

# External Examining Regulations – SAM System

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# External Examining Regulations – SAM System<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Duties of External Examiners

### *Approval of Examination Papers and Other Materials*

1.1 External Examiners are responsible for the detailed work of monitoring assessment and assessment outcomes and ensuring that standards are maintained in particular subject areas is done by people who are suitably qualified for this role.

1.2 School<sup>2</sup> or award externs will ensure that the micro level focus of the subject externs is balanced by a macro level focus on the programme. Ideally, there would be communication between the subject externs and the School or award externs, as well as between the externs and the relevant internal staff.

1.3 External Examiners are responsible for specific subjects or subject groups and will do the detailed work of monitoring assessment practices and outcomes for all modules provided in the specific subject areas under their remit across the University.

1.4 In relation to the particular set of modules under the External Examiner's control, the subject external examiner would be responsible for, *inter alia*:

- approving the assessment instruments (including ensuring that these instruments are aligned with the module learning outcomes);
- signing off on the standards of marking (ensuring marking is fair, consistent etc.);
- ensuring standards for the subject/discipline area concerned are consistent across the University;
- ensuring standards for the subject/discipline area concerned are consistent with national and international standards in the field;
- advising on the enhancement of existing modules and of teaching, learning and assessment practices as well as on the development of new modules in the area as appropriate.

1.5 External Examiners may attend the University for subject group assessment meetings instead of for Examination Board meetings.

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<sup>1</sup> Semesterisation and Modularisation System – see section 3 (Scope) of the 'Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes 2024-2025' for an explanation on the SAM system. The SAM system applies to programmes that relate to the Waterford campuses.

<sup>2</sup> Any reference to 'School' in this document is understood to be referring to modules, subject areas, programmes etc. within a Faculty which operate under the SAM system. The term is being retained here to recognise system differences and to allow distinction between the systems and should be viewed as an interim measure while there are separate regulations in external examining by system.

1.6 The Head of Department shall ensure that assessment material, including continuous assessment materials, is provided to the External Examiner in good time.

1.7 Where the External Examiner wishes to suggest amendments to draft examination papers, the Examiner may do so in writing. The Internal Examiner shall take such proposed amendments into account, and shall note action taken, if any. This will be retained as a record by the relevant School. Normally the input from the External Examiner and the responses of the School to the recommendations are summarized in the Annual Programme Board report.

1.8 Where a significant dispute occurs between an Internal and External Examiner in relation to an examination paper or an examination result, a report, prepared by the School, shall be submitted to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning for consideration by the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee of the Academic Council.

1.9 If an External Examiner reports that standards are not being achieved a report should be prepared by the relevant Programme Board and forwarded through the School Board or through School Management to Academic Council.

#### *Oral, Practical or Performances Examinations, and Presentations*

1.10 External Examiners with specific responsibility for modules that have oral, performance or practical examinations specified in their programme schedules as an examination requirement, shall normally be expected to attend all or part of such assessments.

1.11 Where such assessments are carried out in the absence of the External Examiner, a recording of the assessment shall be made and a representative sample of this recorded material shall be monitored by the External Examiner as part of the External Examiner's duties.

#### *Assessment*

1.12 Following an examination, the External Examiner is required to see a representative sample of examination material presented by candidates. The sample should normally include the best script/assessment, a number of borderline scripts/assessments at each level in the case of award years and a random sample of the remainder, with sufficient material, including, where feasible, relevant statistical data to enable the External Examiner(s) to form a judgement as to the appropriateness of the marking at all levels of classification.

1.13 The External Examiner should receive the following:

- i A sample of scripts/assessments as specified above;
- ii Course work for this sample where practicable;
- iii Copies of the examination papers/assessments and marking schemes;
- iv Original of the University's mark sheet showing the aggregation and final mark for each candidate in a subject;
- v A statistical overview of pass/fail rates within the module and across the programme.

1.14 The appropriateness of examination materials to the level of award concerned shall be a primary consideration of the External Examiner.

