



# **EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' HANDBOOK**

Academic Quality Unit  
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## Foreword

The External Examiner system is fundamental to the University's key aim of providing an outstanding student experience. It provides essential insight into existing practices from a unique perspective and helps the University to ensure that awards delivered in its name meet threshold academic standards.

The aim of this Handbook is to ensure that policy, process and practice is transparent to all those involved, including University and partner organisation academic and administrative staff as well as External Examiners themselves. This process therefore aims to encapsulate the way the University interprets and implements the Advice and Guidance of the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) related to External Expertise.

In particular, the purposes of this Handbook are to:

1. Outline the roles and responsibilities of External Examiners and of the University (see Section 1)
2. Detail the induction arrangements for External Examiners (see Section 2)
3. Outline the requirements for External Examiner reports (see Section 3)
4. Describe how External Examiner reports are used throughout the University and how feedback is provided to External Examiners (see Section 3)
5. Outline the administrative procedures for the submission and payment of External Examiner fees and expenses (see Section 4)
6. Provide information about the academic frameworks and generic assessment regulations which contextualise the award and module regulations that External Examiners receive for the particular Assessment Board to which they are appointed (see Section 5).

Further information about the University's quality policies and processes can be accessed through the [Academic Quality Unit](#) (AQU) website. If you have any questions about the External Examiner system in general, please contact Margaret Chaffey in the first instance.

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# Section 1: The Role and Rights of External Examiners

## Role of the External Examiner

1 External Examiners have an important role within the quality assurance mechanisms in assuring comparability of academic standards outside and within the University and ensuring the fairness of the operation and assessment of courses. They also contribute towards the assurance and enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching, and the attainment by students of course outcomes.

2 External Examiners are expected to be familiar with the [UW Assessment Policy](#) which sets out the definitions and requirements for verification, standardisation and moderation of marking across all Schools within the University (see Section 12 of the policy for full details).

3 In particular, the following normally comprise the External Examiner's role:

- a. to verify the work of internal markers in respect of the assessments with which the External Examiner is associated in accordance with University policy. In order to fulfil this role the External Examiner will be presented with a sample of work (normally around 15%, or at least 6 items) across the full range of marks and, as applicable in the case of some collaborative provision, across the range of institutions where provision is delivered. The External Examiner is expected to use the sample of work to assure themselves, and the University, of the security of the whole set of marks (see moderation, below)
- b. to ensure that all students are examined within the regulations approved for the course with particular reference to the requirements of professional bodies (PSRBs) as applicable
- c. to agree with course/subject teams a process for scrutinising assessment items and assessment criteria either prior to publication to students or as part of the process of external moderation
- d. to inform the University of any matter which, in his or her view, militates against the maintenance of proper academic standards
- e. to attend the meetings of Boards of Examiners at which the results of assessments are agreed (usually referred to as Subject Assessment Boards). Where it is not possible for External Examiners to attend Boards physically, virtual attendance via Skype or other appropriate means will be considered. Where no form of attendance is possible, External Examiners will, exceptionally and as a minimum for an individual year, provide written comments to the Chair of the Board regarding satisfaction with marks
- f. to satisfy himself or herself that the work and decisions of a Board of Examiners of which he or she is a member are consistent with the best practice in higher education
- g. to ensure that the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions of which the External Examiners have experience

- h. to ensure that the threshold academic standards set for the course are appropriate through reference to national subject and qualification benchmarks, including the QAA Quality Code Part A; Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards
- i. to endorse the outcomes of assessments through the normal Board of Examiner processes
- j. to report annually to the University on the standards attained by students on the course, and on any other matters deemed appropriate to enable the University to assure academic standards and quality. (See [Section 3](#) for details.)

4 Additionally, External Examiners should expect to be consulted regarding proposed changes to provision, or for any other advice and guidance deemed necessary throughout the period of office.

### **Role of External Examiners in moderating marking of assessments**

5 All Schools are expected to be familiar with the [UW Assessment Policy](#) which sets out the definitions and requirements for verification, standardisation and moderation of marking across all Schools within the University (see Section 12 of the policy for full details).

