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## External Examiners Policy

### 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 educational providers under the *Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Act 2012*.

### 2. Purpose

The External Examiners Policy ensures 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 The standard for research thesis examination is aligned with international best practice.

### 4. Scope

- 4.1 This policy applies to the external examining of taught programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and of postgraduate research dissertations.



- 4.2 The minimum requirement at Trinity is for external examining of the final year of degree awarding programmes. Additional requirements vary across schools and disciplines, and may be subject to the requirements of external accreditation bodies.
- 4.3 This policy also applies to remote attendance by external examiners at supplemental Courts of Examiners for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and in exceptional circumstances.

## **5. Principles**

- 5.1 Trinity is responsible for the quality assurance of its education, research and related services.
- 5.2 External examiners provide a valuable and objective perspective that contributes to the quality assurance of Trinity education and research programmes.

## **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 academia and also from industry, business and the professions. For research dissertations the external examiner must be recognised as an independent expert in the candidate field of study.

## **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 on borderline cases in all classes of award;
- v. Attend at least one meeting each academic year of the Courts of Examiners of which they are member;



- vi. Identify and communicate areas for improvement at the Court of Examiners and document them in the External Examiner Annual Report;
- vii. Submit the External Examiner Annual Report within eight weeks of completion of external examining duties.

**7.2 Role of the External Examiner of Postgraduate Research Theses, Masters and Doctoral:**

- i. 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. 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;
- iii. Propose that, in the case of a Master's degree:
  - a. The degree be awarded for the thesis as it stands;
  - b. The degree be awarded for the thesis subject to minor corrections, for which two months are allowed from the time of notification;
  - c. The thesis be referred for major revision and subsequent re-examination, for which 6 months are normally allowed from the time of notification; or
  - d. The thesis should be failed.
- iv. Propose that, in the case of a Doctoral degree,
  - a. The degree be awarded for the thesis as it stands,
  - b. The degree be awarded for the thesis subject to minor corrections, for which two months are allowed from the time of notification,



- c. The thesis be referred for major revision and subsequent re-examination, for which six months are normally allowed from the time of notification,
  - d. A lower degree be awarded, if necessary, following minor corrections to the thesis, or
  - e. The thesis should be failed.
- v. Viva Voce Examinations
- a. A viva voce is not mandatory in the examination of a Master's thesis. However, one may be arranged if either of the examiners, or the School's Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate), requires it 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;
  - c. A viva must be held for all Ph.D. candidates.
- vi. Inform the Dean of Graduate Studies that requested corrections have been carried out satisfactorily if nominated to do so in the case of two External Examiners being appointed, one of which has been assigned the functions of the internal examiner.
- vii. Submit the report of the examination (including the viva voce if held) within eight weeks of the completion of examining duties.

### **7.3 Criteria**

#### **7.3.1 Taught Programmes**

- 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 qualifications to at least the level of the qualification under assessment.



- iii. 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.

#### 7.3.2 Research Thesis

- i. The external examiner should be a recognised independent expert in the candidates field of study;
- ii. The external examiner should not be a collaborator in the candidate's research;
- iii. The external examiner should not be a recent graduate of Trinity, i.e. within the past ten 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.
- v. The Dean of Graduate Studies is to be consulted prior to approaching the nominee if they are not from a Third Level Educational Institution.

### 7.4 **Appointment**

#### 7.4.1 Taught Programmes

- i. The number of external examiners appointed to the degree year of each programme must be enough to ensure that sufficient expertise is available to cover all areas of the syllabus under assessment.
- ii. Heads of School in consultation with Course 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, then the Faculty Dean, as budget holder, must give approval to the creation of the position.



#### 7.4.2 Research Thesis

- 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 Masters and Doctoral Research Thesis on behalf of the University Council.
- iii. Where it is necessary to create an additional external examiner position, then the Dean of Graduate studies must give approval to the creation of the position.

