

Whose Standards? Reflections on External and Internal Peer Review of Assessment

St Laurence's Church, TU Dublin Grangegorman, D07 E244

Wednesday 23rd April 2025

Programme



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| 10am | Registration |
| 10.30am | Welcome |
| 10.40am | Reflections on External Examining Roles and Practices in Irish Universities Followed by Q&A |
| 11.30am | Break |
| 11.45am | Do you “know a 2:1 when you see one”? Social Moderation and Calibration of Academic Standards: Workshop Part 1 |
| 12.45pm | Lunch |
| 1.15pm | Do you “know a 2:1 when you see one”? Social Moderation and Calibration of Academic Standards: Workshop Part 2 |
| 2.15pm | Discussion and Q&A |
| 2.45pm | Close |

Reflections on External Examining Roles and Practices in Irish Universities

Dr Sinéad O’Sullivan

Presentation of the findings of the ExPeRA project

The [ExPeRA](#) project is the first comprehensive analysis of external examination of taught programmes in eight designated awarding bodies (DABs) in the Republic of Ireland. It provides a basis for a sectoral examination of the fitness for purpose of existing approaches to external peer review of assessment and whether those reviewing, assessing or undergoing assessment have a collective understanding of the purposes of the process.

Based on a survey of over 770 external examiners and academic leads appointed by or working in the participating institutions, this report looks at the role of the external examiner and its impacts, examines institutional policies for external examining; identifies areas of good practice, and proposes how these roles and the process can be enhanced and future proofed.

The findings suggest a shared understanding of concepts that underpin academic standards, however different actors have in some cases divergent views on the importance of different tasks undertaken by external examiners and of their effectiveness.

Recommendations are made regarding institutional policy, engagement and communication with external examiners, closing the feedback loop, the use of online platforms, encouraging internal dialogue and suggesting further work on the sustainability of the external examining process into the future.

Sinéad is Director of Quality at University of Limerick and has worked in quality assurance and enhancement for almost 20 years in the public and private higher education sector in Ireland. She was the PI for the [ExPeRA](#) project.

Do you “know a 2:1 when you see one”? Social Moderation and Calibration of Academic Standards

Dr Ian Sadler

Overview

There is significant focus upon protecting the value of UK degrees in the Higher Education sector currently (Universities UK, 2020; QAA, 2022) and external examiners plan an important role in this. Research has shown repeatedly, that under blind conditions judgements of the same piece of work by different assessors varies considerably (Bloxham, 2009). The social constructed and tacit nature of academic standards is at the heart of this variation. Social moderation and calibration is an approach that brings academics together to jointly discuss the academic standards they hold by applying them to concrete exemplars of student work. This process has considerable potential for reducing the variability in academic standards both internally but also between external examiners.

This workshop will explore these ideas in more detail and model an approach to calibration of academic standards. You will review and make judgements on student performances during the workshop and then participate in a dialogic process of peer review with other participants in order to understand different *points of interpretation*. This will foreground some of the limitations of existing tools claiming to support consistent standards and the challenges of undertaking calibration activities. Such understanding is an important foundation for understanding academic standards and the workshop will provide a model to support the development of greater shared standards in a discipline, which is useful both for programme teams and external examiners.

Biography

Ian is a Reader and Subject Head in the School of Sport and Exercise Science at Liverpool John Moores University. He is a Senior Fellow of the Advanced HE and has worked on the [Degree Standards Project](#) that has delivered national training for external examiners. He has published extensively on assessment and feedback in higher education including a paper on [Calibration and Social Moderation](#). He has recently published an edited a book on [Academic Standards in Higher Education](#) based on the work from the Degree Standards Project. Ian has delivered several calibration activities in a range of subject areas including Sport Science, Business Management and Psychology.

The [ExPeRA](#) project and this event are funded by Quality & Qualifications Ireland through the QQI Anniversary Fund Awards for Projects on Assessment and Confidence in HE Qualifications included in the NFQ.