



External Examiner Policy - Research 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 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 III- Graduate Studies and Higher Degrees](#).

2. Purpose

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

3. Benefits

- 3.1. The quality and consistency of the assessment of Trinity's research degree programmes is maintained and enhanced.
- 3.2. The Trinity education is benchmarked to that of comparable universities.
- 3.3. The standard for research thesis examination is aligned with best practice internationally.
- 3.4. Recruitment and retention of research external examiners is promoted.



4. Scope

- 4.1. This policy applies to the external examining of all research degrees in Trinity.
- 4.2. Linked Providers are required to align their external examining procedures for research degrees, validated by Trinity, with this policy.
- 4.3. The taught components of Professional Taught Doctorate Programmes are out of scope of this Policy (refer External Examiner Policy-Taught).
- 4.4. The research dissertation component of Taught Programmes is outside the scope of this Policy (refer External Examiner Policy-Taught).

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. They are drawn from comparable third level institutions and also from industry, business, and the professions. For research theses the external examiner must be recognised as an independent expert in the candidate's field of study.



7. Policy

7.1 Role of the External Examiner of Postgraduate Research Masters Theses

- i. To determine if a thesis submitted for a master's degree shows evidence of rigour and discrimination, appreciation of the relationship of the subject to a wider field of knowledge, and makes a contribution to knowledge/scholarship.
- ii. In the case of a Master's degree, to propose one of the following recommendations:
 - a. The degree be awarded for the thesis as it stands; or
 - b. The degree be awarded for the thesis subject to minor corrections; or
 - c. The thesis be referred for major revision and subsequent re-examination; or
 - d. The thesis should be failed.

In the case of recommending (c) the external examiner re-examines the revised and resubmitted thesis and proposes a recommendation.

- iii. To participate in a viva voce examination, as required:
 - a. A viva voce is not mandatory in the examination of a Master's thesis. However, one may be arranged at the request of either of the examiners, or the School's Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate), after preliminary consideration of the thesis.
 - b. A viva voce examination is mandatory in cases where one or both examiners contemplate failure of the Master's thesis or recommend that the thesis is referred for major corrections.

7.2 Role of the External Examiner of Postgraduate Research Doctoral Theses

- i. To determine if a thesis submitted for a Doctoral degree shows evidence of rigour and discrimination, appreciation of the relationship of the subject to a wider field of knowledge, and makes an appreciable, original contribution to knowledge, as well as showing originality in the methods used and/or conclusions drawn.
- ii. To propose and agree with the internal examiner a recommendation that:
 - a. The degree be awarded for the thesis as it stands; or



- b. The degree be awarded for the thesis subject to minor corrections; or
- c. The thesis be referred for major revision and subsequent re-examination; or
- d. A lower degree be awarded, if necessary, following minor corrections to the thesis; or
- e. The thesis should be failed.

In the case of recommending (c) or (d), the external examiner re-examines the revised and resubmitted thesis and proposes a recommendation.

- iii. To participate in a viva voce examination for Doctoral theses:
 - a. A viva voce examination must be held for all Doctoral candidates.
 - b. The external examiner should submit a pre-viva report to the Internal examiner one week before the scheduled viva-voce examination, setting out key areas for discussion in the examination.
 - c. Agree and sign a joint report of the outcome of the examination, so that the report can be submitted by the Internal Examiner, within 24 hours of completion of the viva-voce examination.

In the case where two external examiners have been appointed to examine a thesis, and a recommendation has been made for minor corrections, one examiner must be nominated to assume the responsibilities of an internal examiner and that examiner must advise the Dean of Graduate Studies that requested corrections have been carried out satisfactorily.

7.3 Criteria

- i. The external examiner should be a recognised independent expert in the candidate's field of study.
- ii. The external examiner should not be a recent collaborator in the candidate's research or that of their supervisor(s).
- iii. The external examiner should not be a recent graduate of Trinity, i.e., within the past five years.



