



LSHTM Academic Manual 2023-24

Chapter 5: External Expertise

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Annual Review of the Academic Manual

The LSHTM Academic Manual was introduced in 2019-20 bringing together all the academic regulations and procedures which constitute LSHTM's framework for quality and standards for credit-bearing taught provision, research degrees and special programmes. The Academic Manual consists of 11 Chapters all of which are reviewed annually and published as separate documents on LSHTM website together with a summary of amendments. With the exception of most minor editorial changes (e.g. typos, formatting and spelling or grammatical corrections), all revisions and amendments are noted and approved by Senate before the start of each academic year.

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5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 **External expertise:** The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) engages in a variety of sources of external peer expertise to provide independent and impartial comment and input to a programme's design, management, monitoring, evaluation and review.
- 5.1.2 **External Examiners:** The External Examiner is an independent and impartial adviser with experience and knowledge of UK HE sector practices. They will report on the academic standards set by the institution, confirm that sector benchmarks have been met and that the process of student assessment has been conducted appropriately. All External Examiners to LSHTM are asked to confirm that threshold standards set for the award(s) are consistent with the [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-awarding Bodies](#) (FHEQ), the OfS' Sector Recognised Standards and any relevant [Subject Benchmark Statements](#). The External Examiner verifies the assessment process and assures overall standards rather than seeking to judge individual student cases. See section 5.2 of this chapter for further detail.
- 5.1.3 **External Reviewers for Validation and Periodic Review:** External Reviewers are employed to participate on Validation and Periodic Review Panels. As a panel member they will use their subject expertise and HE experience to consider the health of a current programme (periodic review) or a new programme proposal (validation). This will be completed through a review of programme related documentation and data, including feedback from students, alumni, prospective employers and External Examiners. They will provide an independent view of the ways in which the programme meets sector-wide subject benchmarks and degree award characteristics. *Detail on the Validation and Periodic Review Procedures can be found in [Chapter 3, Programme Management, Monitoring and Evaluation of the LSHTM Academic Manual](#).*
- 5.1.4 **External Advisors:** Academic staff are encouraged to engage with external advisors during new programme development. Academic advisors will offer advice and guidance on developments in learning and teaching practices across the HE sector. Subject and Industry specialist advisors will offer insight into the current needs and latest developments within the field. There is no formal method to appoint and recruit

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external advisors and should thus be treated as an informal consultation practice.

5.1.5 **Alumni voice:** Gathering views from past students is an important part of the programme periodic review procedure. Alumni can also provide valuable information for the design and development of new programmes or modules. Academic staff are encouraged to gather feedback from alumni in surveys and forums.

5.2 External Examiners

5.2.1 An External Examiner to LSHTM is responsible for:

- confirming that the structure, content and academic standards and teaching of LSHTM programmes is comparable with national standards;
- evaluating and ensuring that there is fairness in the LSHTM assessment processes;
- providing feedback on the quality and validity of assessments at the design stage, and ensuring their suitability for the level of study and the learning outcomes being tested.

5.2.2 The External Examiner is full member of the relevant Programme Board of Examiners and should refer to the Board's Terms of Reference (ToR) in [Chapter 10, Academic Governance of the LSHTM Academic Manual](#) for an overview of its official duty.

5.2.3 The External Examiner duties will include:

- providing feedback on Summative assessment tasks, marking criteria and/or model answers that lead to the award; the programme structure and curriculum and any proposed changes;
- reviewing a representative sample of assessed work from the top, middle and bottom of the grading range; plus a full portfolio of assessed work for any students who have failed the module assessment.
- attending the final Examination Board meeting to confirm grades, ratify awards;

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- signing candidate results sheets (REP5 or ER1) directly after results have been agreed at each final Exam Board. These will be used for formal notification of results to students.
- producing a full written annual report within **four weeks** of the final Exam Board meeting.

Engaging with Students

5.2.4 External Examiners may request to meet with a selection of students to help to confirm aspects of programme quality and the standard of students. If a programme has more than one External Examiner, they should be invited to meet with students together.

Assessment Sampling and External Oversight

(For the full procedure please see the section on External Oversight in [Chapter 8a, Intensive Postgraduate Taught Degree Academic Regulations](#) or [Chapter 8b, Distance Learning Postgraduate Taught Degree Academic Regulations](#) of the LSHTM Academic Manual)

5.2.5 The purpose of the external overview of marking performed by an External Examiner is to give LSHTM confidence in the appropriateness and consistency of its assessment process, and assure that standards are in line with LSHTM and national benchmarks.

5.2.6 A sample must consist of at least six pieces of work for each module assessment task and final projects, two each from the top, middle and bottom of the range of grades. External Examiners will be given access to all distinction-level and fail-graded assessed work or project reports. For smaller programmes all assessed work and projects are often made available.