1.15 External Examiners shall determine whether:

- i. the assessment and determination of awards processes have been fairly conducted and
- ii. the standard of the student performance is adequate for the relevant stage of the programme.

1.16 The External Examiner shall pay particular attention in award stage of a programme to the distribution of marks achieved and the grades of award attributed.

### *Examination Appeals*

1.17 External Examiners may be asked to review scripts/continuous assessments/projects where the final marks are appealed. However, students may not request a re-examination of a script/assessment etc. by an examiner.

### *Attendance at Examination Board Meetings/Visiting the University*

1.18 External Examiners may visit the University once in each academic year. This visit would normally take place at the time of award stage Examination Boards.

1.19 When visiting the University, the duties of External Examiners<sup>3</sup> shall be:

- i. to review borderline cases and, if necessary, to interview such candidates;
- ii. to review a random sample of the cohort's scripts. Where an examination module is examined by other forms of assessment, the External Examiner shall review a sample of this work;

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<sup>3</sup> These duties are relevant whether the External Examiner visits the University or not.

- iii. to review the overall performance of candidates, contributing to Examination Board determinations on marks as appropriate;
- iv. to review the success of the examination materials in determining the levels of student achievement;
- v. to attend the appropriate Examination Board meeting;
- vi. to participate in the determination of final marks and results of each candidate at the Examination Board meeting;
- vii. to review the exhibition of candidates' work, to interview a selection of candidates and to agree the final marks/grades for each candidate (in the case of assessment based on the presentation of a portfolio) and to attend final year performances and participate in the determination of marks for the candidates (in the case of assessments based on performance);
- viii. to interact with examiners in the subject area on matters related to teaching and assessment which enable best practice to be shared in the spirit of knowledge exchange. This could include periodic seminars on topics of mutual interests.

1.20 The External Examiner may comment on such matters relating to individual student performance, module performance, or programme performance as the External Examiner deems necessary. The Examination Board shall give due consideration to such comments.

1.21 The External Examiner may request to have the examiner's dissenting opinion on any matter recorded on the Broadsheet.

1.22 The External Examiner shall indicate on the module marking sheet any proposed adjustment to the marks/grades as proposed by the Internal Examiner. Efforts should be made to achieve consensus with the Internal Examiner in relation to such proposed amendments. The External Examiner is a member of the Examination Board where collective decisions are the norm.

1.23 Where the External Examiner proposes adjustments to a group of students as a whole, the Examiner shall consult with the Internal Examiner in advance of the meeting of the Examination Board. Efforts should be made to achieve consensus in relation to such proposed amendments.

### *Reporting*

1.24 External Examiners are required to submit a full report on each examination with which they are involved not later than September 30<sup>th</sup> of the academic year following the year in which the examinations considered have taken place. The report should cover all relevant assessment and should be made in sufficient detail to enable the Programme Board to derive substantial benefit from its contents.

1.25 This report should be sent to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning on the appropriate report form. The Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning will make a copy of each report available to the Head of School and Head of Department. The Head of Department will ensure that the contents of the report are communicated appropriately to the relevant Programme Boards. It is normal that all members of the Board receive a copy of the report.

1.26 It is understood that External Examiners' reports should act as an input into all quality assurance procedures at module, programme and academic unit level and that action should be taken and reported on where recommendations are issued. The School shall routinely report on External Examiner reports and the School's responses to those reports through the reports of its School Board to the Academic Council. In the first instance, External Examiner reports and actions taken as a consequence of recommendations should be summarized in Annual Programme Board reports submitted to the School Board from each programme in the School. School Boards will normally consider reports from each examiner in the first instance before offering an overview of all reports to Academic Council. As circumstances dictate, the School Board or, in some cases, the Programme Board directly may report more than once annually to Council and may be required to do so at the behest of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning.

1.27 It is normal and appropriate for External Examiners to receive timely feedback on their reports. This may happen at module level and be visible in changes, for example, to an examination paper or may be appropriately addressed at another level within the University as well as in formal responses. At the very least the External Examiner should receive a copy of the Annual Programme Board report. The Examiner should contact the Head of Department/School if there are any instances where feedback has not been adequately received.