6 It is important to bear in mind that in all but the most exceptional cases, External Examiners are reviewing a sample of student work and there are important principles to maintain.

7 On reviewing the sample of work, an External Examiner may propose to moderate a whole run of marks upwards or downwards in the interests of preserving the standard of the award. Indeed, in such cases the External Examiner would be performing precisely the function for which they were appointed. Occasionally, however, External Examiners may encounter individual marks with which they disagree, even where they believe a general run of marks to be accurate. This may be the case both in regard to 'borderline' students, or those where an individual student's mark is deemed to be 'too generous' or 'too strict'. In such cases, it is open to an External Examiner to discuss the matter with responsible internal markers to determine what, if any, action might be taken. Any agreed amendment to the mark of an individual student should be fully justified and should take account of the fact that changes to marks of student work from within the sample selected for moderation may indicate that the whole cohort requires checking or re-marking.

8 Equally, course teams are reminded that External Examiners are appointed as members of the Board of Examiners and should not, therefore, be asked to act as a third marker in the case of disagreement between internal markers. Again, they may be invited to participate in an academic discussion of the case(s) in point, but they should not be considered to hold a casting vote.

9 In cases where the External Examiner believes that mark(s) for a cohort should be reviewed, s/he is advised to contact the relevant Examination and Assessment Officer to discuss the matter in advance of the Subject Assessment Board.

## The role of the Chief External Examiner

10 The University currently has one Chief External Examiner who maintains oversight of the conduct and operation of a group of awards bearing similar properties, specifically undergraduate awards leading to BA/BSc (Hons).

11 The role of the Chief External Examiner covers the conduct and operation of the second tier Board of Examiners, the appropriateness and application of regulations, student performance and standards.

12 The Chief External Examiner should satisfy themselves regarding the probity of the examination board processes in respect of the application of the regulations, (i.e. that there is fair and equal consideration of all students) and the robustness of the assessment systems and processes. In addition, the Chief External Examiner is asked to comment on the outcomes of assessment in relation to academic standards and student achievements based on data provided and to report annually on these matters.

13 Where, exceptionally, the Chief External Examiner is unable to attend a Board of Examiners, appropriate arrangements for confirmation of assessment outcomes should be made in consultation with the Academic Registrar.

## Rights of the External Examiner

14 An External Examiner has the authority and the responsibility to report directly to the Vice Chancellor of the University in such cases that he/she believes there to be serious concerns about an award, particularly if it is considered that assessments are being conducted in a way that jeopardises either the fair treatment of individual students or the standards of the University's awards. Any other issues of a confidential nature, which the External Examiner may wish to raise, may also be referred, in full and in writing, to the Vice Chancellor.

15 Upon receipt of a report indicating serious concerns, an investigation is carried out by the Academic Registrar and/or the Director of Quality and Educational Development as appropriate, and a written response provided to the External Examiner within ten working days.

16 The University hopes to resolve and address any serious issues notified both effectively and speedily. Where this is not the case, and an External Examiner has serious concerns about systemic failings, and has submitted a report to the Vice Chancellor and received a report of the investigation and outcomes, External Examiners may consider invoking the QAA's [concerns scheme](#) or inform the professional body [Reference p8 of the UK Quality Code for HE](#)

17 External Examiners are also able to:

- a. request to see a sample of all draft assessment items (examination papers and coursework assessments) before they are given to students in consultation with the appropriate internal marker/s
- b. inspect any material relating to the course; particularly, but not exclusively, course handbooks, examination papers, scripts, coursework or project reports relating to the assessments with which s/he is specifically associated

- c. meet students and discuss curriculum development with academic staff
- d. withhold his or her endorsement for the recommendation of an award.

18 Final judgements on, or approval of, assessment outcomes are academic peer group processes. As with any such process, it is possible that members of the group will disagree. The Academic Board is the final authority for any award of the University. Therefore any disagreement so great that it cannot be resolved at the level of a Subject Assessment Board or Board of Examiners (i.e. where an External Examiner withholds their endorsement of the marks or awards) may come to Academic Board (or delegated subcommittee) for resolution.