5.2.7 Ahead of the final Exam Board meeting, the Programme Administration Office will provide External Examiners with a sample of assessed module work. External Examiners are expected to review a sample in order to gain a clear understanding of programme content, marking standards and student attainment. This is for information purposes as the results for modules are ratified at the relevant Exam Board following internal moderation and cannot be raised or lowered.

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- 5.2.8 *Although recommendations of External Examiners will be given due weight, they do not have the authority to change marks unilaterally.*
- 5.2.9 Details on External Oversight can be found in [Chapter 8a](#) (for Intensive masters programmes) or [Chapter 8b](#) (for distance learning programmes) of the LSHTM Academic Manual.

Attendance at Exam Boards

- 5.2.10 The External Examiner is a full member of the relevant Programme Board of Examiners and should refer to the Board's Terms of Reference (TOR) for an overview of its official duty. The External Examiner is expected to attend the Board of Examiners' meetings where student awards for the relevant programme are ratified.
- 5.2.11 Exam Boards may be conducted in either a physical or online setting or a combination of both, as determined by the Chair. If an External Examiner cannot attend the Board of Examiners in person they can attend virtually, providing that the appropriate equipment is available at both locations.
- 5.2.12 If the External Examiner is not able to attend the meeting in person or virtually due to short term issues (maximum of 10 working days), then the Chair of the Exam Board will postpone the meeting and reschedule (within 5 working days of their return to work). If there is concern that these arrangements would be detrimental to students graduating at their expected time, the matter should be raised with the Head of Registry.
- 5.2.13 In the case where there is more than one External Examiner for the programme then the meeting may go ahead as scheduled providing that the second External Examiner has reviewed an appropriate sample and is able to verify the standards for the cohort in whole.
- 5.2.14 If the reason for absence is medium or long term (longer than 10 days) and there is no second External Examiner for the programme, the following arrangements would apply:
- 5.2.15 Where there is only one External Examiner allocated to a programme, the Chair of the Board of Examiners may seek permission from the Associate Dean of Education (Quality, Academic Standards, and

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Collaborative Provision) to reallocate duties to a substitute External Examiner (listed in procedural order):

- a. First, attempt to source a substitute External Examiner from LSHTM programmes with a comparable specialism.
- b. Secondly, attempt to source a substitute External Examiner from any other master's programme at LSHTM to provide a generalist view of quality and academic standards within the broad subject discipline of healthcare.
- c. Thirdly, the School will seek to recruit an external reviewer to act as a temporary external examiner;
- d. In exceptional circumstances (e.g. illness, epidemic, pandemic, terrorism, acts of God (extreme weather), disaster, or industrial action) if a substitute External Examiner cannot be sourced from the existing pool of external examiners employed by the School, then an external senior professional services lead in this area should attend for the purpose of ensuring that due diligence has occurred, and will be sourced by the QAS department.
- e. If it is not possible to secure an external senior professional services lead in the area of quality and standards then the Head or representative of Quality and Academic Standards at LSHTM will attend the Board to ensure due diligence has occurred.

N.B If the substitute External Examiner has not been part of the sampling process they must have the opportunity to review all necessary documentation prior to the meeting to be able to confirm that academic standards are appropriate and at the correct level.

- 5.2.16 As a full member of the Board of Examiners the External Examiner will be expected to be part of the discussion at the meeting, ensuring that the decisions made are in line with the LSHTM's regulations and Sector benchmarks. The External Examiner will be expected to make recommendations to the Board of Examiners on borderline cases (including but not limited to, students with approved Extenuating Circumstances).

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Submission of an annual report

- 5.2.17 External Examiners are required to submit a detailed written annual report electronically to pgtexamining@lshtm.ac.uk within four weeks of the main examination board. The template report form can be found [here](#). LSHTM will share the annual examiner reports on LSHTM's staff/student Intranet page for enhancement purposes. LSHTM reserves the right to redact information within External Examiner reports prior to publication, solely on the grounds of staff or student confidentiality, or inappropriate comments relating to LSHTM policies, regulations or procedures that are outside the remit of the External Examiner. External Examiners would be informed if any such amendments were to be made to their reports prior to publication.
- 5.2.18 All External Examiner reports are forwarded by the Quality & Academic Standards office (QAS) to the faculty and the Associate Dean of Education (Quality, Academic Standards & Collaborative Provision). An LSHTM-wide report is produced to form part of the institution's annual monitoring.
- 5.2.19 The Programme Director (PD) will also draft a formal response to the External Examiner, outlining the actions taken in response to any recommendations, and send directly to the External Examiner including the QAS Team.
- 5.2.20 The PD will use the External Examiner Report as one of the key sources to inform their Annual Programme Director's Review (APDR).