1.28 The report of the External Examiner is a public document and will be made available for internal and external quality assurance purposes.

## **2. Communications with External Examiners**

2.1 The External Examiner will receive the following documentation:

- i. Description of role and duties as set out above (on appointment and as modified by subsequent Academic Council policy decisions) from the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning;
- ii. External Examiner Report templates (annually) from the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning;
- iii. Relevant SETU Academic Regulations (annually) from the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning;
- iv. Module syllabi as set out in relevant approved programme evaluation documents and as modified by subsequent Academic Review and established in the Programme Schedule from the relevant School Office;



2.2 At the appropriate time, but well in advance of the relevant examination session, the External Examiner will receive from the Head of Department, through the School Office, the draft examination papers (for approval) together with detailed marking schemes. In addition, in modules where there are no final examination papers, the method of assessment and marking schemes will also be provided.

2.3 Following the examination session, the Head of Department shall make available to the External Examiner a representative sample of scripts, project work and any other materials submitted for assessment including programme work. A record of material made available shall be kept by the School and its return shall be noted.

2.4 The External Examiner shall be advised in good time by the School Office as to the times and dates of proposed Examination Boards at the University.

### **3. Roles of School Level External Examiners**

In addition to External Examiners, each School should also appoint a School Level examiner.

3.1 The role of the School Level External Examiner is:

- i. to monitor the academic standards achieved within the School and to assure their comparability to the highest Irish and international standards;
- ii. to ensure that the assessment process is fair and that the results as determined are equitable and
- iii. to report to the School Board and to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning.

3.2 The duties of the School Level External Examiner are to:

- i. provide general comment and overview on assessment within the School, based on an analysis of examination papers, marking schemes and model answers where applicable;
- ii. make commendations of good practice and/or any areas that should be strengthened or risks which should be addressed in order to maintain confidence in standards on the programme;
- iii. comment on curriculum design;
- iv. evaluate the NFQ<sup>4</sup>-level appropriateness of programmes, which the examiner has scrutinised;
- v. consider the learning, teaching and assessment methodologies employed in the School and
- vi. make recommendations arising from the scrutiny of School programmes.

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<sup>4</sup> National Framework of Qualifications

3.3 School Level External Examiners shall decide, in consultation with the Head of School, in relation to:

- i. the particular draft examination papers, model answers and marking schemes to review prior to the examination;
- ii. the particular marked examination scripts/assessments to review;
- iii. the nature and content of other assessment material to review, including course work.

3.4 The Head of School shall ensure that such material is provided to the External Examiner in good time.

3.5 School Level External Examiners shall normally attend the University (which can be physically or remotely as appropriate) at the time of determination of results to attend the Examination Board meetings and at other times as may be determined by the School in consultation with the Examiner for the purpose of contributing to the School Board in relation to assessing the standard of the programmes and/or the standard of student performance, including the spread of marks achieved and the grades of award attributed.

3.6 The School Level External Examiner may comment on such matters relating to individual student performance, individual module performance or programme performance as the examiner deems necessary. The Examination Board shall give due consideration to such comments.

3.7 The School Level External Examiner may request to have their dissenting opinion on any matter recorded on the Broadsheet.

3.8 School Level External Examiners are required to submit a report to the School Board on each examination sitting with which they are involved. The report should be made in sufficient detail to enable the School to derive substantial benefit from its contents.

3.9 The Heads of School, having considered the School Level External Examiner's report with the School Board, shall include their response in the Annual School Board report to Academic Council, including any actions taken to address matters arising from the reports or any other comments or reactions from the School to the content of the reports.

3.10 The University is obliged to maintain confidentiality in certain aspects of its work. It is the duty of the provider of External Examiner services to the University to observe such confidentiality. This restriction shall continue to apply after termination of the period of the contract.

3.11 All documentation and correspondence related to the examinations of the University should be returned to the University by the termination date of the contract.

