

External Examining Regulations – ADF System

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External Examining Regulations – ADF System¹

1. Introduction

1.1 External Examiners assist higher education institutions to monitor the standards of their awards.

1.2 External Examiners act as independent and impartial advisors providing institutions with informed comment on the standards set and learner achievement in relation to those standards.

1.3 External examining is an integral and important part of quality assurance and enhancement. The purpose of external examining is to:

- verify that standards are appropriate for the award or award elements which the External Examiner has been appointed to examine;
- assist the university in the comparison of academic standards across higher education awards and award elements;
- ensure that the university's assessment processes are fair, are fairly operated and are in line with university regulations, policies and procedures.

2. General Requirements

2.1 SETU is responsible for the assessment of learners and the maintenance of programme standards, both for SETU programmes and programmes leading to Joint Awards that accord with national standards.

2.2 Learners shall be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures, which are applied consistently.

2.3 The external examining process is a quality assurance and enhancement mechanism that supports public confidence in academic qualifications.

2.4 The External Examining Regulations – ADF System is integrated with other relevant regulations and policies within SETU.

2.5 An External Examiner is an independent expert within the programme's fields of learning whose accomplishments attest to their likelihood of having the authority necessary to fulfil the responsibilities of the role. The roles to be discharged by an individual or by a team of External Examiners are decided by a Head of Faculty. The appointment of Programme External Examiners shall consider the range of expertise and discipline diversity within a Department.

¹ Academic Delivery Framework System – see section 3 (Scope) of the 'Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes 2024-2025' for an explanation on the ADF system. The ADF system applies to programmes that relate to the Carlow, Wexford and Wicklow campuses.

3. Criteria for Nomination and Appointment of External Examiners

3.1 The primary criterion for the nomination and appointment of External Examiners is that an External Examiner nominated for appointment shall be a person of academic or professional distinction, whose association with a particular programme(s) could be considered to enhance the standing of the programme(s).

3.2 External Examiners shall be drawn from academic life and, where appropriate, from business, industry and professional practice. An External Examiner drawn from business, industry or professional practice, shall be an independent expert who is a member of the broader community of practice within the programme's field of learning and whose accomplishments attest to their likelihood of having the authority necessary to fulfil the responsibilities of the role.

3.3 Academics shall be nominated from national and international Higher Education Institutions and universities and SETU shall seek to draw nominations from a variety of Higher Education Institutions, and, within a single discipline, shall avoid multiple nominations from the same institution. The Head of Faculty shall have due regard to prior membership of programme validation and review panels when nominating an External Examiner in line with best practice. External Examiners shall not be appointed from institutions or bodies that are collaborative partners or with whom the University offers Joint Awards.

3.4 An External Examiner drawn from academic life shall hold an academic qualification, in an appropriate discipline, to an equal or higher level (on the National Framework of Qualifications) than that of the programme(s) to which they have been nominated. An External Examiner drawn from industry shall have extensive experience in the activities related to the field of study concerned. The External Examiners shall have at least three years' post-qualification experience before nomination as an External Examiner.

3.5 In line with Government Policy on promoting Gender Equality in the Workplace, the University shall take due cognisance of the desirability for gender balance when nominating teams of External Examiners.

3.6 External Examiners shall be appointed for a period of three years and may be reappointed for one more consecutive term. However, an External Examiner's term should not exceed two consecutive appointment periods for the same programme. This duration of appointment is deemed by the University sufficiently long to allow them to assess trends and sufficiently short to provide diversity and maintain the required level of independence. External Examiners who have served for two appointment periods shall not be considered for re-nomination until a minimum of three years has elapsed.

The records pertaining to External Examiner appointments are kept in the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning.

3.7 With regard to the requirements of Heads of Department, Programme Boards, collaborating partners and programmes leading to Joint Awards, where relevant, the Heads of Faculty shall nominate the External Examiners to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning for ratification. Additionally, the requirements of the individual programme being examined, the discipline area, the need for independence and the avoidance of conflicts of interest are considered on nomination of an External Examiner.

