Guide for External Examiners in History of Art: BA

There are two external examiners for the undergraduate programme in History of Art, covering the BAs in Single Subject History of Art, combined English/History of Art, and combined History/History of Art. The ‘early’ external examiner covers the approximate period late antiquity to the Baroque, and the ‘late’ external examiner covers the approximate period 18th century to the present. External examiners are normally appointed for a period of three academic years, though they may in special circumstances be asked to serve for a fourth year.

The University sends general guidance notes to all external examiners. A full explanation of the department’s undergraduate teaching programme and methods of assessment can be found in the Undergraduate Handbook, the Written Statement on Assessment Policies and Procedures, and the Academic’s Handbook and Calendar (all revised yearly). These will be sent to external examiners each year during the summer vacation or at the beginning of the academic year, together with the timetable of examined work. External examiners should also receive copies of the previous year’s examiners’ reports other than their own, and minutes of Teaching Committee or Board of Studies meetings where their recommendations are considered.

External examiners will primarily liaise with the departmental Examinations Officer (EO) and the Chair of the Board of Studies. External examiners are also free to contact other internal examiners directly if they wish to discuss specific cases.

General role of external examiners
The University of York views external examiners’ role as overseers of departmental assessment policies and procedures. They assist in evaluating fairness, consistency, parity with other institutions, and appropriate judgments at the borderlines. Externals are not generally expected to act as third markers, though they may be asked to adjudicate in certain cases (for further details see below). Their comments on any aspect of the department’s assessment system are welcomed and will be considered. The department’s Board of Studies and the Board of Examiners as a whole (external plus internal examiners) constitute the final decision-making bodies on assessment matters within the department.

Responsibilities
Each year the EO will select examples from four main sets of undergraduate examinations to send to external examiners, together with a full list of marks and the relevant module booklets:

- long essays in week 5 or 6 of the Autumn term (approximately mid-November)
- slide tests plus 48-hour open papers in week 5 or 6 of the Spring term (approximately mid-February)
- 3-hour closed exams in week 5 or 6 of the Summer Term (approximately end of May)
- Dissertations and Bridge Essays in the second half of the Summer Term leading up to the Final Exam Board in Week 10 (approximately mid-June)
Externals will be expected to review the internal marking and adjudicate in certain cases (see below). Externals are normally given about two weeks to return the work. For Dissertations and Bridge Essays, in a few cases (particularly for those students who may be applying for AHRC or other funding) externals may be asked to write brief comments; otherwise they are simply expected to review the marks.

During the year, external examiners will also be asked to review upcoming examination questions, and they may be asked to advise or comment on proposed additions or changes to the undergraduate teaching programme.

The Final Exam Board at which student degrees are classified normally spans two days in Week 10 of the Summer Term. The external examiners participate fully in the review of each candidate, and they may be asked to review individual scripts of borderline candidates. Their opinion will particularly be sought in cases where special circumstances (such as medical or personal difficulties) apply. If a student is recommended by the Board for a first with distinction, external examiners may be asked to review that candidate’s full run of exam scripts and write a brief statement in support of the recommendation.

The external examiners will be invited to give a verbal report on the department’s assessment processes at the Final Exam Board, and the University requires an end-of-year written report using a set form (full details are in the University’s Guidance Notes for External Examiners, which will be sent by the University administration).

Role of external examiners in marking
The EO will select two different types of examined work to send to external examiners. First, there will be scripts on which the external examiner’s judgment is explicitly called for. These will be cases where the internal examiners disagreed on a mark, viewed the script as a borderline case, or requested that the external examiner review their decision. In these cases the EO will state clearly what is asked of the external examiner. In addition, when externals review first-class work, particularly dissertations, they may wish to suggest adjustments to the mark of each one in comparison with other first-class work and in the light of practices at other institutions. All first-class work will normally be included in the selection of scripts sent to externals.

External examiners should note that x9 marks are borderline marks. All other marks, up to and including x8 marks, are not considered as borderlines: thus 68 is a top 2i, and its use implies a judgement that it cannot be raised to a First. There are two circumstances where an x9 mark might be given by internal markers:

Borderline cases: Where there is good reason to consider a candidate’s work borderline, i.e. possessing some of the significant qualities we attribute to the class above, this will be signalled by an x9 mark. It should only be used where both internal markers agree that the work contains significant elements of both the lower and the higher class.

Class disagreements: Where there is an unresolved disagreement over the class between the internal examiners, the co-ordinated mark should be left blank and the case referred to the Examinations Officer who will consider further with the markers. In such a case an x9 mark may be awarded.
Externals will always be asked to look at x9 marks, and they will be notified whether each case is a borderline or a class disagreement. The external then has discretion to lower the mark, or raise it, or retain it at x9. If the external raises or lowers the mark, his/her judgment will normally be considered as final. If the external examiner decides to retain the mark at x9, it becomes a genuine borderline and can be reopened at the Final Exam Board. No other marks should be reopened at the Final Exam Board (although see the department’s Written Statement on Assessment for consideration of borderline candidates with exceptional medical or personal circumstances). If an external examiner is asked to review an x9 script at a Final Exam Board, his/her judgment on whether to raise the mark to the higher class or not will be considered final.

The second type of work that will be sent to external examiners will be ‘random’ examples of marking that span the range of the mark scale within each module. Their purpose is to serve as a representative example of the type of work which the department evaluates at different points in the marking scale (i.e. the type of script that we would generally mark as mid-2.2, the type of script that we would generally mark as low 2.1, etc.). Externals should form a general opinion on the marking of such scripts, with particular regard to consistency, fairness, parity with other institutions, and appropriate judgments at the margins (x8 and x0 marks). They may also use these scripts as comparisons against which to judge x9 cases.

Externals are not, however, expected to change the marks on these types of scripts. If such scripts raise concerns for an external examiner about the consistency and equity of internal marking, these concerns should generally be raised with the department through the EO and/or in the end-of-year report. If an external believes that the mark of any individual script is inappropriate and recommends that it be changed, s/he must review all of the scripts within that module which fell within that mark range (in accordance with the advice of the University’s Standing Committee on Assessment). This is particularly important for recommended changes between degree classes. For example, if a script has been agreed at 61 and the external examiner recommends that the mark should be changed to 58, s/he will be asked to review all the scripts in that module that received marks of 58, 59, 60, or 61 and recommend whether these other marks should also be adjusted. If all such scripts have not been included in the selection sent to the external for review, the external should request them from the EO. External examiners should be aware that their role in marking such scripts is considered advisory and that all marks are subject to final decision by the full Board of Examiners.

External examiners should also be aware that all students from class years 2004/5 and later will be given a mark for their seminar performance in each History of Art module. For Combined English/History of Art and History/History of Art students, these marks will constitute 10% of the overall module mark (the written examination constituting the other 90%). For Single Subject History/History of Art students, the seminar performance marks of Terms 1-8 will be weighted together to constitute one out of the eight examination units of the degree (weighted at one-half). These marks, together with their rationale, are recorded in the end-of-term reports that each student receives from the tutor. Although these reports are not routinely sent to external examiners, they are welcome to request access to them at any time.