



## About Kingston University

Institution Size	18,500 students	Student Record System	SITS
Exam Board Structure	Structured by function	Virtual Learning Environment	Canvas

## Project Overview

Kingston University undertook a two year project (2020-2022) to streamline their approach to exam boards, which were previously delivered through module exam boards and programme exam boards. Feedback from the academic and external examiner community signaled that the module boards were very time consuming but did not add a lot of value. Kingston wanted to find more effective, flexible and meaningful ways to carry out the necessary assessment activity and free up academic and external examiner time for enhancement activity, which benefits course development, and in turn the student experience.

The module exam board was replaced with a newly developed online mark ratification area, and the programme exam board retained. To support the change, the external examiner model was also revised.

The new approach delivered the following benefits:

- More flexibility in how core assessment activity is carried out
- Academic time saved, reduced meeting burden
- Removal of duplication
- Reduced administrative burden
- Making the most of external examiner expertise and time
- Benefits for quality assurance and enhancement processes

**Important:** While the new approach gave more flexibility in how and when activity was completed, it did not eliminate any of the core activity which had to be undertaken.

### Contact Information

For any questions or clarifications, please reach out to:

**Michaela Pittom**  
michaela.pittom@kingston.ac.uk

# Delivering the change

A task group was formed to explore different exam board structures and external examiner models.

## Online ratification of module marks

The task group undertook detailed sector research, which included speaking to institutions who had already made changes. A detailed mapping exercise of assessment activities and timelines was undertaken to determine if a new exam board structure would be logistically feasible within Kingston's academic calendar and framework.

The group consulted widely within the institution and decided to adopt a structure with a single programme exam board that would be supported by technology to confirm module marks.

The group worked closely with Information and Technology Systems colleagues to create a function in E-Vision where module leaders could:

- Check and confirm module marks
- Confirm if there had been any assessment irregularities
- Confirm the subject external examiner audit of sample student work and upload their report

## Implementing the change

An extensive communications plan for staff and external examiners was launched prior to implementation. The initial project timeline was one year but an additional year was taken to allow for extensive system development and testing, which involved an academic user group. This ensured the system was intuitive and eased staff into a new system and way of working.

The implementation (January 2022) was intentionally launched prior to the peak exam board period (June-August). This enabled any lessons learned from smaller boards to be applied prior to the peak exam board period and formed the 'getting single tier ready' actions for staff.

## Key reflections

1. **Starting small** before the peak exam period was beneficial.
2. **Allow sufficient time** to implement the project and changes.
3. **Milestones and deadlines** for key activities, including module ratification, helped ensure timely delivery and provided a sense of formality while keeping visibility.
4. **Compression was not possible** as core activities required sufficient time to be carried out.
5. **Detailed mapping** helped preserve pockets of time for marking, moderation and subject external examiner scrutiny.
6. **Escalation plans** are important for outstanding ratifications past the deadline.

## Institutional external examiners

Different models of external examiner engagement were explored to support the change of exam board structure. Sector research and consultation was undertaken and it was decided that there should be two separate types of externals (subject and institution type) with specific remits.

- Subject External Examiners would not longer attend exam boards and would use the time saved to focus on quality and enhancement activities.
- Institutional External Examiners would attend programme exam boards and provide external oversight of exam board decision-making. Appointments to this new group of institutional external examiners consisted of senior academic and professional service staff (Associate Deans, Academic Registrars) with extensive exam board experience.