Raising serious concerns

- 5.2.21 External Examiners are advised to raise matters of significant concern with the Associate Dean of Education (Quality, Academic Standards & Collaborative Provision), who will review the issues and where necessary refer to the LSHTM Executive Team. LSHTM will provide a considered and timely response to any confidential report received, outlining any actions it will be taking as a result.

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- 5.2.22 Alternatively, the External Examiner has the right to raise any serious issue directly to LSHTM's Pro-Director (Education) or Director.

Induction

- 5.2.23 Exam Board Chairs will provide an initial instruction on the programme and LSHTM regulations as part of a new External Examiner's induction. Additionally, the Exam Board Chair will provide an annual refresher to inform the External Examiner of any changes. For distance learning programmes, the University of London Worldwide (UoLW) has delegated induction responsibility to the PD.
- 5.2.24 New External Examiners will be asked to complete an [External Examiner Induction Checklist](#) and return it to QAS. All External Examiners will have to opportunity to comment on induction and provision of information within their annual report.

Termination of appointment

- 5.2.25 In certain circumstances, it may be necessary for the LSHTM to terminate an External Examiner's appointment prematurely. These circumstances might include, but are not limited to: failure to attend an examination board without having had alternative arrangements agreed by the Associate Dean of Education (Quality, Academic Standards & Collaborative Provision), failure to provide a complete annual report within four weeks following the examination board; the emergence of a conflict of interest; breaching confidentiality with regard to personal information of students; unsatisfactory performance/conduct, or bringing the University into disrepute.
- 5.2.26 On occasion, a programme of study may suspend recruitment or close the provision entirely. In these circumstances the External Examiner will be consulted as part of the Programme Suspension and Discontinuation procedure to ensure the appropriate teach-out plan and examination procedure continues whilst students are still expected to complete.

5.3 External Examiner Nomination and Approval Procedure

- 5.3.1 *For the appointment criteria see section 5.5.*
- 5.3.2 *External Examiners who do not meet all of the appointment criteria may be appointed provided they are part of a larger External Examiner Team who collectively offer complementary expertise to meet all the criteria for the programme.*
- 5.3.3 The procedure for nominating External Examiners is the formal responsibility of the Exam Board Chair, but they will liaise with the relevant Programme Director (PD) to identify an appropriate External Examiner. The Quality & Academic Standards office (QAS) will inform the Exam Board Chair when a new External Examiner is required. This will be on the approval of a new programme or 12 months in advance of the expiry of the tenure of the existing Examiner, unless an External Examiner resigns mid-year.
- 5.3.4 Exam Board Chairs should approach potential External Examiners informally in the first instance. External Examiners will be provided with enough information on LSHTM and the programme to enable them to make an informed decision whether to accept nomination. Members of Programme Teams and the Dean / Faculty Postgraduate Taught Committee might be consulted informally if desired, but it is not necessary for proposed nominations to be considered at full Programme Committee or Faculty Postgraduate Taught Committee meetings.
- 5.3.5 Exam Board Chairs will adhere to the External Examiner Appointment Criteria as set out in section 5.5 of this chapter before approaching potential External Examiners. The nominated External Examiner must ensure that they raise any known conflict of interest as set out in 5.5 prior to appointment.
- 5.3.6 Approval of nominations is the delegated responsibility of Senate Postgraduate Taught Committee (SPGTC). QAS provides professional advice. After having obtained an agreement to act in principle from the proposed External Examiner, Exam Board Chairs will initiate the formal nomination and approval procedure. This is by completing in full

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LSHTM's External Examiner Nomination and CV Forms and returning them to QAS (pgtexaming@lshtm.ac.uk).

- 5.3.7 An additional section of the nomination form will need to be completed for distance learning (DL) Programmes, and submitted to UoLW for final approval.
- 5.3.8 Nominations will be considered and approved by the Associate Dean of Education (Quality, Academic Standards & Collaborative Provision) on behalf of the SPGTC, with reference to the appointment criteria and list of conflict of interests. A report of nominations and appointments will be submitted to each SPGTC throughout the academic year.
- 5.3.9 QAS send the appointment letter along with the terms of appointment to new and approved External Examiners. They will be directed to the [External Examiner Induction Checklist](#) as well as relevant regulations, policies and guidance.
- 5.3.10 External Examiners for distance learning programmes will receive information relating to their appointment, including the appointment letter, conduct of exams and the expense and fee claims information, directly from the University of London.
- 5.3.11 External Examiners will be appointed for four consecutive academic years. In exceptional cases tenure may be extended for one further academic year providing a rationale found acceptable by the SPGTC is supplied by the Exam Board Chair.

