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## External Examiner Policy - Taught Programmes

### 1. Context

As a designated awarding body, Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, is responsible for the establishment and granting of awards, in alignment with the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. Trinity engages external examiners to evaluate the quality and academic standards of its taught programmes and postgraduate research theses, in line with international best practice.

The University is also required to assure the quality of validated programmes delivered by its Linked Providers under the *Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Act 2012*.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the [College Calendar Part II Undergraduate Studies](#), and [Part III Graduate Studies and Higher Degrees](#).

### 2. Purpose

The External Examiner Policy aims to ensure a transparent, consistent, and effective external examining system at Trinity.

### 3. Benefits

- 3.1. The quality of the content, organisation and assessment of Trinity's programmes is maintained and enhanced.
- 3.2. The Trinity education is benchmarked to that of comparable universities.
- 3.3. Recruitment and retention of external examiners is promoted.



## **4. Scope**

- 4.1 This policy applies to the external examining of taught programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level, inclusive of programme elements such as subjects, programme strands and modules.
- 4.2. The minimum requirement at Trinity is for external examining of the award phase of all undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes (Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees). Additional requirements vary across schools and disciplines and may be subject to the requirements of external accreditation bodies.
- 4.3. Linked Providers are required to align their external examining procedures with this Policy.
- 4.4. The taught components of Professional Taught Doctorate programmes are in scope of this Policy.
- 4.5. The research dissertation component of Postgraduate Taught Programmes is in scope of this Policy.

## **5. Principles**

- 5.1 External examiners provide a valuable and objective perspective that contributes to the quality assurance of Trinity's education and research programmes.
- 5.2. The implementation of the External Examiner Policy is expected to take account of Trinity's institutional commitments to Sustainability and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI).

## **6. Definitions**

- 6.1 External examiners are individuals appointed to provide impartial and independent advice on degree awarding standards and on student achievement in relation to those standards. Examiners are drawn from comparable third level institutions and also from industry, business, and the professions.
- 6.2. The most up-to-date definitions of relevance to this policy are located in the [Curriculum Glossary](#). As of 4<sup>th</sup> August 2023, the following definitions apply:



- a. A **module** is a self-contained unit of teaching, learning and assessment on particular topics, with learning outcomes, modes of delivery and assessment schemes. In Trinity, modules are normally the building blocks of programmes and carry defined credit values.
- b. A **programme** is a set of modules or course options, such as strands or subject pathways, that has programme learning outcomes and leads to an award (e.g., a degree). The terms programme and course are often used interchangeably when the course leads to an award (e.g., degree course, certificate course) though the term programme is more commonly used.
- c. A **programme strand** is a set of modules that creates a distinct thematic pathway within a programme of study. The strand learning outcomes must relate to the overall learning outcomes of the parent programme.
- d. A **subject** refers to a branch of learning or discipline. The term is of particular relevance to undergraduate education in Trinity where programme architectures enable the study of one, two and more subjects to Bachelor's degree level.
- e. A **validated programme** is a programme of study that is developed, delivered, and managed by a linked provider but approved and quality assured by the designated awarding body leading to one of its awards.

## 7. Policy

### 7.1 Role of the External Examiner of Taught Programmes at Undergraduate and Postgraduate Level:

- i. Evaluate if academic standards are being maintained.
- ii. Ensure that examination regulations are followed.
- iii. Ensure that individual students are treated fairly.
- iv. Moderate borderline cases in all classes of award.
- v. Participate annually in meetings of the Court of Examiners.
- vi. Identify and communicate areas for improvement at the Court of Examiners and document them in the External Examiner Annual Report.
- viii. Where appropriate and feasible, meet with representatives of the cohort of students on programmes, for which they are examiner.



- ix. Submit an External Examiner Annual Report within two weeks of publication of results. Where external examiners are examining at the subprogramme level (subject or programme strand) individual reports should be submitted for each subject and programme strand, whereas multiple modules can be addressed in one report.