3.8 These external examiner nominations shall have regard to the requirements of Section 2.2 in the Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining (QQI February 2015). These recommendations are required to have regard to the reviews of relevant external bodies, and the Industry Liaison Board for each Faculty.

3.9 At the time of application for a remunerated position within SETU, an External Examiner shall withdraw from their role as an External Examiner for SETU.

3.10 With the exception of members of panels, or existing External Examiners, no previous employee of SETU shall be considered for the role of External Examiner, for a minimum period of three years on concluding their employment with SETU.

3.11 The Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee of the Academic Council shall review the nominations for External Examiners and shall make recommendations for formal appointments of External Examiners to the Academic Council. External Examiners are formally approved by Academic Council.

4. Role and Responsibilities of the External Examiner

4.1 The role and responsibilities of the External Examiner is to assure standards both in the relevant modules and in the overall award, subject to the requirements of the University regulations and policies. Refer also to Section 6 Duties of the External Examiner.

4.2 The extent of the External Examiner's authority shall be clearly communicated to all stakeholders, and shall include *inter alia*:

4.2.1 That they are entitled to meet learners on programmes or parts of programmes in which they are examining;

4.2.2 That they are entitled to request any evidence they need to judge the quality and appropriateness of assessment and to assure themselves that assessments are testing the intended learning outcomes of the programme;

4.2.3 That they shall be given adequate opportunity to hold meetings with internal examiners.

4.3 The External Examiner shall prepare and submit an end of academic year report, no later than the 30th September, to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning. For programmes leading to Joint Awards, the end of academic year report is to be submitted to the Vice President for Academic Affairs/Registrar of each awarding partner Institute at a time agreed by each partner – but no later than the 30th September. Where feasible, the External Examiner shall attend examination boards as appropriate pertaining to the programme/ joint awarding programme.

4.4 The main functions of the External Examiner (or External Examiner team) are to:

4.4.1 be familiar with the programme learning outcomes, and be cognisant of those learning outcomes that may be specific to Joint Awarding programmes;

4.4.2 review the programme-assessment strategy and procedures for both SETU programmes and programmes leading to Joint Awards and then proceed to probe subsidiary assessment strategies;

4.4.3 probe the actual attainment of learners (actual programme learning outcomes) using information agreed with and supplied by SETU;

4.4.4 review key-assessment tasks, especially in modules that are assessed in part or in full by continuous assessment;

4.4.5 report findings and recommendations to SETU.

4.5 External Examiner reports shall be considered at all management organisational levels as deemed appropriate by SETU, commencing at Programme Board level.

4.6 For External Examiner reports involving collaborative programmes or programmes leading to Joint Awards, such reports shall be considered by both the joint programme board and at all management organisational levels deemed appropriate by all members of the joint awarding partnerships.

4.7 For both programmes leading to SETU awards and those leading to Joint Awards, actions arising from the report shall be recorded, communicated to learners, and other staff as appropriate.

4.8 External Examiner reports and the Faculty summary of responses to these shall be provided to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning for forwarding to Academic Council. These processes shall contribute to the quality assurance procedure and University Research Activities.

4.9 In the case of programmes leading to Joint Awards, External Examiner reports shall be considered at the joint programme board comprising members of the Faculty of each joint awarding partner. The summary of responses for each member of the joint awarding partnership shall be provided via the joint programme board to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning/Registrar's Office for each partner for forwarding to their respective Academic Council. In the event that the

Academic Council of any joint awarding partner raises a concern about either the examiner's report or the response from the joint programme board, the concern is initially readdressed to the joint programme board to discuss further. If there is failure to reach a conclusion to the satisfaction of the joint programme board, the concern is sent to the Joint Strategy Board, which comprises of senior representatives of each joint awarding partner, for final resolution.

