



UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

External Examiner Policy (Taught Programmes)

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The Academic Council of the University of Limerick is charged under the University of Limerick Act with ensuring academic standards and the quality of all awards made by the University. In accordance with the University's quality assurance procedures, Academic Council appoints external examiners to all taught programmes, modules, and awards to assure academic standards, advise on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and provide an independent view on student performance, programme outcomes and proposed awards.

In general, Academic Council Examination Boards will consider recommendations from faculty examination boards and submissions from both internal and external examiners before determining students' final awards.

1.2 Scope

1.2.1 *To whom does the policy apply?*

This policy applies to University community (staff and students), external examiners appointed by University of Limerick and prospective external examiners.

1.2.2 *In what situations does the policy apply?*

This policy applies to the nomination and appointment of external examiners, to the operation and management of the external examination process, to the evaluation of this process and in support of the evaluation of taught academic programmes. .

1.2.3 *Who is responsible for ensuring that the policy (and any associated procedure) is implemented and monitored?*

The Provost and Deputy President (PDP) is responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented as approved. The PDP is supported in this by the

- AVP-AA who is responsible for management of nominations and the appointment of external examiners by Academic Council
- Director of Quality who is responsible for ensuring administrative support to the appointment of external examiners and the annual reporting process
- Deans and Heads of Department through the nomination of appropriate examiners, the facilitation of access to assessments and provision of information to examiners

2 Context

2.1 Legal and Regulatory Context

This policy has been developed in accordance with the University's responsibility to have quality assurance procedures in place for its activities as required by the Quality & Qualifications (Education & Training) Act, 2012 as amended and its obligations to give due regard to quality assurance guidelines published by Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

3 Policy Statements

3.1 Principles for UL External Examiner Policy

3.1.1 External Examiner Remit & Function

External examiners are appointed by Academic Council to act independently and impartially within the following remits.

- **Examiner of the Outcome & Standards**
- **Auditor of the Process**
- **Consultant to the Curriculum**

3.1.2 Examiner of the Outcome & Standards

In general, this remit includes examining the output and the standards achieved by those outputs, to review the standard of marking across the cohort and advise upon its general appropriateness to the work submitted. To assist the External Examiners in fulfilling this remit the following principles will be applied –

- The External Examiner will be provided with the following materials for each module examined in the form of a *Module Pack* – the module outline; details of each assessment mode with copies of the assessment instrument (e.g. the exam paper, , lab guidance sheets etc.) if appropriate; the marking rubric; the final module results for all students including high level grade metrics and a representative sample of the submitted assessment materials.
- The External Examiner will be provided access to all assessment materials for all students excluding assessments where the original submission by the student does not remain under the control of the university, or in the case of performance, practice or placements, where it is not possible to re-create the original event and sufficient records are not available.
- The External Examiner will be provided access to any other materials requested by the External Examiner in consultation with the University.
- The External Examiner will be provided with the opportunity to comment on the decisions made with regard to progression of students and the exit award of graduating students. To facilitate this the External Examiner must be provided with sufficient information as to confirm the grades awarded.
- An External Examiner may moderate grades awarded by an Internal Examiner.
- All assessment materials and/or records of assessments will be retained in line with the University of Limerick Records Management Policy (available at ul.ie/policy-hub/) and made available to the External Examiner on request.

3.1.3 Auditor of the Process

In general, this remit includes ensuring that the University's regulations and procedures with respect to the assessment process are carried out in a rigorous manner. To assist the External Examiners in fulfilling this remit the following principles will apply

- External Examiners must have the opportunity to discuss procedural issues at module/programme (e.g. formative feedback procedures within a module/programme) and University level (e.g. QCA/GPA calculation, discretionary band procedures etc.) with University staff and, where appropriate, those involved with managing the External Examiner process within the institution. Outcomes of these discussions will be reported back to Academic Council via the Dean (or their nominee).
- The External Examiner will be provided with the opportunity to provide immediate comment to the University on any issue arising during their tenure.
- The External Examiner will be provided with the opportunity to comment on the procedures used by the internal examiners related to decisions made with regard to progression of students and the award of graduating students. To facilitate this the External Examiner must be provided with detailed procedures used by the Internal Examiners in coming to these decisions.
- The External Examiner will be invited to attend the University Exam Board.

3.1.4 Consultant to the Curriculum

In general, this remit includes assisting developments within curricula at programme and module level. To assist the External Examiners in fulfilling this remit the following principles will apply–

- An External Examiner will provide written comment related to the curriculum they have examined.
- Where an External Examiner is engaged by the University as an additional External Examiner the external examiner will provide contextualised comments related to the programme(s) for which their specialised area is connected with.

