



REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS FOR TAUGHT PROGRAMMES/MODULES

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The objectives of the external examiner system are to ensure:

- (i) that examinations leading to degree and other awards of Dublin City University are comparable in standard to similar examinations and awards obtained nationally and internationally
- (ii) that the assessment methodology is fair and is applied equitably in the classification of candidates for such awards.

To achieve these objectives, external examiners need to be able to:

- (i) review the assessment processes for the award of degrees and other qualifications
- (ii) advise on problem cases
- (iii) comment and give advice on the assessment methodology in use
- (iv) comment and make suggestions, as requested, on any other features of the programme in relation to their role as an external examiner (this includes engagement with the APR (Annual Programme Review) process and may include engagement with the PPR (Periodic Programme Review) process
- (v) participate, where feasible and appropriate, as requested by the University, in the (re)accreditation of programmes with a view to professional recognition.

1.2 The appointment of external examiners is an important part of the University's quality assurance system. The University ensures that, in approving all external examiner appointments (through the University Standards Committee), there is consistency of standards across the University and adherence to all relevant University policies.

2. SELECTION, APPOINTMENT AND PERIOD OF SERVICE

2.1 General

2.1.1 Recommendations for appointment of external examiners should be made available for consideration by the University Standards Committee before the end of the academic year prior to the academic year in which the period of service is intended to begin. The Head of School or Department (or Group, in the case of Dublin City University Business School)¹ is normally responsible for ensuring that this is done.

¹ All references to 'School' in this document should be understood as including other appropriate nomenclature, e.g., 'Department', 'Group'

- 2.1.2** An external examiner may be appointed to a programme, two or more related programmes, or a range of modules.
- 2.1.3** The number of external examiners for a particular programme or related programmes should be sufficient to cover the full range of studies within the programme(s). It may be necessary to appoint more than one external examiner where there is a large number of students and/or where two distinct areas of expertise are involved.
- 2.1.4** To the extent possible, appointments within a School and/or across a subject area should be staggered to avoid a sudden significant loss of expertise.
- 2.1.5** More broadly, every effort should be made to ensure that an appropriate depth and breadth of experience and expertise exist across every School and suite of programmes at all times, as far as external examining is concerned.
- 2.1.6** Consideration can be given to nominating the same external examiner to serve in two different areas of the University (including any linked college) at the same time, on the basis that this may afford an opportunity for the individual to gain oversight of subject provision and identify possible gaps and opportunities for synergy.
- 2.1.7** Nominations should be submitted to the University Standards Committee, via the Office of the Vice-President Academic Affairs (Registrar), through Guru <https://guru.dcu.ie/>

2.2 Qualities

- 2.2.1** External examiners should normally have the following qualities and competencies:
- Experience at an appropriate level of examining in the general subject area(s) to be externalised. This is important to ensure that external examiners are technically competent and have an understanding of the principles of assessment and formal examination and the constraints and limitations of the system and flexibilities that may need to be applied. Such experience will give the externs a familiarity with the processes of the Progression and Awards Board, *viva voce* examinations and appeals mechanisms on which they may be asked to comment.
 - Previous experience as an external examiner ²
 - Relevant lecturing and examination-setting experience. This will give the external examiner an understanding of the need for balance and equity in setting examination papers.
 - Formal academic qualification and/or professional qualification and experience at the level of the programme(s) being externalised.
 - Ability to command the respect of colleagues.
 - A willingness to respond to requests for comments on papers and scripts within tight time deadlines and to be available to attend at least one Progression and Awards Board meeting per year.
- 2.2.2** Programme design experience is useful (although not essential). External examiners are often asked to express an opinion about structural changes that are proposed.

² Desirable, though not essential

2.2.3 For competency-based or practical modules, it is desirable to appoint an external examiner with extensive work-based experience in addition to academic qualification. If such a suitable person is not available, an extern with substantial relevant work experience may be more appropriate than one with formal academic qualifications. In all cases in which a professional external examiner is appointed for a module or modules, it must be ensured that there is also an academic external examiner for the programme as a whole.

2.2.4 In line with the University's policy and stated commitment to best practice in equality issues, Heads of School must ensure, as far as possible, a balanced gender representation in the appointment of external examiners to the examining team for taught programmes.

2.3 Independence

2.3.1 It is imperative, for quality assurance purposes, that the external examiner be independent of the University, of its internal examiners and of the candidates presenting themselves for examination. To this end, an individual to be considered for appointment should:

2.3.1.1 Have no close personal relationship with examiners or candidates such that, in the opinion of the Head of School, there is a risk that the Conflict of Interest Policy and Guidelines might be breached.

