



Academic Quality Framework

External Examiner

**Approved by Academic Council
28 June 2023**

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Document Control Summary

Area	Document Information
Author	Academic Quality Framework
Owner	Academic Affairs
Reference number	AQF_EEP_01
Version	1
Status	Approved
Approved by / to be approved by	Academic Council
Approval date	28 June 2023
Document Classification	TU Dublin Internal/Wide

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University, as a Designated Awarding Body, is responsible for the quality and standards of its awards. External Examiners are periodically engaged by the University to provide the annual peer judgement on the assessment strategies for its programmes/modules as well as the cumulative standards achieved at the completion of programmes leading to TU Dublin awards.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 This policy describes the functions of the External Examiner, the eligibility to become an External Examiner in TU Dublin, the criteria and appointment process, term of office on appointment and the specific responsibilities including membership of designated Assessment Boards, and submission of an annual report. This policy is consistent with the [QQI Guidelines *Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining*](#) (revised February 2015).

3. Functions of External Examiner

- 3.1 The function of External Examiners shall be to ensure that the assessment strategies employed for a programme and for the modules within that programme are appropriate for the overall programme aims and learning outcomes, the programme and module content and the level of the award. External Examiners shall also have a role in advising whether the results achieved by the student are aligned to their assessment performance. They shall have due regard to:
- 3.1.1 Requirement for fairness and equity in assessment.
 - 3.1.2 The level of award and the programme learning outcomes to be achieved.
 - 3.1.3 Relevant national and international standards and benchmarks.
- 3.2 External Examiners shall be appointed in respect of all stages of a programme of study, but with a particular remit in respect of assessment strategies that contribute to the final award.
- 3.3 At least one academic External Examiner shall be appointed for each programme leading to a Major University Award and associated Minor Awards. Academic Affairs in consultation with Faculty Boards will determine the merits of appointing External Examiners for other awards such as Special Purpose and Supplemental Awards on a case-by-case basis. The number of External Examiners appointed for a particular programme or programmes should be sufficient to cover the key discipline areas within a programme. In addition, the duration of a programme, and consequently the workload of the External Examiner should be considered. Consequently, a school may wish to make a convincing budgeting case for the appointment of more than one External Examiner for a programme.

- 3.4 For programmes of a vocational/professional nature, an External Examiner from industry may be appointed in addition to the academic External Examiner. As in 3.3 above, a budgeting case for such an appointment should be made. These External Examiners shall have a particular remit to consider practical/project work and any professional standards that may apply, as well as the overall enhancement of employability of graduates from a programme.
- 3.5 An External Examiner may serve on more than one programme at a time where there is commonality across the curricula. Where programmes consist of modules from a number of discipline areas and therefore requiring a number of External Examiners, there shall be at least one academic External Examiner appointed to the programme as a whole.

4. Eligibility for Appointment as External Examiner

- 4.1 External Examiners shall be drawn from persons with qualification and experience in the relevant academic field and/or the professional practice of their disciplines in Ireland or abroad. They shall normally hold academic or professional qualifications which are appropriate to the programme and/or subjects to be peer-reviewed.

- 4.2 External Examiners shall be able to carry out their role independently and objectively. They shall not have any current or recent relationship with the University, i.e., shall not have been a member of teaching staff or a student within the five years preceding their appointment. Nor should they have been an external examiner for a programme within the same school within the past four years, or have any other relationship with the University, staff and/or students that might constitute a conflict of interest.
- 4.3 Academic External Examiners should have experience of assessing student work in the same discipline/subject area and at the same level as the programme to which they are to be appointed.
- 4.4 An individual who has recently retired from employment, i.e. within the previous three years, and who remains active in their profession/discipline may be nominated as external examiner. Should an external examiner retire from their full-time position during the period of their appointment as external examiner, they shall be expected to continue as external examiner for the full period of appointment.

5. Period of appointment

- 5.1 External Examiners shall normally be appointed by the University for a period of four years or for a period corresponding to the full cycle of the programme, whichever is the greater. The appointment may be extended by one further year in exceptional circumstances: these might include where a programme is being phased out, or to ensure a cross-over of current and new external examiners, to avoid loss of knowledge and expertise.

- 5.2 An External Examiner may be reappointed to the same programme or another programme within the University after a period of four years has elapsed since the end of their period of appointment. Following a second period of appointment, an individual will no longer be eligible to serve as External Examiner on a programme within the University.

6. Scope of External Examiner's role

- 6.1 External Examiners shall be appointed in respect of all years of a programme, with a particular remit in respect of the assessments of a programme which contribute to the final award of the University.

7. Appointment of External Examiners

- 7.1 External Examiners shall be nominated by the Head of Discipline through the relevant External Examiner Nomination Form. The form shall be submitted to Faculty Board for approval and, if approved, shall be forwarded to University Programme Board for noting.
- 7.2 In circumstances where an External Examiner resigns from their position, the Head of Discipline shall arrange for a suitably qualified replacement, through the process outlined in above.

- 7.3 External Examiners should be nominated and approved before the start of the academic year and be in place when teaching commences.

8. Liaison with External Examiner

- 8.1 The External Examiner, once the nomination is approved, shall receive a letter of appointment from Academic Affairs accompanied with the relevant University policies, procedures, and regulations. Training sessions and resources will also be made available by Academic Affairs. External Examiners will be advised to liaise thereafter with the Head of Discipline who will act as their point of contact with the University. The Head of Discipline shall provide the External Examiner with relevant programme documentation, including module descriptors along with the overall schedule of assessments for their designated programme(s). Where necessary, they may also schedule formal briefing sessions for attending to any queries that may arise in respect of the process.