## Section 2: Induction

### General information for External Examiners

19 Upon appointment, External Examiners are sent an appointment letter which confirms and provides the following information, specific to each examiner:

- award (or award element) to which the examiner is appointed
- Reminder that their appointment is subject to the appropriate Right to Work check which should be carried out **before** they start work and the completion of on-line HR forms
- contact details for course leader/key personnel
- agreed annual fee
- link to [Taught Courses Regulatory Framework](#) for reference (NB. This applies to both undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses)
- process/principles for resignation
- process and general criteria for termination of appointment.

20 External Examiners are also directed to the [Academic Quality Unit](#) webpages where they can access current information relevant to their role along with this Handbook.

21 Course teams (typically the Course Leader) are responsible for providing examiners with course specific information, including relevant course handbooks, programme and module specifications and, where appropriate, details of professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) information including that related to continuing PSRB accreditation (e.g. fitness to practice requirements). The Course Leader is also responsible for providing their External Examiner with a schedule of key dates for the moderation of student assessments, and for ensuring that the dates of examination boards are communicated with adequate notice.

22 University policies related to learning and teaching are available directly from the [AQU webpages](#) and External Examiners are directed to this information upon appointment. Of particular relevance is the [University's Assessment Policy](#).

## Arrangements for informing External Examiners following appointment

23 Appointments are subject to appropriate Right to Work documentation being provided prior to commencement of the role. Due to legislation on Right to Work in the United Kingdom, The University of Worcester is required to carry out this check and documents verified before external examiner appointments can be formally confirmed. See Annex 1 for further information.

Appointments are normally made for four years, running from September in year one to December in year four. This provides overlap of appointments at the end of each term of office to ensure consistency and appropriate handover.

24 Where a nominated External Examiner does not have previous or has limited external examination experience, arrangements are made to ensure that they are assigned a mentor for the first 12 months of their contract. The Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee (ASQEC) will recommend such action as appropriate under the [University of Worcester's Mentoring Policy for New External Examiners](#).

25 It is expected that course teams provide incoming External Examiners with a copy of the previous year's annual evaluation report, which contains the outgoing External Examiner's report and course response.

26 The University holds an annual External Examiners' induction day during which examiners are provided with an overview of their duties, role and rights, and the general academic regulations. The day focusses on the specific expectations of external examining at the University of Worcester and therefore all incoming External Examiners are strongly encouraged to attend, irrespective of their previous experience. This event also provides the opportunity for External Examiners to meet with members of the course team. The date of the induction day is published on the AQU webpages and all newly appointed External Examiners are invited to this event. Following the induction day, related materials are made available on the [AQU webpages](#).

## Section 3: Annual Report to the University

27 The External Examiner attends as a full member of the appropriate Board of Examiners and is required to submit an annual report electronically to the University, via the Academic Quality Unit ([AcademicQualityTeam@worc.ac.uk](mailto:AcademicQualityTeam@worc.ac.uk))

28 In some cases an External Examiner's remit may incorporate more than one course, or more than one iteration of a given course (for example as offered through a collaborative partnership). This is clarified during the nomination and appointment process where the University ensures that the expertise of External Examiners reflects the provision and specifies the scope of the role.

29 External Examiner reports are shared with students via Blackboard and discussed with the Student : Staff Liaison Committees (formerly Course Management Committees) which includes Course Representatives



30 With this in mind, the formal report to the University, which should preserve the anonymity of students and staff, covers the following areas:

- a. the appropriateness of the academic standards
- b. the overall performance of the students in relation to: the award under consideration, their peers on comparable courses, peers in previous years, national frameworks and/or professional body standards
- c. the strengths and weaknesses of students as a cohort
- d. the quality of knowledge and skills (both general and subject-specific) demonstrated by the students
- e. the curriculum and links to learning outcomes and assessments
- f. the appropriateness of assessment strategies and techniques
- g. consistency and rigour of marking
- h. the lessons of the examination and assessment process for the future development of the course and its management
- i. the conduct and operation of the Board of Examiners
- j. the quality of teaching and learning as indicated by the student performances
- k. any institutional issues
- l. recommendations for course improvement based on the experience of examining
- m. whether the response to the previous External Examiners report was received and adequate in its content
- n. activities undertaken during the year
- o. any identified examples of good practice
- p. comments on the University interpretation of the role of External Examiner, and the support given in order to carry out that role
- q. in the case of examiners completing their term of office - any additional comments.