2.3.1.2 Have no professional relationship with examiners or candidates such that, in the opinion of the Head of School, there is a risk that the Conflict of Interest Policy and Guidelines might be breached.

2.3.1.3 Not have been in the employ of the University, or of any linked college of the University³, in the five years prior to appointment.

2.3.1.4 Not have been a student of the University, or of any linked college of the University⁴, in the five years prior to appointment.

2.3.1.5 Not be a beneficiary of any bursary or remuneration from the University, or from any linked college of the University⁵ other than from the post of external examiner, member of accreditation board, member of quality peer review group, or member of recruitment/promotions panel.

2.3.1.6 Not have taught within the last five years on any of the programmes being externed.

2.3.2 In no circumstances may a staff member from DCU act as an external examiner to a linked college ⁶or *vice versa*. A staff member of a linked college may not act as external examiner in another linked college.

³ All references to linked colleges are to any current linked colleges and any institutions which may obtain this designation in future

⁴ See footnote 3 above

⁵ See footnote 3 above

⁶ See footnote 3 above

2.4 Reciprocity

Reciprocal examining arrangements between the University and other institutions in the same subject area should be avoided. Specifically:

- An external examiner should not be succeeded, in the same role and with the same duties, by another external examiner from the same institution
- No School should have more than one external examiner from the same School or Department in the same institution at the same time
- The Head of School should satisfy him/herself, as far as possible, that the acceptance of the invitation to act as external examiner (following University approval) would not put the University in a situation where there was reciprocity between departments (i.e., where an individual from a DCU School was an external in a School in another institution and there was a similar arrangement in the other direction).

The Head of School should satisfy him/herself, as far as possible, that by accepting the invitation to act as external examiner (following University approval) an individual would not be in the position of holding more than two concurrent external examining posts.

When nominations are being made, deviations from the above should occur rarely, if at all. Any request to the USC to consider a nomination that deviates from the above must take the form of a detailed rationale as well as evidence that all reasonable efforts have been made to adhere to the above. The USC will consider the rationale and evidence before deciding whether to consider the nomination.

2.5 Terms of appointment

2.5.1 Period of appointment/conditions of re-appointment

The period of appointment for External Examiners is normally four years from 1 October in the year of engagement to 30 September in the year of expiry. An external examiner cannot be re-appointed at the end of this period, however if a School wishes to reappoint an external examiner, then a period of four years from the initial service must elapse before a reappointment can be considered.

The reappointment can be for a maximum period of four years. Following such a period of reappointment, an external examiner cannot be considered for any further service, for taught programmes, to the University or to any linked college.

2.5.2 Retirement during period of appointment

If an external examiner retires from employment during the period of engagement as external examiner, he/she may continue to act as external examiner until the period has been completed.

2.5.3 Retired nominees

An individual who has already retired from employment may be nominated as external examiner provided the retirement has taken place in the recent past (normally within the previous four years) and the individual remains professionally active and continues to contribute to his/her discipline.

2.5.4 Maternity/parental leave/adoptive leave/leave of absence during period of appointment

If external examiners are on maternity /parental leave/adoptive leave/leave of absence from their own institution during the four-year engagement period, they will remain engaged as an external examiner and resume duties by agreement with their host school. Maternity/parental related leave/adoptive leave/leave of absence will not be counted in the duration of service.

2.5.5 Illness during period of appointment

In the event of illness which would impact on external examiner duties the examiner is asked to, contact the host School as soon as is feasible.

2.5.6 Appointment of a replacement external examiner in the event of illness or maternity /paternity/ adoptive leave/leave of absence of external examiners during their 4-year appointment period

A replacement external examiner can be appointed to temporarily replace the incumbent external examiner, during their 4-year appointment period due to the following reasons:

1. extended sick leave of 3 months or more up to a maximum of 12 months
2. maternity/adoptive/extended paternity leave/leave of absence (up to a maximum of 12 months)

If a School/Faculty is formally notified of an expected absence of an appointed external examiner for reasons of long-term illness or maternity/paternity/adoptive leave/leave of absence, the Head of School may nominate a replacement external examiner for the duration of the planned leave.

The replacement appointment should be for a maximum of one year's duration only. Thereafter, if necessary, the situation should be reviewed by the School/Faculty with the original external examiner. This one year of sick-leave or maternity/paternity/adoptive leave/leave of absence will not be counted as part of duration of service.

