4.2 Further Information**

- 4.2.1 The Quality Office can provide clarification and additional information on any of the points above.
- 4.2.2 Programme Level External Examiners will also receive from the Chair of the Board of Examiners:
- A full and detailed briefing/induction on the regulations for the programme covered by the Board to which they have been appointed and on the departmental learning and teaching and assessment strategy;
  - A copy of the student handbook (or equivalent);
  - If more than one External Examiner is appointed to the programme, an explanation of the roles assigned to each appointee;
  - A full and detailed briefing on their role in relation to the internal examiners and the assessment process;
  - The date, and time of the meeting of the Board of Examiners.

## **4.3 Briefing at Goldsmiths**

- 4.3.1 External Examiners to programmes leading to validated awards of Goldsmiths delivered in collaboration with an approved partner will be required to attend a briefing by the International Developments and Academic Partnerships (IDAP) Office during the autumn term.
- 4.3.2 College External Examiners will receive a briefing from the Assessments Manager on the operation of the College Boards. The Assessments Manager will also confirm the dates and times of all College Board meetings which the External Examiner is required to attend.

## **4.4 Mentoring Scheme for Programme Level External Examiners**

- 4.4.1 For new Programme Level External Examiners with no previous experience in the role, Goldsmiths operates a mentoring scheme in the first year of appointment.
- 4.4.2 The mentor should be agreed prior to the appointment of the new External Examiner and should be a current, experienced External Examiner of Goldsmiths who has agreed to act in this role.
- 4.4.3 The Quality Office will introduce the new External Examiner and the mentor to each other via email. The mentor is expected to be prepared to offer general advice, either by phone or email. The type of issues that they might be asked to offer guidance on could include: dealing with draft examination papers; moderating and commenting on assessment; offering advice to the Board of Examiners; completion of the annual report; as well as general discussions about external examining experiences and common scenarios that may arise.
- 4.4.4 If the mentee or mentor experience any problems in the operation of the

scheme, they are asked to contact the Quality Office who will attempt to resolve the issue.

- 4.4.5 Following completion of the year, both mentor and mentee are asked to comment on their experience of the scheme within their annual reports.

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## **5 Responsibilities of External Examiners**

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### **5.1 General**

- 5.1.1 Goldsmiths requires its College and Programme Level External Examiners to assist in ensuring and enhancing the academic integrity, inherent fairness, currency and standards of its awards and the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students on its programmes. It seeks to facilitate this process by enabling them to comment freely, and in detail, on all issues associated with the assessment, progression and award processes and in the context of a number of duties appropriate to the category of External Examiner.

### **5.2 Approval of Draft Examination Papers**

- 5.2.1 To ensure that all students are assessed fairly in relation to the syllabus and assessment regulations, Programme Level External Examiners are asked to give advice on all modes of summative assessment, specifically including approval of the form and the content of all timed assessments (whether taking place in person or online).
- 5.2.2 Chairs of Programme Boards are responsible to the Head of Department for sending draft examination papers to the External Examiner(s) for approval.

### **5.3 Moderation of Assessments**

- 5.3.1 Programme Level External Examiners have the right to see all assessed work. Their primary role, however, is to attest to the general standards of work achieved as represented by each classification through the moderation of a representative sample of assessed work.
- 5.3.2 The sample should include a selection from each classification, all Firsts / Distinctions, borderlines (+/-2%) and fails. It is expected that the total sample of work would typically be no less than 10% of the total, or a minimum of 10 items of assessed work. For programmes with larger cohorts, Chairs of Boards of Examiners shall liaise directly with External Examiners to decide on an appropriate sample. The process of internal moderation that has been employed in marking the work should be set out clearly for the External Examiner.
- 5.3.3 Programme Level External Examiners may also be asked to attend exhibitions, degree shows, performances etc. where appropriate.
- 5.3.4 It is emphasised that External Examiners must not be used to second mark but are asked to provide an independent overview of the consistency of approaches to assessment. As such the standards of Internal Examiners'

marking are of more concern than the individual marks attained by each student. If an External Examiner considers that there is any inappropriate marking for a particular element of assessment, they may request that the marks for each student should all be reconsidered and the marks for individual students may not be amended other than in the context of such a reconsideration of the entire unit.