31 The Chief External Examiner report covers the appropriateness and application of regulations, the conduct and operation of the Board, student performance and standards.

32 All External Examiners will be forwarded the link to the relevant report template/s annually by AQU prior to the date of the final exam board. (NB. due to the timing of Postgraduate courses, External Examiners for these awards will be sent a further reminder).

33 It is a condition of appointment that all External Examiners provide a written annual report using the relevant UW Report Template, **within 3 weeks** of their attendance at the awarding Subject Assessment Board (or other Board of Examiners). The completed report should be sent electronically to Academic Quality Team [AcademicQualityTeam@worc.ac.uk](mailto:AcademicQualityTeam@worc.ac.uk) Payment of the annual fee is processed automatically upon receipt of the report. The University reserves the right to take appropriate action in relation to non or late submission of the report (See paragraph 53).

## External Examiners of Collaborative Provision

34 The general external examining arrangements and regulations for courses delivered in collaboration with the University's partner organisations are the same as those for the University's other provision. However, as an External Examiner for a collaborative programme, the University expects that External Examiners would normally meet with the partner course team and/or students at least once every two

years (twice during a period of tenure). This is in addition to attendance at the Board of Examiners.

35 The host University School should make clear at the outset the arrangements for external moderation of partner provision, the most appropriate point in the academic year to attend the partner organisation where applicable and the arrangements for the Board of Examiners. In some instances the key contact for these arrangements will be the HE Manager or the course leader at the partner organisation in liaison with the Link Tutor from the host School.

36 The University views the opportunity for External Examiners to meet with students as particularly useful for collaborative programmes delivered through partnership arrangements. The outcomes of such meetings should be reported in the External Examiner's annual report.

37 In cases where External Examiners have been appointed to act as an External Examiner for a programme/course which is delivered either by **multiple partner organisations and/or on multiple sites**, the External Examiner should expect to see clearly identified samples for external scrutiny and statistical profiles from **each** partner organisation/site of delivery in order to ensure equivalence of standards. For programmes delivered by multiple partners, a further internal moderation activity should have taken place prior to external moderation to enable representatives from all partners to ensure consistency in the application of assessment criteria and complete internal moderation across all partners (sometimes referred to as 'standardisation').

38 The University requests that External Examiners comment on both the comparability of standards and quality of the learning experience and consistency in assessment practice, e.g. application of grading criteria, for the course/programme as delivered at each partner organisation/site of delivery and any specific issues for the course as a whole throughout the report. Where there are inconsistencies in standards, quality of learning experience or assessment practice or comments that are specific to individual partner organisations, these should be identified through the annual report to enable appropriate response, support and action. Similarly, if there are instances of good practice at one or more partner, these should be clearly identified.

39 Where individual modules or short courses from a wider curriculum framework are offered through partnership arrangements, the University expects that the External Examiner will see clearly identified samples and statistical profiles for external scrutiny. In order to ensure appropriate oversight, the University expects the external examiner to identify any specific issues, comments and areas of good practice for each of the individual partner organisations.

External Examiners who are required to complete a Summary Report will be notified by the Academic Quality Unit and sent the appropriate template.

## Use made of External Examiners' Reports

40 External Examiners' reports form an essential aspect of the quality assurance and enhancement processes operated by the University. Discussions of External Examiner reports are incorporated specifically within the processes of annual evaluation and periodic review, and also through Student : Staff Liaison Committees

formerly Course Management Committees) where they are formally discussed with student representatives.

41 The process for receipt of, and responding to, External Examiner reports is as follows.

42 Copies of reports are, upon receipt, sent to the Director of Quality and Educational Development (Chair of Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee (ASQEC)) who produces an overview report to Academic Board, and also responds to all institutional issues raised by External Examiners, following consultation with relevant University colleagues.