4.10 An External Examiner shall make a declaration stating that the role of External Examiner for SETU, and, where relevant, for joint awarding partnerships, does not constitute any potential conflict of interest situation (see the Code of Conduct on Conflict of Interest of External Examiners in Appendix 1). In addition to this, the External Examiner shall inform SETU (and, in the case of Joint Awards, the other partnership members) should any such conflict of interest situation arise during their term of appointment in accordance with paragraph 3 (b) of the Code of Conduct on Conflict of Interest of External Examiners. Additionally, confidentiality must be maintained at all times, with specific reference to student data and the divulgence of exam questions prior to the learner sitting the exam, refer to paragraph 1 of the Code of Conduct on Conflict of Interest of External Examiners.

5. Duties of SETU in Assisting the Performance of External Examiners

5.1 Specific training is provided for external examiners before taking up the role and a series of scenario-based issues form part of this training so that external examiners are adequately prepared for the role.

5.2 The Head of Department/Faculty and Joint Awarding Partners shall ensure that support is made available for the External Examiners to include:

- Provision of programme documentation and the relevant regulations and policies in relation to the programmes, for SETU and the Joint Awarding Partners;
- A representative sample of the assessment materials;
- Where feasible, the Faculty shall support the External Examiner with arrangements associated with the attendance at the University;
- Notification to internal examiners of external examiner attendance to facilitate maximising staff availability.

5.3 SETU shall maintain a register of the External Examiners for each of its Programmes and Joint Awards, together with the date of appointment of each External Examiner.

5.4 Each External Examiner shall be offered an induction/training workshop following their appointment. This shall include:

- Outline of the mission of the University and place it in context with the Irish Higher Education system;

- In the case of programmes leading to Joint Awards, the mission of the joint awarding partnership is required to be outlined and the position of the Joint Award in context with the Higher Education System;
- Outline the ADF system on external examining, including the reporting requirements as part of its Quality Management System;
- The principles of learning outcomes and criterion referenced assessment;
- The requirement for comparison of benchmarking SETU's programmes with similar programmes with which they are already familiar;
- An outline of the overall structure of the academic programmes, the programme-assessment strategies, grading systems and Examination Broadsheet Codes;
- The relationship between the programme standard and the award standard, and how these award standards relate to the National Framework of Qualifications.

5.5 An External Examiner shall be facilitated in providing verbal and written, informal and formal feedback. Formal feedback in the format of a written report shall constitute the official record to be submitted by 30th September; however, in the case of programmes leading to Joint Awards, feedback in the form of a written report shall be submitted by a date agreed by the Joint Awarding Partners, but not later than 30th September. This written report is held by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning, both for SETU and Joint Awards.

5.6 The External Examiner shall be provided with a considered response to their comments and recommendations, including information on any consequent actions taken by SETU, from the Head of Faculty on or before 31st December of each year.

6. Duties of the External Examiner

6.1 To recommend approval or make such recommendations for amending examination papers as are deemed appropriate by the External Examiner, in order to ensure the consistency and fairness of the assessment and to maintain academic standards;

6.2 To prepare an end of session (30th September) report for SETU and the Joint Awarding Partnership as applicable.

6.3 The External Examiner shall:

6.3.1 Review the drafts of all relevant draft examination papers, outline solutions and marking schemes for all relevant assessment sessions;

6.3.2 For new External Examiners, acknowledgement of access of induction material is required;

6.3.3 On sampling papers for review, the External Examiner shall ensure that, as far as is reasonably practicable, such papers are obtained from borderline grades;

6.3.4 Agree, in consultation with the internal examiner(s), via the relevant Faculty office, the final format of the examination papers and the continuous assessment brief and requirements;

6.3.5 Review the continuous assessment guidelines and strategy. Examples of continuous assessment guidelines include *inter alia*; project brief, essay title, laboratory requirements and marking criteria and scheme;