It is only in this particular set of circumstances that an external examiner may be appointed for up to one year. University Standards Committee expect that the nomination would normally be in line with the regulations for appointment of an external examiner, however it may give consideration to an exemption from section 2.5.1 of the regulations, when considering the nomination in these particular circumstances.

2.5.7 Resignation from and termination of appointment

External Examiners who wish to resign before the end of their normal period of appointment should write to the Head of School or nominee, giving at least four months' notice to allow for a replacement to be identified.

External examiners must notify the School immediately of any changes in their circumstances that could lead to a conflict of interest that cannot be resolved satisfactorily and that may, therefore, require an engagement to be terminated. This is particularly important in cases where an External Examiner changes his/her home institution since this may result in more than one External Examiner in an area being based there.

An external examiner's appointment may be terminated by the University if, without reasonable cause, an examiner fails to engage with the duties as outlined at the outset of appointment or breaks the confidentiality with regard to personal information on students or otherwise acts counter to the University's Regulations.

3. DUTIES

3.1. Duties of External Examiner

- 3.1.1 External examiners are normally appointed with responsibility for a specific programme or specific programmes or a range of modules. They should deal primarily with the final year(s) of the programmes or study periods that contribute to the award and should approach the task with a view to ensuring that each candidate's performance is properly assessed, subject to the regulations and standards applicable generally for the award of a degree or other award of the University.
- 3.1.2 The external examiners should review the relevant module descriptors and the drafts of all examination question papers, marking schemes and worked solutions before the exam papers are finalised. External examiners have the right to make such suggestions regarding deletions, additions and amendments as appropriate. A response should be made by the School to suggestions made by the external examiner indicating whether the advice has resulted in the modification of the paper or continuous assessment.
- 3.1.3 External examiners should see a representative sample of material presented for assessment, e.g., projects or practical work, particularly for those years of a programme that contribute directly to the final degree award and classification. The sample, which should be drawn on a basis agreed between the internal and external examiner(s), should include sufficient material to enable the external examiner(s) to form a judgement on the reliability and consistency of marking and on the levels of classification including borderline cases and proposed cases of failure.
- 3.1.4 External examiners are encouraged to attend, if possible, in the first year of their four-year term and at least once during the four-year term, at a minimum.
- 3.1.5 The external examiner should submit an annual report using the pro-forma online form
- 3.1.6 Where appropriate, provide evidence to demonstrate that the requirements and standards of professional bodies are being met, including practice.

- 3.1.7 External examiners may be consulted about relevant matters in respect of examination appeals submitted to the Examination Appeals Board or be asked to participate in the review of an assessment, formally requested by a student through the Appeals process.
- 3.1.8 Where oral examinations constitute a substantial part of the assessment procedures, then the procedures to be used for oral assessments should be determined following consultation between the internal and external examiners.

3.2 Assessment of postgraduate taught dissertations and the External Examiner

- 3.2.1 The assessment of dissertations for postgraduate taught programmes is carried out by two internal examiners and reviewed by a Programme External Examiner.
- 3.2.2 The role of the External Examiner is to comment on the overall standards of the assessment of dissertations by reviewing a sample of at least two.

3.3 Review of examination papers

Examination papers are reviewed once per semester through the Guru system. Generally, the review of examination papers takes place in November and March of each academic year. External Examiners are provided with the examination paper and solutions to those papers through the secure Guru system and can provide comments and updates through it. External Examiners should expect to have a dialogue with the module co-ordinator in response to the suggestions made.

External Examiners are requested to review the appropriateness of the exam paper.

3.4 Review of continuous assessment assignments

Some Faculties/School request that the External Examiner review continuous assessment assignments set at the beginning of each semester (September and January), however in the majority of cases, the external examiner will be asked to review student submitted continuous assessment at the time of the annual visit to the university. This information is made available on the Guru system.

3.5 The role of the External Examiner at Progression and Award Boards (PABs)

The External examiner should discuss with their appropriate School or Faculty contact whether they attend the **Progression and Award Board (PAB)** (either in person or online). In advance of the Progression and Award Board, the Programme Chair/Faculty contact will be in touch to discuss a pro-forma summary report of the outcomes of the internal **Examination Review Committee(s) (ERC)** and to seek the external examiner's views on the completed report and on their review of an indicative sample of assessments.

The basis for discussion at this stage of the process should be the report(s) generated by the Examination Review Committee(s) plus the review of an indicative sample of assessments by the external examiner(s).