43 Reports are also sent to the Head of School, Course Manager/Leader and other members of the University as deemed appropriate (normally determined by School structure, e.g. Heads of Department or Heads of Centre). Reports on courses taught collaboratively with partners are copied to the head of the partner organisation (normally the Principal of an FE college) and HE manager or equivalent and UW Link Tutor.

44 An initial response to any issues raised in the External Examiner report is prepared by the Course leader, formally signed off by Head of Department, and forwarded to the External Examiner, normally within six weeks of receipt of the report.

45 In addition, the course annual evaluation report, including External Examiners' reports and the course team responses to these, is discussed with students via Student : Staff Liaison Committees (formerly Course Management Committees). Course annual evaluation reports also highlight any issues regarding University procedures for the attention of the University's committees responsible for academic quality. The Course Annual Evaluation Report (AER) is forwarded to the External Examiner for information.

46 External Examiners' reports are considered for general as well as specific issues by senior managers within the School and, as appropriate, these will be referenced in each School's annual enhancement plan.

47 Full information on the [annual evaluation process](#) can be found on the AQU webpages.

48 External Examiners who have raised institutional issues, can expect a response from the Director of Quality and Educational Development and/or Head of School, normally following the process of considering reports through the University committee processes.

### **Typical Timescales**

49 The process is the same for undergraduate and for postgraduate awards, although in the case of the latter final examination boards are generally held in September or early October and so the early stages may occur slightly later:

- a. June/July/September (following examination boards, typically): reports received by the Academic Quality Unit (AQU)
- b. July/August/September/October: AQU sends acknowledgement of receipt of report

- c. August/September/October: course leaders provide an initial response to issues raised
- d. October: course teams and student representatives discuss External Examiner reports and other data on academic standards and quality – e.g. assessment outcomes, at Student : Staff Liaison Committees (formerly (Course Management Committees) and confirm full response and actions
- e. November/December: course teams submit annual evaluation report Head of Department (see [Annual Evaluation Process](#) pages for full details)
- f. December/January: External Examiner receives the full annual evaluation report, including full response/actions arising from External Examiner report
- g. ASQEC receives report reviewing all External Examiner reports, including responses to institutional issues

## Section 4: Fees and expenses

### Payment of Fees/Expenses

50 **Expenses:** expense claims for visits to Worcester and/or to partner institutions. The University will reimburse external examiners expenses incurred in the course of their duties via the electronic expenses system. Receipts must be produced to ensure payment will be made. Expenses should be submitted as and when they are incurred; noting there is a restriction in place where you will not be able to claim for expenses that are greater than 3 months old.

51 **Annual Fee Payment:** the annual fee will be processed automatically upon receipt of an appropriately completed annual report from the External Examiner via the University of Worcester's on-line expenses system ([Access ACloud](#)).

## Section 5: Termination of Contract

52 All External Examiners are entitled to submit their resignation for any reason. However, the University would expect that such action would not put the standards of awards in jeopardy. The University would therefore expect sufficient notice (a minimum of 3 months) in order to make revised arrangements for awards.

53 The University reserves the right to terminate the contract of any External Examiner, subject to the agreement of the Academic Board. Such action will only be taken where there is evidence that key duties are not being carried out, resulting in a lack of evidence of the standards of University awards and normally following efforts to rectify the situation. Such actions include repeated non-receipt and/or significantly delayed receipt of an annual report or routine non-attendance at Board of Examiner meetings.

## Section 6: Useful Information

### Contacts

You may wish to use this page to record certain contact details at the University of Worcester

Academic Contact  
(Course Leader)

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Email/telephone

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Examinations Officer

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Email/telephone

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Administrative Contact  
(UW School)

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Email/telephone

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### **Director of Quality and Educational Development**

Dr Marie Stowell

Tel. 01905 855579 ([m.stowell@worc.ac.uk](mailto:m.stowell@worc.ac.uk))

### **Quality Officer (External Examiners)\***

Margaret Chaffey

Academic Quality Unit,

Tel. 01905 855519 ([m.chaffey@worc.ac.uk](mailto:m.chaffey@worc.ac.uk))

\*Appointment enquiries, visit expenses, accommodation booking requests and report submission

## **Links to information:**

[UW quality policies and procedures](#)

[University regulations and procedures](#)