- 5.3.5 The Chair of the Programme Board of Examiners for a subject area will determine the distribution of duties between External Examiners.

## **5.4 Attendance at Boards of Examiners**

- 5.4.1 It is a requirement that Programme Level and College level External Examiners should attend Board of Examiners meetings for the purpose of recommending an award of Goldsmiths or of the University of London. All Boards are convened online. No qualification should be awarded without participation in the examining process by at least one External Examiner. Decisions relating to finalists and other students can be taken either by action of the Chair of the Board of Examiners, provided the prior approval of the External Examiner(s) has been obtained or at the meeting of the Board as appropriate.
- 5.4.2 Chairs of Boards of Examiners should ensure that dates for meetings are arranged at the earliest opportunity, if possible, on the occasion of the previous year's meeting, and that External Examiners are informed promptly of the time and date of meetings.
- 5.4.3 If, because of illness or accident, no Programme Level External Examiner can be present at a meeting of a Board of Examiners, the meeting may proceed if all of the following conditions are met:
- The External Examiner has completed all moderating duties;
  - The External Examiner has presented a written report by the time of the start of the meeting;
  - The External Examiner has agreed that the meeting may proceed with these conditions in their absence;
  - Any decision which would, in the presence of the External Examiner, have been referred to them, should be deferred to Chair's action to enable the Chair to speak with the External Examiner at a later point.

## **5.5 Conduct of Boards of Examiners**

- 5.5.1 The full description of the regulations governing the operation of Boards of Examiners may be found within the Regulations for Taught Programmes and the Guidance and Procedures for the Conduct of Boards of Examiners contained within the Goldsmiths Academic Manual <https://gold.ac.uk/gam/taught-programmes/examination-boards/>.
- 5.5.2 The Chair of the Board of Examiners should provide information and guidance, but the decisions are taken by the Board as a whole. If there is a controversial issue, the different viewpoints should be heard, and if necessary, a vote taken, in which External Examiners should each have a

single vote, along with all other voting members. The Chair has a casting vote. If External Examiners wish to comment during the course of a Board, they should always be allowed to do so, but in any event they should be invited to make comments at the end, and thanked for their work.

- 5.5.3 In rare instances, an External Examiner may be unwilling to endorse the decision of the Board. In such circumstances every attempt should be made to resolve the disagreement through discussion. If it proves impossible to reach agreement, the Chair of the Board should refer the matter to the Head of Quality who will attempt to negotiate an agreement. Should this prove to be unsuccessful then the Pro-Warden Academic should be asked to investigate the disagreement. Notwithstanding the desirability of obtaining the External Examiners' endorsement, the decisions of the Board are taken by the Board as a whole and will remain valid so long as agreed by the majority of members.

## **5.6 Report**

- 5.6.1 All External Examiners are required to make annual reports on the form designed for this purpose, which should be submitted electronically, within three weeks of the Board of Examiners, to the Quality Office. They are free to make any comments they wish.
- 5.6.2 External Examiners should be aware that comments they write in these reports are routinely made available to student representatives on Departmental Boards and can be viewed electronically on the V.L.E. by the wider Goldsmiths community. Consequently, External Examiners should not mention individual students and staff in reports or include any other comments from which individual candidates are likely to be identifiable (e.g. use of a student ID number or reference to a particular individual project title).
- 5.6.3 In particular, Programme Level External Examiners are asked to confirm and report on:
- Whether the academic standards set for the awards, or part thereof, are appropriate and student performance comparable with that in other UK higher education institution(s);
  - Whether the assessment processes rigorously and fairly measure student achievement and whether they have been conducted within the regulations and guidance;
  - Good practice they have identified or opportunities to improve the quality of learning opportunities provided to students with particular reference to:
    - Programme curriculum and structure;
    - Teaching practices;
    - The design and structure of assessment.
  - Report on general administrative procedures and the extent to which comments made in previous reports have been taken on board.
- 5.6.4 College Level External Examiners are specifically asked to confirm that:

- Organisational arrangements of the of the School Board of Examiners allowed them and the Board to carry out their duties effectively and that the Boards were conducted and decisions reached in accordance with the Goldsmiths regulations;
  - The considerations of the Board in respect of students were dealt with in accordance with Goldsmiths Regulations;
  - That overall academic standards of awards were maintained throughout all decisions taken by the School Board;
  - Any other comments they might have in relation to the operation of the School Boards.
- 5.6.5 All External Examiners are asked to give an overview of their term of office as part of their report in their final year of appointment.
- 5.6.6 In exceptional cases, if External Examiners have serious concerns about the academic standards or quality of provision or wish to raise an issue of a confidential nature, they may send a separate, confidential report directly to the Warden.

## **5.7 Payment**

- 5.7.1 External Examiners should not be paid any expenses, other than travelling expenses, prior to receipt of their annual report.
- 5.7.2 Goldsmiths will reimburse reasonable travel and subsistence expenses incurred by External Examiners in connection with assessment or moderation of student work which cannot be carried out remotely within the limits set out in its Expenses, Travel and Subsistence Policy.

## **5.8 Other duties**

- 5.8.1 As syllabuses are regularly updated, the views of current Programme Level External Examiners are sought as part of the process of approval of amendments to taught modules and programmes. This may include providing comment on major programme amendments, articulation arrangements and changes to modes of delivery and assessment in the case of an emergency situation, as set out in Goldsmiths' Exceptional Academic Regulations.

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# **6 Consideration of External Examiners' Reports**

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## **6.1 Annotation and Departmental Consideration**

- 6.1.1 Following receipt of the reports, they are read and annotated in the Quality Office to highlight comments or suggestions to which a specific response is required, along with examples of good practice. Programme Level External Examiner reports are then shared with the Head of Department, Programme Convenor and Chair of Board of Examiners of the relevant academic department, whilst School Level External Examiner reports are shared with

the Chair of the School Board of Examiners, for consideration and response.

- 6.1.2 In addition to those areas of the annotated report which have either been identified as requiring a response or as being good practice on **which** the department may wish to expand upon for wider circulation, the response may also comment on any other aspect of the report, correct any factual errors or misunderstandings and should thank outgoing External Examiners for their service. It is important that the dialogue with the External Examiner is undertaken in a constructive manner.
- 6.1.3 It may be decided to discuss the report in person with the External Examiner. However, there should always be a formal written response to each report.
- 6.1.4 The response to Programme Level External Examiner reports is normally made by the Programme Convenor / Co-ordinator though it may also come from either the Chair of the Board of Examiners, but in any event must be authorised by the Head of Department. The response to School Level External Examiner reports may be from either the Chair or the Deputy Chair of the School Board of Examiners.
- 6.1.5 Responses are then returned to the Quality Office where they are read in conjunction with the reports to ensure that any issues which require immediate action or clarification are addressed. The report and response are then sent back to the External Examiner.
- 6.1.6 External Examiners' Reports should be considered by Departmental Learning and Teaching Committees and should form a part of the documentation used for Departmental Development Planning and Programme Reapproval.

## **6.2 Institutional Consideration**

- 6.2.1 All External Examiner reports for the previous four years are made available to staff and students on the [Goldsmiths External Examiners Archive](#).
- 6.2.2 The Quality Assurance Manager prepares an annual digest of themes arising across all reports received during the previous academic session for consideration by the College's Quality and Standards Committee.