3.2 Roles & Responsibilities

3.2.1 External Examiner Role

The role of the External Examiner is to -

- Ensure the adequacy of standards of the University assessments and the maintenance of uniformity of standards as far as is practicable from year to year
- Ensure that the appropriate standards with regard to academic grades that are applied.
- Ensure that comparability of standards across the University is achieved and maintained as far as is feasible.
- Ensure that the academic standards of programmes, modules, and the awards to which they lead are consistent with the academic outcomes specified and are comparable to those achieved in the subject area in equivalent universities internationally.
- Consider whether the academic standard attained by a student is at the appropriate level for the grade or award recommended by the Examination Board for that student.
- Review assessment methods and student performance and advise Academic Council whether students' attainment of the programme's learning outcomes has been fairly assessed.
- Where appropriate, consider whether the programme of study meets the professional requirements of the discipline.

3.2.2 External Examiner Duties

The specific duties required of an External Examiner to undertake the aforementioned roles and address the External Examiner remit are as follows.

- Commenting on the suitability of the assessment strategy and individual assessment instruments for the programme and for its constituent modules.
- Commenting on any changes to the range of assessments.
- Assessing and approving all assessment instruments contributing to the final award before distribution to students.
- Reviewing a representative sample of marked assessments for each module.

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- Notifying the university of any discrepancies in the marking and of any consequent action to be taken.
- Attending the relevant Internal Exam Board(s) and the relevant University Exam Board(s) at which the overall outcome for individual students is discussed and cohort progression, completion and award statistics are considered.
- Indicating by signature their approval of the proposed outcomes by submitting an annual report to the university indicating -
 - Whether or not the academic standards for the programmes or parts of programmes for which they are responsible are appropriate
 - The extent to which assessment processes are rigorous, ensure equity of treatment for students and have been fairly conducted within institutional regulations and guidance
 - The standards of student performance in the programmes or parts of programmes to which they have been appointed
 - The comparability of the standards and student achievements with those in other higher education institutions
 - Good practice they have identified
- Providing support to the programme team in enhancing the curriculum and the student experience related to the programme of study.
- Require a documented full consultation between the external and internal examiners in exceptional cases where the external examiner is unable to visit the university.
- Require the written approval of the Provost & Deputy President (or their nominee) where it is not practical or possible for an external examiner to carry out any of their core duties and responsibilities.
- Ensure that all communications in relation to assessment are secure and confidential and in line with UL policies on IT Security, Data Protection and Records Management. External Examiners should note that all correspondence to, from, or within the University of Limerick may be the subject of a request under the Freedom of Information Acts 2014 and/or the Data Protection Acts 1988 – 2018.

3.3 External Examiner Visits

All external examiners will normally be expected to visit the University campus at least twice during their four-year tenure. Attendance will normally be expected during the first year with subsequent visits to be decided in consultation with the relevant Head of Department/School. For the avoidance of doubt, External Examiners have the option to visit the University every academic year.

Visits will normally take place at the time of the University Examination Board meeting or at the time when final results are determined and should conform to the arrangements made in this regard by the University.

The University facilitates and encourages remote external examining where appropriate. The appropriateness of remote external examining will be determined by the relevant Head of Department in consultation with the External Examiner. Remote external examining will be facilitated through videoconferencing and/or through delivery of Module Packs to the External Examiner in digital or physical format.

The relevant Head of Department should confirm with their External Examiner which format they wish to use, considering efficiency of operations and the maintenance of academic standards. It is of utmost importance that all communications in relation to assessment are secure and confidential.

In cases where the University permits the presentation of candidates at a second examination board for the purpose of determining final awards, a further visit of the relevant external

examiner is not required. However, full consultation shall take place between the external and internal examiner, a written record of which shall be available to the examination board.

3.4 External Examiner Reports

External examiners are required to submit a formal report, through an online reporting system, to the Office of the Provost & Deputy President each academic year for each programme with which they are involved. The report template will be emailed to the external examiner and should be returned 30 days after the examination board. The Head of Department should ensure that course boards consider the report and provide a formal response to the external examiner on issues raised by the external examiner in his/her report. In the event of an unresolved matter between the external and internal examiners, Academic Council shall adjudicate on the matter in question, and its decision shall be final.

3.5 Interaction between Programme Teams and the External Examiner

Academic Council requires that deans, heads of department and course directors ensure that external examiners are provided with information detailing the syllabus, learning outcomes, any professional requirements and/or standards, and the structures of all programmes and modules in sufficient time for the information provided to be fully assimilated by the external examiners and for them to take into account the implications of individual assessment instruments on the overall academic curricula concerned.