- Discussions should include, as appropriate, Programme Chair, Teaching Convenor, Head of School, and some module coordinators; Faculties will need to determine (as needed in discussion with the external examiner(s)) the composition, recognising that a large group would be unwieldy.
- The outcomes should be:
 - (i) feedback and observations on DCU processes – assessment, review of results, etc.
 - (ii) recommendations to the Progression and Award Board.
- It is important to note that the role of the External Examiner is to review standards in general; it is not to make recommendations solely in respect of individual cases in the sample of assessments reviewed.
- A note of this discussion will be kept using the template provided (please see appendix for relevant form)

External examiners who attend PABs will be briefed on relevant rules and programme regulations prior to the PAB. The PAB Chair may invite external examiner(s) in attendance to comment briefly following the deliberation of the results; to make recommendations on the distribution of results or trends within modules/programmes during the PAB. Detailed feedback from external examiners on modules or programme is reserved for the formal written report submitted by the external examiner to the University. External examiners act as an important element of the quality assurance process and in some instances only wish to comment on the execution of the process as per regulations and standards.

3.6 Periodic Programme Review

Periodic Programme Review (PPR) at DCU involves, in an agreed cycle (every five years), an extended annual review, which enables Programme Teams to evaluate, comment upon and monitor the impact on their taught programmes of cumulative, incremental change over a longer review period than is involved with APR and to identify further opportunities for enhancement of the student learning experience

The PPR procedure also involves a person external to DCU, normally a programme external examiner, who is asked to comment on the Programme Team's summary report and accompanying documentation by means of an External Reviewer report.

4. REPORTAGE

Formal feedback from an external examiner following a diet of examinations should be reserved for the written report submitted by the external examiner to the University (though feedback is normally also made available in the course of the academic year). Reports are submitted online through the Guru System, in accordance with the University's online reportage system. Reports that relate to semester 1 and summer examinations only are submitted by a specified date in summer; all other reports are submitted following the autumn examinations.

Heads of School review the reports and may discuss them with the Programme Chairs, Module Co-ordinators or Teaching Convenors. If necessary, Heads of School will also formulate responses to reports. Deans of Faculty also have access to reports.

External Examiner Reports are reviewed on an annual basis at institutional level and items of note are discussed with the relevant Faculty colleagues and/or in relevant institutional fora.

5. PAYMENT OF FEES

An annual fee will be paid on receipt of the external examiner’s report. External examiners will also be reimbursed for travel and related expenses in accordance with regulations.

6. VERSION CONTROL

Version	Approved by Academic Council
1.7	4 October 2023
1.6	3 February 2021
1.5	5 February 2020
1.4	12 October 2016

APPENDIX (FORMS)

Template for review with Programme External Examiners

Programme:	
Date:	
Membership of Examination Review Committee:	
1. Consideration of module results vis-à-vis previous years' module results for equivalent modules	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the pattern of results for the modules on the programme broadly in line with previous years' patterns for the same/equivalent modules? 	Yes/No + commentary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If NO, please comment on differences 	
2. Consideration of equivalence of module results across the cohorts of students	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the pattern of results for all modules broadly in line with the overall patterns of results in other modules for the same cohorts of students? 	Yes/No + commentary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If NO, please comment on differences 	
3. For the award years of programmes only	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the distribution of award classifications consistent with expectations? 	Yes/No + commentary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is this distribution of award classifications broadly in line with past patterns? 	Yes/No + commentary
4. Are there any particularly unusual results – individual or module – that should be noted?	

Template for review with Subject/Disciplinary External Examiners

Subject/discipline:	
Date	
Programme(s):	
Subject representatives:	
1. Consideration of module results vis-à-vis previous years' module results for equivalent modules	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the pattern of results for the modules broadly in line with previous years' patterns for the same/equivalent modules? 	Yes/No + commentary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If NO, please comment on differences 	
2. Consideration of equivalence of modules across years of programme(s)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the pattern of results for these subject/disciplinary modules broadly in line with the overall patterns of results in other disciplinary modules for the same cohorts of students? Is the pattern of results for these modules out of sync with expectations? 	Yes/No + commentary
3. Are there any particularly unusual results – individual or module – that should be noted?	

Template for note of discussion with External Examiner(s)

External examiner(s) present:	
Others present:	
Relevant Programmes/PABs:	
Date:	
Feedback and observations on our processes:	
Recommendations to the Progression and Award Board:	