

# How to be an external examiner

**Nighat Farooq, Julia Miller and David Peck explain the commitment required to become an external examiner and the rewards it can bring for pupils and the school as a whole**



**Q** I am a teacher of two years' experience and want to know how I go about becoming an external examiner. Can you help me to get the benefits to me and my school into perspective? I shall need my headteacher's support but how should she do this and can you please tell me what exactly is involved in the process?

**A** **Nighat Farooq writes:** You need to decide on the exam board, subject and level but it makes sense to choose a syllabus you are teaching. Then check exam board websites for examiner vacancies and download an application form, if available.

The benefits are manifold: you can make a positive contribution to external assessment work, your classes and colleagues will gain from the inside knowledge you'll gain and, lastly, you can also earn extra money by attending their standardisation meetings and marking scripts. There are no downsides for your school as it gets teacher cover costs each day when you are asked to attend meetings by the exam board.

During the standardisation meeting you learn how to mark scripts in line with the agreed mark schemes. All examiners mark a set of scripts during the meeting and discuss any variations to ensure there is consistency in marking demonstrated by all examiners and in agreement with the principal examiner. You learn what to look for when you award marks and how to ensure that it is correct.

There is a benefit here for your pupils as you can teach them the techniques during

past paper practice and help them achieve good marks.

The whole experience has a positive effect on your teaching and learning as you learn what is expected in exams. Your headteacher will usually welcome this and support you because this helps to improve the school's practice and keep it up to date with external examination requirements. It is also prestigious to have school staff involved in activities closely relevant to their roles and responsibilities in the school.

**A** **Julia Miller writes:** Being a moderator gives teachers the opportunity to see the work being done by students in other centres, You will realise that you are part of a larger process where other teachers face the same challenge which they may meet in different ways. You become more aware of common misconceptions among students, and sometimes teachers too.

Another benefit is that you will meet teachers from other schools and you will build lasting relationships that will form the basis of a solid support network.

**A** **David Peck writes:** I expect your headteacher would be supportive if you wish to become an examiner as your experience will be of great benefit to the students you teach and, potentially, to the rest of your department. I certainly found this to be the case myself when I was an examiner (long ago) for CSE, O level and A level science subjects. Nighat is one of a number of examiners on the teaching staff at my school.

There is nothing quite like examining for really getting to grips with the fine detail of what is and what is not an acceptable examination answer and the impact on the quality of advice a teacher can give to students is invaluable.

The increased workload needs careful management. This is paid work and you will need to find the time for it outside your school routine. I used to do a couple of hours in the morning before going to work.

A couple of years into your career when you have become established and embedded the lessons you learned as an NQT, becoming an examiner can give your teaching a real boost. This is a carrot your head will find it hard to resist.

## Meet the experts



**Nighat Farooq** has been leader of community languages at Moseley School, a language college, since 1988. She is an examiner for GCSE Urdu with a major awarding body.



**Julia Miller** is an ICT specialist who moderates a leading award body's ICT GCSE short course and a team leader moderator for another major awarding body.



**David Peck** has been headteacher of Moseley School for six years. Eighty-seven percent of students at the school speak English as an additional language.

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