The external examiner and the department are encouraged to communicate informally to discuss teaching, assessment, and grading and to seek agreement on the most appropriate ways in which the University can best achieve compliance with the highest internationally accepted academic standards. To facilitate a successful interaction the relevant department will;

- Ensure a match between the number of external examiners and the diversity of material being examined
- Ensure that there is a single defined point of contact (the Head of Department or their nominee) within the department for each external examiner
- Send to the external examiner a checklist of items and timescales for the receipt and return of such items. This should include the most recent relevant report by any retiring external examiner.
- Notify external examiners of the dates at which their attendance is required as soon as the dates are confirmed
- Ensure all correspondence and other contacts are recorded
- Produce a *Module Pack* for each module within the jurisdiction of the specific External Examiner
- Ensure that all communications in relation to assessment are secure and confidential.

3.6 Appointment of External Examiners

Faculties and departments are responsible for identifying potential external examiners, seeking their agreement to be nominated and processing the nomination forms in accordance with the procedures approved by Academic Council. The guiding principle to be followed when identifying potential nominees is that they must have the required academic experience and professional standing to carry out the aforementioned remit and duties. To facilitate successful appointments the following principles will apply –

- An external examiner will be appointed to each programme the University offers. An external examiner may be appointed to more than one programme.
- Where the programme incorporates minor awards, supplemental, special-purpose, or exit awards, these awards fall within the remit of the relevant external examiner.
- Where the Head of Department in consultation with the Dean determines that, due to the multifaceted nature of the programme of study, a requirement exists for additional

external examiners to cover specific modules within and/or across programmes of study, additional external examiners may be appointed. An external examiner may be appointed to modules which occur on more than one programme.

- External examiners should have sufficient professional standing and experience of examining at the level for which he/she is to be appointed. While some external examiners are from industry, most tend to be academics. However, this is not a requirement. Fundamentally, all external examiners must be well qualified in their field of expertise.
- In situations where it is not possible to identify a candidate with the required professional and academic experience or where particular expertise has been identified that will provide the department with an opportunity to enhance the quality of the programme, additional external examiners may be nominated. The role and responsibilities of the external examiner will be identified on the nomination form.
- External examiners are appointed for a maximum of four years. In exceptional circumstances, application may be made to the Office of the Provost & Deputy President by the head of department for the reappointment of an external examiner for a fifth year.
- The appointment of external examiners from the same institution as the previous appointee should be avoided where possible.
- In general, nominees for the position of external examiner should be independent of the University and its staff, and any potential conflict of interest, either professional or personal, should be declared.
- External examiners should not hold any post in the University of Limerick and should not teach on any programme of study delivered in whole or part by the University. Departments are requested to identify any links between the department and its staff with the home institution of the proposed nominee for the post of external examiner. External examiners may not be reappointed to any taught programme until a period of five years has elapsed since their departure.
- Members of staff of a linked provider or any other entity currently affiliated to the University of Limerick are not eligible for appointment as external examiners.
- Former members of staff of the University, a linked provider, or any other entity affiliated to the University of Limerick are not eligible for appointment as external examiners until a period of at least five years has elapsed since their departure.

3.7 Annual Fee and Expenses

The University will pay an annual fee to the external examiner on receipt of the annual report at the end of the reporting period; this payment is made in line with Revenue guidelines where at least some of the work is undertaken in the State.

The University will allow for actual and reasonable subsistence expenses that are incurred solely in the performance of one's duties as an external examiner; these expenses are processed in line with the University of Limerick Travel & Subsistence Policy (www.ul.ie/policy-hub/).

In general, such expenses must be vouched for and supported by receipts when claiming reimbursement. Travel should be by public transport where possible. Where convenient public transport is unavailable, expenses incurred for private car use will be paid at the prevailing University rate. Air fares, where applicable, will be reimbursed at economy class rate.

3.8 Administrative Supports

Administrative supports for the External Examiner process within the University are provided by the Quality Support Unit. To ensure appropriate administrative supports the following principles will apply –

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- External examiner appointments are approved by Academic Council and noted at the next Governing Authority meeting.
- Following Academic Council approval, letters of invitation and contracts for service from the Provost & Deputy President will be sent to each prospective external examiner by the Quality Support Unit. The letter is copied to the relevant Dean of Faculty, Head of Department and Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs.
- At the conclusion of their appointment, a completion-of-term letter from the Provost & Deputy President will be sent to each retiring external examiner by the Quality Support Unit. The letter will be copied to the relevant Dean of Faculty, Head of Department and Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs.
- In general, accommodation for external examiners will be booked by the relevant academic department. External Examiners will normally make their own travel arrangements.
- All expense claims shall be submitted directly to the Provost & Deputy President's office, not to the department using procedures developed from time to time.

4 Related Documents

Related policies that should be read in conjunction with this External Examiner Policy include:

- University of Limerick Records Management Policy
- University of Limerick Travel & Subsistence Policy

5 Document Control

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