N.B. If there are delays in identifying a new External, this should not delay the main Board nomination procedure and appointments can be followed up later in-year. However, Chairs are expected to ensure they have at least one External appointed from as early as possible each year.

- 5.3.12 An extension into a fifth year will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, for example, if a programme is due to be discontinued, it may be inappropriate to make a replacement nomination for one year only. Requests for extension to an External Examiner's tenure must be made on the standard extension request form with a rationale,

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to the Associate Dean of Education (Quality, Academic Standards & Collaborative Provision).

- 5.3.13 Any amendment to an External Examiner's terms of approval (such as a proposed reallocation of duties, or other revision of responsibilities from that stated in an examiner's approval letter) requires formal approval from QAS who will act in consultation with the Associate Dean of Education (Quality, Academic Standards & Collaborative Provision).
- 5.3.14 QAS holds and maintains an External Examiner database which contains contact details, length of contract and payment details for all External Examiners, which is accessible to QAS. QAS monitors the appointments procedure and notifies the SPGTC of progress regarding all External Examiner appointments.

5.4 External Reviewer for Periodic Review and Validation

Identifying and Appointing an External Reviewer

- 5.4.1 Finding the most appropriate External Reviewer is key to a productive periodic review or validation. External Reviewers must be in a position to provide an impartial and independent comment on the programme. They must have knowledge and experience of teaching and learning at the level of programme under review, as well as relevant subject expertise. The appointee should be UK-based, with an understanding of the UK higher education system, and may be from another UK HEI that offers what is considered a potential 'competitor' programme. Programme Directors (PDs) are encouraged to liaise with QAS to seek advice on suitability of candidates and to ensure they meet the prescribed criteria.
- 5.4.2 As a guide, the appointment criteria, as set out in section 5.5 of this chapter should be adhered to, however, in specialised subject areas, it may be very difficult to find suitable experts without links to LSHTM. In these exceptional cases, advice must be sought from the Associate Dean of Education (Quality, Academic Standards & Collaborative Provision).
- 5.4.3 Payment of fees to the External Reviewer will be made once the report has been received by LSHTM (via the Quality & Academic Standards

office [QAS]) and deemed to be of suitable standard. External Reviewers must be able to demonstrate the Right to Work in the UK prior to any work being undertaken.

- 5.4.4 **Appointment:** PDs are responsible for identifying and approaching potential External Reviewers at the start of the process. Nominations must be submitted to QAS in the autumn term of the review/validation year to ensure that the panel meeting dates can be agreed with advance notice. The appointment will be formally approved by the Programme and Module Review Committee.
- 5.4.5 In addition, distance learning appointments will be made in consultation with the University of London Worldwide (UoLW). The External Reviewer appointed may or may not have prior close experience of distance-based or e-learning provision at postgraduate level. If they do not, then it may again be appropriate to appoint a second External Reviewer with such expertise, even if they are not a subject specialist. As an alternative, a member of staff with appropriate expertise from either the UoLW or any University of London college (including LSHTM) may be co-opted—*e.g.* a learning technologies adviser.

5.5 Appointment Criteria for External Examiners and Reviewers

- 5.5.1 External Examiners/Reviewers must have appropriate evidence of the following:
- a. Knowledge and understanding of UK sector-agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality.
 - b. Competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof.
 - c. Relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate.
 - d. Competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures.

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- e. Sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline
- f. To be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers.
- g. Familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed.
- h. Fluency in English.
- i. Meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.
- j. Awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula.
- k. Competence and experience in enhancement of the student learning experience.

5.5.2 LSHTM will not appoint anyone in the following categories or circumstances as an External Examiners/Reviewers; individuals must inform the Quality & Academic Standards office if they are or become:

- a. A member of a governing body or committee of either LSHTM or a collaborative partner institution involved in the programme; or a current employee of either LSHTM or a collaborative partner institution involved in the programme.
- b. Engaged in a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme.
- c. Required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme.
- d. In a present or likely future position to significantly influence the future of students on the programme (prior to graduation).
- e. 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.
- f. Former staff or students of LSHTM, unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the External Examiner have completed their programme(s).
- g. Responsible for cognate programmes at another institution for which an LSHTM staff member is External Examiner.

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- h. A member of the same department in the same institution as another current External Examiner for the programme, or another External Examiner who has just stepped down from the programme.
- i. A member of staff at a member institution of the University of London. Such individuals may be appointed as Intercollegiate Examiners in addition to the External Examiner, but not in place of the External Examiner.
- j. A nominee who already holds two or more external examiner appointments that would overlap with the LSHTM appointment.