9. Responsibilities of an External Examiner

- 9.1 External Examiners shall consider the intended assessment strategy for the programme as a whole, including the appropriateness of the programme learning outcomes and the module learning outcomes for the level of the programme/award to be attained, and the appropriateness of assessment methods used in measuring those learning outcomes.

9.2 In the context of point 9.1 above:

9.2.1 External Examiners shall be provided with access to samples of draft examination papers and draft assessments/assessment briefs for programme(s) for which they are appointed and shall consider these in advance of the assessment taking place, in accordance with a schedule provided to the Examiner by the Head of Discipline. The external examiner may request sight of particular assessment briefs/materials or examination papers, if these are not provided within the sample. It would be expected that an External Examiner, within the period of their appointment, should have reviewed the assessments for each module on a programme at least once.

9.2.2 They shall report their comments to the Head of Discipline. Comments and recommended changes are returned to the Head of Discipline.

9.2.3 Where a programme is delivered for the first time, External Examiners will meet at an early stage of the programme with the Head of Discipline, and members of the Programme Team to discuss the intended assessment strategy and review assessment materials. This meeting may be held online.

9.2.4 In the External Examiner's review of draft examination papers, assessment briefs and of assessed materials, the Examiner may be directed by the Head of School or nominee to particular modules, e.g., where average marks are or have been significantly higher or lower than in other modules, where the module is new or where a module is being delivered and assessed by a new member of staff.

9.3 External Examiners shall be members of the Assessment Board reviewing the overall assessment of student work, thus ensuring the maintenance of quality and standards in the assessment process and fair and equitable treatment of students.

- 9.4 External Examiners may visit the University to review assessment materials and shall attend Assessment Board meetings. These two processes may or may not be held at the same time. During their visit to the University, they shall:
- 9.4.1 Meet with academic staff delivering the modules and share experiences of the assessment process.
 - 9.4.2 Meet with a representative group of students to discuss the programme, matters pertaining to assessment and the quality of the student experience.
 - 9.4.3 Review a representative sample of work submitted for assessment including examination scripts, projects, and other key assessment tasks. Samples should include sufficient material to enable the external examiner to form a judgement of the appropriateness of the marking at all levels of classification.
 - 9.4.4 Review assessment materials, including assessment briefs, marking and assessment schemes to determine whether assessment strategies and the procedures applied are valid, reliable, fair and consistent.
 - 9.4.5 Consider a selection of borderline cases such as those on the pass/fail borderline and those close to higher classification bands, prior to and during Assessment Board meetings, and participate in the determination of final marks and results of each candidate at the Assessment Board meeting.
- 9.5 Virtual attendance at Assessment Boards by the External Examiner is permitted, with the approval of the Head of School. In such cases, the External Examiner shall discharge their duties according to the guidelines on remote participation in Assessment Board processes [//Guidelines to be Developed//](#).

- 9.6 The Marks and/or Grades to be presented for consideration by Assessment Boards will be prepared in line with the current Assessment Regulations.
- 9.7 External Examiners may interview students when they consider this to be necessary and appropriate.
- 9.8 External Examiners shall receive, for their information only, a copy of the Annual Programme Enhancement Report(s) for the programme including minutes of the Discipline Programmes Board.
- 9.9 External Examiners shall be invited to have input into a review of a programme as a key stakeholder, and they shall be invited to provide feedback on any proposed major changes to programmes.
- 9.10 External Examiners, where they have concerns regarding the fair and equitable treatment of students, may advise on the potential re-scaling or adjustment of grades for a student or cohort of students.
- 9.11 External Examiners may raise any appropriate equality, diversity and inclusion issues that may apply to the assessment of students within the programme.
- 9.12 Schools may require external examiners to undertake specific assessment tasks, as dictated by PRSB requirements, or due to the nature of the discipline. These requirements should be clearly indicated and agreed.

10. Report of the External Examiner

- 10.1 The External Examiner shall submit to the Head of Discipline, at the end of each year, a written report. This report shall contain comments on the assessment strategy of the programme and how it ensures that the programme learning outcomes are met, on the general standards achieved by the students and other matters related to assessments and the operation of the programme and modules. A fee shall be paid to the External Examiner upon receipt of this report. Where there is more than one examiner attached to a programme, each examiner shall submit a separate report.
- 10.2 The Head of Discipline considers any issues of immediate concern within the report which should be brought to the attention of the Discipline Programmes Board. The report is then sent to the relevant Programme Coordinator. It is also forwarded to the Discipline Programmes Board for discussion and included in the annual monitoring report for the programme.
- 10.3 The External Examiner has the right to report directly to the Faculty Dean on matters of major concern that pose a serious risk to the quality and standards of a university award, if they are of the view that serious issues are not being satisfactorily addressed by the school. Should these concerns relate to fairness and equity of treatment of students, the External Examiner should report these to the Head of School at the time.

11. Resignation and/or Termination of Appointment

- 11.1 Failure to attend Assessment Boards or to present a written report to the Head of Discipline shall be seen as a breach of contract and the University has the right to terminate the External Examiner's appointment in such cases. For this purpose, the Head of Discipline, shall make a recommendation to the University Programmes Board which shall have the authority to recommend the termination of contract for approval by the Academic Council.