

Regulations and guidelines: external examiners for taught programmes/modules

Approved by Academic Council on 9 February 2011.

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.

In order to achieve these objectives, External Examiners need to be able to:

- (i) participate in full in the assessment processes for the award of degrees and other qualifications
- (ii) arbitrate or adjudicate 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.

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 the University's Equality and Access Policy <http://www.dcu.ie/equality/policy.shtml>¹.

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 is normally responsible for ensuring that this is done.
- 2.1.2 An external examiner may be appointed to a programme, two or more related programmes, or a range of modules.

¹ External examiners should, upon appointment, be made aware of this policy so that they will be in a position to adhere to it themselves.

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 Nominations should be submitted to the University Standards Committee, via Student Awards in the Registry, on Form EE1 <http://www.dcu.ie/registry/forms/pdfs/EE1.pdf>.

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 externed. 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 is desirable, although not essential.
- 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 least at the level of the programme/s being externed.
- 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 (see Section 3.7 below).

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.

2.2.3 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:

- Have no close personal relationship with examiners or candidates (refer to the University's Conflict of Interest policy at http://www.dcu.ie/staff/conflict_guidelines.pdf)

- Not have been in the employ of the University (in any capacity) in the five years prior to appointment.
- Not have been a student of the University in the five years prior to appointment.
- Not be a beneficiary of any bursary or remuneration from the University other than from the post of external examiner, member of accreditation panel, or recruitment/promotions panel.
- 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 college² or *vice versa*. Nor may a staff member of a linked college act as an external examiner in another linked college.

2.4 Reciprocity

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

- an external examiner should normally not be succeeded by another external examiner from the same institution (or a partner institution of this institution)
- no School should normally have more than one external examiner from the same institution (or a partner institution of this 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.

2.5 Period of service

- 2.5.1 An external examiner is appointed for a maximum period of four years. Reappointment at the end of this period is not possible. Where a Programme Board wishes to reappoint an external examiner, a period of four years from the completion of the initial service must elapse before a request for reappointment can be considered.
- 2.5.2 Reappointment is for a maximum period of four years. Following such a period of reappointment, an individual cannot be considered for any further service as external examiner to the University or the linked colleges.
- 2.5.3 An individual who retires from employment during the period of service as external examiner may continue to act as external examiner until the period has been completed.
- 2.5.4 To the extent possible, appointments within a School and/or across a subject area should be staggered so as to avoid a sudden significant loss of expertise.
- 2.5.5 Consideration can be given to nominating the same external examiner to serve in two different areas of the University (including the linked colleges) at the same time, on

² i.e. St Patrick's College; Mater Dei Institute of Education; All Hallows College.

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.

3. DUTIES

- 3.1. External examiners are normally appointed with responsibility for a specific programme or specific programmes or a range of modules (see Section 2.1.2 above). External examiners should deal primarily with the final year(s) of the programmes 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.
- 3.2. It is the duty of external examiners to see the relevant syllabuses and the drafts of all examination question papers, marking schemes and worked solutions before the question papers are sent for printing. External examiners have the right to make such suggestions regarding deletions, additions and amendments as appropriate.
- 3.3. External examiners should see a representative sample of scripts and other material presented for assessment, e.g. projects or practical work, particularly for those years of a programme which contribute directly to the final degree award and classification.
- 3.4. 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.
- 3.5. The external examiner(s) should certify the agreed final marks for each candidate.
- 3.6. External examiners may be consulted about relevant matters in respect of examination appeals submitted to the Appeals Board.
- 3.7. All external examiners will be expected to visit the University ONCE in each academic year. This visit will, normally, take place at the time of determination of final results in Summer. In the case of resit examinations, the attendance of external examiners at the University, if required, will be arranged by the appropriate School. External examiners should endeavour to discharge by correspondence, using registered post, as much of their work (including finalisation of examination papers and/or other tests) as it is feasible and appropriate to perform in this manner.
- 3.8. 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.
- 3.9. When visiting the University, the duties of external examiners are as follows:
 - (i) to review all borderline cases and, if necessary, interview the relevant candidates
 - (ii) to agree with the internal examiner(s) the proposed final marks and levels of classification for consideration by the appropriate Progression and Awards Board
 - (iii) to attend the appropriate meetings of the Progression and Awards Board.

4. REPORTAGE

Procedures are under review at present.

5. PAYMENT OF FEES

- 5.1. An annual fee will be paid on receipt of the external examiner's Report. The report should be submitted to the Registry within six weeks of completion of all examination sessions for which the examiner has responsibility, in accordance with the procedures outlined in Section 4 above.
- 5.2 External examiners will also be reimbursed for travel and related expenses in accordance with University regulations. The University has negotiated special rates with a number of hotels and guesthouses adjacent to the campus. Details may be obtained on request.