- iv. The external examiner should not be a recent employee of Trinity, i.e., within the past five years.
- v. External examiners should not have any existing or recent professional relationships with Trinity, members of its staff or students that could call into question their impartiality or present the potential for conflict of interest.
- vi. The Dean of Graduate Studies is to be consulted prior to approaching a nominee if they are not affiliated with a Third Level Educational Institution or if a query exists around the suitability of a nominee.
- vii. If the external examiner is emeritus, they must be research active.

7.4 Appointment

- i. The Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) in consultation with the supervisor nominates potential external examiners to the Dean of Graduate Studies.
- ii. The Dean of Graduate Studies approves nominations for external examiner for Master's and Doctoral Research Theses on behalf of the University Council.
- iii. Where it is necessary to create an additional external examiner position, the Dean of Graduate Studies must give approval to the creation of the position.

7.5 Term of Appointment

- i. The term of appointment for external examiners of research theses is to the point of completion of the process, which may be up to two years if work is referred for reexamination.
- ii. Examiners of research theses may not be appointed as a research theses examiner until at least three years have elapsed since the end of their previous appointment, in the same School/ Discipline.
- iii. Examiners of research theses may not be appointed as a research theses examiner for the same Supervisor (acting as Principal Supervisor or Co-Supervisor) until at least five years have elapsed, since the end of their previous appointment as a research thesis examiner for a student of that Supervisor.
- iv. Examiners may be appointed as a research examiner after two years have lapsed since the completion of their term as an external examiner for a taught programme 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 adequately perform their roles and responsibilities, as outlined in this policy or if conflicts of interest arise during their term.

7.6 Mode of Attendance

- i. The decision as to the 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 examination requirements specific to disciplines.
- ii. The [Procedure for the operation of an online viva voce examination of a Research Thesis or Dissertation](#), should be followed if an online viva voce examination is to be conducted.
- iii. The format for the viva should not be grounds for an appeal.

7.7 Payment

- i. Trinity pays external examiners of research thesis a fixed fee per individual examination 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 for the conduct of examining duties. (refer [External Examiner Website- information for External Examiners](#)).

7.7 External Examining of validated Research Degree 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 research external examiners to the Dean of Graduate Studies for approval.
- iii. Linked providers meet all the costs associated with the examining of research programmes.



7.8 External Examining of Research 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 jurisdiction;
 - c. the approved programme proposal; and
 - d. the Agreement signed by all parties to the partnership.

8. Responsibility

- 8.1 The Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies is responsible for overseeing this policy in relation to research theses examination.

9. Related Documents

- 9.1 [College Calendar Part III- Graduate Studies and Higher Degrees](#)
- 9.2 [Procedure for the operation of an online viva voce examination of a Research Thesis or Dissertation](#)
- 9.3 [Nomination Form for External and Internal Examiners of Research Theses](#)
- 9.4 [Research Examiner Nomination Guidelines](#)
- 9.5 Information on technology infrastructure in Lecture Theatres and Classrooms is available at <https://www.tcd.ie/itservices/our-services/teaching-rooms-with-audio-visual-equipment/>
- 9.6 [Sustainability Policy](#)
- 9.7 [Travel Policy](#)
- 9.8 [Terms and Conditions of Data Processing by External Examiners](#)
- 9.9 [Information for Examiners applying for a PPSN number](#)
- 9.10 [PPS Number Exceptional Application Form \(www.gov.ie\)](#)
- 9.11 [Payment Models for External Examiners \(Taxation\)](#)
- 9.12 [EE Payment Requisition Form.](#)
- 9.13 [External Examiners/Reviewers Irish Set-up Form PRD10 form](#)

10. Document Control

- 10.1 Date of initial approval: June 2015 (V1.0), April 2018 (V1.1) (Combined Policy)



10.2 Date policy revised: 8th June 2023

10.3 Date policy effective from: 8th June 2023

10.4 Date of next review: Academic Year 2026/2027

