Guide for External Examiners in History of Art: MA

There is one external examiner for the taught MA in History of Art. The term of appointment normally runs for three years, from January to December to take account of the marking cycle of the MA programme. In special circumstances an external examiner may 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 MA teaching programme and methods of assessment can be found in the Guide for MA Students, the Written Statement on Assessment Policies and Procedures, and the Academic’s Handbook and Calendar (all revised yearly). These will be sent to the external examiner each year during the summer vacation or at the beginning of the academic year, together with the timetable of examined work. The external examiner should also receive copies of the minutes of Graduate Committee or Board of Studies meetings where their recommendations are considered, and during their first year they should receive a copy of the previous external examiner’s last report.

The external examiner will primarily liaise with the departmental Examinations Officer (EO) and with the Graduate Chair. The external examiner is also free to contact other internal examiners directly if s/he wishes to discuss specific cases.

General role of external examiner
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 three main sets of MA examined work examinations will be sent to the external examiner, together with relevant module booklets:

- first assessed essays in week 4 or 5 of the Spring Term (approximately early February)
- second and third assessed essays in week 5 or 6 of the Summer Term (approximately late March)
- dissertations in week 4 or 5 of the Autumn Term (approximately early November)

The external will be expected to review the internal marking and may be asked to adjudicate in certain cases. Normally the external examiner is asked to review essays within 1 ½-2 weeks, dissertations within 2-3 weeks.
During the year, the external examiner may also be asked to advise or comment on proposed additions or changes to the MA teaching programme.

The Final Exam Board at which student degrees are classified normally takes place in Week 8 of the Autumn Term (approximately mid-November). The external examiner participates fully in the review of each candidate, and his/her opinion will particularly be sought in borderline cases or where special circumstances (such as medical or personal difficulties) apply. Wherever possible the EO should notify the external examiner of such cases in advance, at the point of reviewing the Dissertation marks.

The external examiner 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 examiner in marking

The EO will send to the external examiner all MA work written for History of Art modules, together with a list of all marks (including marks received by History of Art students taking modules in other departments). The external may be requested to attend particularly to certain scripts, such as distinctions, borderlines and problematic cases; in addition, s/he will generally be expected to survey a selection of scripts across the full range of the mark scale. If the first and second internal markers have been unable to agree on a mark, the EO may ask the external examiner for a decision, in which case his/her judgment will be considered final. Otherwise, the external examiner is not normally expected to act as a third marker, but rather to review and advise on internal marking, with particular regard to consistency, fairness, parity with other institutions, and appropriate judgments at the borderlines. S/he is invited to give written comments on the marking of individual scripts and/or on the internal marking more generally.

The external may recommend that internal markers reconsider an agreed mark. If the 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). 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. External examiners should be aware that their role in remarking such scripts is considered advisory and that all marks are subject to final decision by the full Board of Examiners.

External examiners should bear in mind when wording their comments that although we do not routinely release externals’ reports to candidates, under the Data Protection Act candidates may request access to externals’ comments that relate to their work.