6.3.6 Ensure that the assessments adequately evaluate the achievement of the learning outcomes of the programme;

6.3.7 Review the overall performance of candidates, contributing to Examination Board determinations on marks as appropriate;

6.3.8 Recommend to the Examination Board the final marks to be awarded to a candidate;

6.3.9 Review, in consultation with the internal examiner(s), all borderline candidates;

6.3.10 Carry out a review of marks awarded in any assessment in accordance with the ADF system Review Procedures as necessary, prior to the exam board;

6.3.11 Contribute to the annual review of assessment policy and procedures for each relevant programme in order to effect continuous improvement to the process;

6.3.12 Share experience of good practice in learning, teaching and assessment.

7. Analysis and Monitoring

7.1 Analysis and monitoring of the reports submitted by External Examiners is conducted at each respective Faculty. The summary report on feedback from External Examiners is sent to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning by each respective Faculty by 31st January of each academic year. Regarding programmes leading to Joint Awards, such summary reports are compiled in collaboration with the Joint Awarding Partner, whereby the summary report is sent to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning/Registrars' Office at both SETU and the equivalent level in the Joint Awarding Partner.

8. Special arrangements in relation to oral or performance examinations

8.1 Where oral or performance-based examinations constitute a substantial part of the assessment procedure (in excess of 30%), the Internal Examiner and External Examiner shall together examine the candidates concerned. The Internal Examiner and the

External Examiner may agree that, where special circumstances so require, the assessment can be conducted in the absence of the External Examiner, provided it is recorded in audio or audio-visual format as appropriate.

9. Special arrangements in relation to Art & Design

9.1 External Examiners shall visit SETU to:

- Review the exhibition of candidates work and to interview a selection of candidates;
- Agree the final marks or grades for each candidate;
- Attend appropriate meetings of the Examinations Board as required.
- The External Examiner shall acquaint themselves with, and abide by, the Code of Conduct on Conflict of Interest of External Examiners
- Performance of the above described duties is a condition of the role of the External Examiner.

Appendix 1

Code of Conduct on Conflict of Interest of External Examiners – ADF System

1. Introduction

This code of conduct addresses potential conflicts of interest which may arise in relation to the formal decision-making processes concerning the External Examiner and the assessment of learners.

SETU relies on each External Examiner to act in the best interests of SETU and observe principles of fairness, impartiality and equal opportunity in relation to their role and responsibilities.

Confidentiality must be maintained at all times, with specific reference to student data and the divulgence of assessment prior to the learner undertaking that assessment.

2. Definition

A conflict of interest arises where a person is in a position of trust (e.g. a position of authority over another person or within an organisation) and has competing professional or personal interests which can make it difficult to fulfil their duties impartially. A conflict of interest exists even if no unethical or improper act results therefrom. A conflict of interest can create an appearance of impropriety that can undermine confidence in the person, profession, or process.

3. Existence of Conflict of Interest

a) A conflict of interest will be deemed to exist for an external examiner in the following circumstances:

- The External Examiner is related to a learner (i.e. spouse / civil partner, parent, child, sibling, uncle or aunt, first cousin, niece or nephew or grandparent or grandchild) or has a personal relationship with a learner;
- The External Examiner is related to, or in a personal relationship with, any person employed during the relevant period either under a contract of service or relevant contract for services with SETU. A related person includes any: spouse / civil partner, parent, child, sibling, uncle or aunt, first cousin, niece or nephew, or grandparent or grandchild of the External Examiner.
- The External Examiner is employed or becomes employed with an institution or body which is a collaborating partner of SETU during the term of their appointment;
- Any other reason considered relevant by either the External Examiner or SETU.

b) Should any of the above circumstances exist or come into existence, either at the time of appointment or subsequently, the External Examiner shall notify the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning at the earliest opportunity and absent themselves from the examination and assessment process.