## 7.2 Criteria

- i. External examiners must possess sufficient seniority, experience and achievement in the discipline covered by the programme.
- ii. External examiners should normally be attached to a third level institution and hold a doctoral qualification in the relevant discipline.
- iii. External examiners should not be a recent employee of Trinity i.e., within a period of five years.
- iv. External examiners should not have any existing or recent relationships with Trinity, members of its staff or students that could call their impartiality into question or represent a potential conflict of interest. Schools should consult the External Examiner website as to what constitutes potential causes of conflict of interest <[conflict of interest](#)>. If a query exists around the suitability of the nominee, clarification should be sought from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies or Dean of Graduate Studies, as appropriate, prior to initial contact being made with the potential nominee.
- v. It is required that external examiners have experience in teaching and recommended that they have programme/curriculum management experience at the level that they are examining e.g., Programme Coordinator.
- vi. If the nominated external examiner is emeritus, they must demonstrate ongoing engagement with the discipline and educational process and commence their term as External Examiner within three years of retiring from an active teaching role.

## 7.3 Appointment

- i. The number of external examiners appointed to the degree year of each programme must ensure that sufficient expertise is available to cover all areas of the syllabus under assessment.
- ii. Heads of School in consultation with Programme Coordinators and Director of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate) submit nominations to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies for approval on behalf of the University Council.



- iii. Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) in consultation with Course Coordinators submit nominations to the Dean of Graduate Studies for approval on behalf of the University Council.
- iv. Where it is necessary to create an additional external examiner position, the budget holder (Head of School/Unit/Faculty Dean) must give approval for the creation of the position.

#### **7.4 Term of Appointment**

- i. The term of appointment for external examiners for taught programmes is three academic years.
- ii. Extensions for examiners to serve an additional year for taught programmes may only be sought under exceptional circumstances and require approval from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies or Dean of Graduate Studies.
- iii. Examiners in taught programmes may not be:
  - a. re-appointed within a school, discipline, or programme unless at least six years have elapsed since the end of their previous appointment.
  - b. consecutively appointed to taught programmes (UG/PGT) in the same School/ Discipline.
  - c. be appointed to examine more than one taught (UG/PG) programme normally.
- iv. External examiners may be appointed:
  - a. at the module level across Schools (where modules are related), at the same level (i.e., UG **or** PGT) where the term of appointment is simultaneous.
  - b. as an external examiner for a taught programme within two years of having examined as a research examiner in the same School/ Discipline.
- v. An external examiner may be discharged from their appointment at any time during their term, if they fail to perform adequately their roles and responsibilities, as outlined in this policy, or if conflicts of interest arise during their term.

#### **7.5 Frequency and mode of attendance**

- i. External examiners for taught programmes are required to attend Court of Examiner meetings.
- ii. The decision as to the frequency and mode of attendance by external examiners must take account of the sustainability and carbon footprint responsibilities of the University, the value of relationships with external examiners and the requirements specific to programmes and disciplines.
- iii. There is no minimum requirement for physical attendance by external examiners at Courts of Examiners (unless required by external accreditation bodies), however it is



- recommended that the external examiner physically attend the Court of Examiners once in their three-year term and preferably in their first year, in accordance with section 7.1.vi above.
- iv. The decision as to the frequency and mode of attendance by external examiners rests with the relevant Head of School and Director of Teaching and Learning (UG or PG) and should be informed by the:
    - a. pedagogical approaches to assessment i.e., the nature of the materials to be examined.
    - b. requirements of external accreditation bodies.
    - c. the suitability of facilities (space and technology) to facilitate the mode of attendance.
    - d. preference of the School / Discipline and the external examiner.
    - e. sustainability and EDI considerations.
  - v. Irrespective of the mode of attendance, all normal functions of the external examiner role are to be fulfilled. (e.g., review of scripts; meetings with faculty; meetings with students, etc.).
  - vi. Where required by the mode of attendance, access to an EU GDPR and College approved platform must be arranged prior to the initial examination period and confirmed for each subsequent examination period during the external examiner's term, to ensure access to digital assessment artifacts (refer to <https://www.tcd.ie/itservices/kb/vle/external-examiners/> ).
  - vi. If an external examiner attends remotely, the proper conduct of the Court of Examiners must be agreed in advance with the external examiner, as outlined below:
    - a. The external examiner attending remotely should connect to the Court of Examiners prior to the allocated start time, must remain connected for the duration of the meeting, with the times of entry and exit clearly recorded in the minutes of the Court.
    - b. The external examiner must be provided with all the relevant documentation in advance of the meeting. Any additional materials presented at the Court of Examiners should be shared with the external examiner in real time and the external examiner should confirm the content of the materials prior to any relevant discussion.
    - c. The technology platform used to facilitate remote attendance:
      - must meet any applicable data protection requirement; and
      - be tested with the external examiner prior to the Court of Examiners, and include testing any format used to share documents in real time; and
      - ideally enable a visual connection.