[Taught Courses Regulatory Framework \(TCRF\)](#)

(N.B. this applies to both undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses)

[Regulations for the appointment of external examiners](#)

## **Grade Descriptors:**

[Grade Descriptors – Levels 4-6](#)

[Grade Descriptors - Level 7 \(Masters\)](#)

[Grade Descriptors – Level 8](#)

[Assessment Policy](#)

[Curriculum Design Policy](#)

## **EE Report Templates**

[External Examiner's Report Template](#)

[Supplementary Report Template \(please contact Margaret Chaffey\)](#)

## **National Links**

[The Higher Education Academy, Guidance on External Examining](#)

[Quality Assurance Agency: Quality Code](#) (new link)

[Advance HE \(was Higher Education Authority\) External Examiner Handbook](#) (new link)

## **Additional Information**

[University of Worcester home page](#)

Link to maps:

[Campus/site maps](#): (for car parking - click onto the site to be visited and select the 'car parking' tab)

## Annex 1 - Right to Work

[Right to Work](#) Documentation – External Examiner appointments cannot be confirmed until your documents have been verified by our HR Department

### Right to Work Check

In accordance with HMRC legislation we are also required to carry out an eligibility to work in the UK check **before** you start work - typically this is sight of your original passport or any visa-related documentation/a Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) (for non-UK citizens).

If this check is not completed, your External Examiners' appointment cannot be confirmed until your documents have been verified by our HR Department. **You will be unable to undertake any work, access our e-systems, or be paid/entered onto our payroll system until this check has been facilitated.**

### [Right to Work Checklist](#)

- an original passport
- any visa related documentation or a Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) (for non-UK citizens)

The required documentation can be provided by either of the following two methods.

If you are planning to attend the University prior to starting your role please take your original documents to the HR department (advising them you are an external examiner) at the following address:-

HR Department,  
University of Worcester  
Room WB025  
Woodbury Building  
St Johns Campus  
Worcester  
WR2 6AJ

Tel. 01905 855173

If you are unable to attend in person prior to starting your EE role, original documents should be sent via Special Delivery (or other tracked method) to:

HR Department (External Examiners)  
University of Worcester  
Room WB 025  
Woodbury Building  
St Johns Campus  
Worcester  
WR2 6AJ

## Acronyms

AER	Annual Evaluation Report ( <i>annual course monitoring</i> )
ASQEC	Academic Standards Quality and Enhancement Committee (UW)
APPG	Academic Planning and Portfolio Group
AQU	Academic Quality Unit
LTQEC	Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee
ASQEC	Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee
Blackboard	University of Worcester's Virtual Learning Environment
CL	Course Leader
CMC	Course Management Committee
CIPP	Chartered Institute for Payroll Professionals
DDS	Disability and Dyslexia Service
DH	Deputy Head
DoS (UW)	Director of Studies
DPR	Departmental Periodic Review
EA	External Advisor (course approval)
EAYL	Earn as You Learn
EDD	Evaluation and Development Document
EY	Early Years
HLC	Hereford and Ludlow College
HoS	Head of School
IS	Independent Studies
KS	Key Tasks (Key Skills)
KSB	Knowledge, Skills and Behaviour (Apprenticeships)
LAYV	Learn As You Volunteer
LTQE	Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement
LTQEC	Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement Coordinator
LTSEC	Learning, Teaching Student Experience Committee
KSs	Key Tasks (School Direct only)
PAT	Personal Academic Tutor
Pebblepad	e-portfolio
QC	Quality Coordinator
QED	Quality and Educational Development
SAP	Student as Academic Partners
SLEC	Student Learning Experience Committee
SME	Small/Medium Enterprise (Business)
SMT	School Management Team
SOLE	Secure Student Portal (Student Online Learning Environment)
SPMG	Student Performance Monitoring Group
SSWG	Student Survey Working Group



T&L	Teaching and Learning
TCRF	UW Taught Courses Regulatory Framework
TEL	Technology Enhanced Learning
UW	University of Worcester
UWIC	University of Worcester International College
UWSS	University of Worcester Student Survey
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
VRA	Vacation Research Assistant (UW)
WBL	Work Based Learning