#### 7.5 Term of Appointment

- 7.5.1. The term of appointment for external examiners for taught programmes is three academic years.
- 7.5.2. Extensions for 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.
- 7.5.3. Examiners in taught programmes may not be re-appointed unless at least six years have elapsed since the end of their previous appointment.
- 7.5.4. The term of appointment for external examiners of research dissertations is to the point of completion of the process, which may be up to two years if work is referred for major corrections.
- 7.5.5. Examiners of research dissertations may not be appointed until at least five years have elapsed since the end of their previous appointment.
- 7.5.6. 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 Remote Attendance by External Examiners

- 7.6.1. External Examiners are required to attend the annual session of the Court of Examiners in accordance with section 7.1.v above.



- 7.6.2. Remote attendance by an external examiner may be approved for the supplemental Court of Examiners.
- 7.6.3. Remote attendance by external examiners may also be permitted in exceptional circumstances, such as illness, travel disruption or other unforeseen events.
- 7.6.4. Written approval must be requested from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies or Dean of Graduate Studies, as applicable, as soon as the need arises for an external examiner to attend remotely. The request should include reference to how the external examiner will meet the requirements of the role of external examiner for the relevant School if attending remotely.
- 7.6.5. If approval is given for an External Examiner to attend remotely:
- i. Protocols necessary for the proper conduct of the Court of Examiners must be agreed in advance with the external examiner attending remotely;
  - ii. 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;
  - iii. 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;
  - iv. The technology platform used to facilitate remote attendance must:
    - a. meet any applicable data protection requirements;
    - b. 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;



- c. ideally enable a visual connection e.g. video-conferencing or skype;
- v. The quality of the connection must be recorded in the minute of the Court of Examiner;
- vi. The external examiner should note their remote attendance in Section A5 of the Annual Report Template, which invites comment on their satisfaction with the conduct of the Court of Examiners.

#### **7.7. Payment**

- 7.7.1. Trinity pays external examiners of taught programmes fees at a fixed rate and also reimburses expenses incurred.
- 7.7.2. Trinity pays external examiners of research thesis a fixed fee per individual examination and also reimburses expenses incurred.
- 7.7.3. Payment is administered by Heads of School and School Administrators.
- 7.7.4. External examiners must complete the required payment forms in order to facilitate payment.

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

- 7.8.1. 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.
- 7.8.2. Linked providers must submit nominations for the external examiners of validated programmes to the Trinity College Registrar, for approval by the Associated Colleges Degree Committee, or equivalent management committee.
- 7.8.3. Linked providers meet all the costs associated with the external examining of validated programmes.

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





7.9.1 Collaborative partners must establish their own arrangements for the external examining of collaborative programmes, in alignment with this policy and in accordance with relevant quality assurance legislation in their respective jurisdictions.

## 8. Responsibility

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

8.2 The Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies is responsible for overseeing this policy in relation to undergraduate programmes.

## 9. Related Documents

9.1 External Examining Process Maps ([Undergraduate](#) and [Postgraduate Taught](#))

9.2 External Examiner [nomination form](#) (Taught Programmes)

9.3 [Nomination Form for External and Internal Examiners of Research Theses](#)

9.4 Graduate Studies Office – [Research Examiners Nomination Guidelines](#)

9.5 External Examiner [Annual Report Template](#) (Taught Programmes)

9.6 External Examiner payment forms (registered for tax in the Republic of Ireland):

[External Examiners/Reviewers Irish Set-up Form](#)

[PRD10 form](#)

[EE Payment Requisition Form.](#)

9.7 External Examiner payment forms (not registered for tax in the Republic of Ireland, and responsible for complying with tax regulations in accordance with the requirements of their country of origin):

[EE Payment Requisition Form.](#)

9.8 Information on technology infrastructure in Lecture Theatres and Classrooms is available at <https://www.tcd.ie/itservices/facilities/lecture-theatre-av.php>.



## **10. Document Control**

10.1 Initial approval by Council in June 2015

10.2 Revised Policy approved by Council in April 2018

Next review due 2020/21