- d. The quality of the connection must be recorded in the minutes of the Court of Examiners.
- e. The external examiner should note their remote attendance in Section 1 of the Annual Report Template, which invites comment on their satisfaction with the conduct of the Court of Examiners.

## **7.6 Payment**

- i. Trinity pays external examiners of taught programmes fees at a fixed rate and reimburses expenses incurred.
- ii. Payment is administered by Heads of School and School Managers.
- iii. External examiners must complete the required payment forms in order to facilitate payment.
- iv. External examiners from outside the Republic of Ireland, in accordance with Irish Revenue requirements, must apply for a PPSN number in order to minimise the rate of tax for days that they physically attend Trinity to undertake examining duties. (refer to [External Examiner Website- information for External Examiners](#)).

## **7.7 External Examining of Validated Programmes Delivered by Linked Providers**

- i. Linked providers are expected to abide by the terms of this policy and are accountable to Trinity for the quality assurance of programmes validated by the University.
- ii. Linked providers must submit nominations for the external examiners of validated programmes to the Senior Lecturer (Dean of Undergraduate Studies) or Dean of Graduate Studies (as appropriate), for approval, prior to submission to the Associate College Degrees Committee for noting.
- iii. Linked providers meet all the costs associated with the external examining of validated programmes.

## **7.8 External Examining of Programmes Delivered by Collaborative Partners**

- i. Collaborative partners must establish their own arrangements for the external examining of collaborative programmes, in alignment with:
  - a. this policy;
  - b. relevant quality assurance legislation in their respective jurisdictions;
  - c. the approved Course Proposal; and
  - d. the Agreement signed by all parties to the partnership.

## **8. Responsibility**

- 8.1 The Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies is responsible for overseeing this policy in relation to undergraduate programmes;



- 8.2 The Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies is responsible for overseeing this policy in relation to postgraduate taught programmes.

## **9. Related Documents**

- 9.1 [College Calendar Part II Undergraduate Studies.](#)
- 9.2 External Examiner [Nomination Form](#) (Taught Programmes)
- 9.3 External Examiner [Annual Report Template](#) (UG Taught Programmes)
- 9.4 Link for PGT Taught Programmes <https://forms.office.com/e/bswxGNbi9Y>
- 9.5 [Terms and Conditions of Data Processing by External Examiners](#)
- 9.6 [Information for Examiners applying for a PPSN number](#)
- 9.7 [PPS Number Exceptional Application - f883de3c-1a05-4666-bad4-a1af2af27841.pdf \(www.gov.ie\)](#)
- 9.8 [Payment Models for External Examiners \(Taxation\)](#)
- 9.9 [EE Payment Requisition Form.](#)
- 9.10 [External Examiners/Reviewers Irish Set-up Form PRD10 form](#)
- 9.11 External Examiners using Trinity College Dublin's IT Systems  
<https://www.tcd.ie/itservices/kb/vle/external-examiners/>
- 9.12 Information on technology infrastructure in Lecture Theatres  
<https://www.tcd.ie/itservices/our-services/teaching-rooms-with-audio-visual-equipment/>

## **10. Document Control**

- 10.1 Date of initial approval: June 2015 (V1.0), April 2018 (V1.1)
- 10.2 Date policy revised: June 2023
- 10.3 Date policy effective from: September 2023
- 10.4 Date of next review: Academic Year 2026/2027