3.12 A School Level External Examiner shall declare any circumstances, which may constitute a conflict of interest with the University in their role as External Examiner.

3.13 On appointment the External Examiner will receive from the School Office the following documentation:

- i description of role and duties;
- ii School Board External Examiner report form;
- iii relevant SETU Quality Assurance documentation;
- iv times and dates of proposed examinations;
- v School structure and programme details.

3.14 Should there be any breach by the External Examiner of the terms and conditions as set out in this document or if at any time the University is of the belief that the External Examiner is failing to provide satisfactory service, the University may terminate this contract by giving the External Examiner one month's notice in writing to that effect.

#### **4. Nomination and Appointment of External Examiners**

##### *Nomination Criteria*

4.1 External Examiners are nominated by Schools to the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning committee for vetting against University criteria, and ratified by the Academic Council. The formal notification of appointment is made by the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning.

4.2 The criteria for nomination of a Subject Level External Examiner are as follows:

- i. the person appointed is a senior academic and will have the required knowledge of the discipline to which they are being appointed. In the case of professional examiners, briefing should be given on the nature of the role and the expected input. Professional examiners should be complemented by academics on all programmes unless prior written permission is provided by the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning;
- ii. A senior academic means having a minimum of 5 years' experience in the Higher Education Sector and at least **two** of the following:
  - a. previous experience as an external examiner;
  - b. significant experience of serving on external or internal panels or committees;
  - c. management or programme leadership responsibility;
  - d. a postgraduate degree at least one level above the level of the programme under consideration.
- iii. Professional examiners should meet at least **three** of the following criteria:
  - a. Have attained the same level of award as the highest level being examined, at an institution external to SETU;

- b. Possess a postgraduate degree at least one level above the highest level of module being examined;
  - c. Have a minimum of 5 years' professional experience in a senior role relevant to the discipline area;
  - d. Have prior experience in an academic position (of duration at least 3 years full-time or full-time equivalent);
  - e. Have a strong track record of professional activities – e.g. a leadership role in a professional or industry body or a leadership role in professional development activities;
  - f. Possess quantifiable experience of graduate recruitment, training or mentoring in a relevant professional field.
- iv. The person appointed is available and has the appropriate knowledge of quality assurance frameworks to do the work as described in this section;
  - v. Appropriate consideration is given to international examiners. It is recognised that additional guidance on systems and processes may need to be given in these cases;
  - vi. Candidates with no previous experience of examining who are otherwise well qualified may be appointed as subject group examiners and in such cases should be fully briefed on the role;
  - vii. Any potential conflicts of interests in regard to prior association with the University, or intellectual property considerations should be resolved in advance and certified in writing by the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning;
  - viii. Former staff or students of the University should not be appointed as external examiners unless a period of 5 years has elapsed between their period of work or study;
  - ix. Reciprocal appointments between institutions should be avoided in the interest of examiner objectivity.

#### 4.3 The criteria for nomination of a School Level External Examiner are as follows:

- i. The person appointed is a senior manager in an academic institute and will have the required knowledge and of the faculty to which they are being appointed;
- ii. Appropriate consideration is given to international examiners. It is recognised that additional guidance on systems and processes may need to be given in these cases;
- iii. Any potential conflicts of interests in regard to prior association with the University, or intellectual property considerations should be resolved in advance and certified in writing by the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning;

- iv. Former staff of the University should not be appointed as external examiners unless a period of 5 years has elapsed between their period of work or study;
- v. Reciprocal appointments between institutions should be avoided in the interest of examiner objectivity.

4.4 Succession of an External Examiner with one from the same institution should be noted on the nomination form.

#### *Period of Appointment and Register of Examiners*

4.5 The period of appointment of an External Examiner is for a maximum of 4 years. An examiner cannot act in the capacity as an External Examiner for the University for a period of 5 years after contract completion. In exceptional cases, an examiner may be reappointed for a period of one year with the approval of Academic Council.

4.6 The Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning will maintain a Register of External Examiners that will include the dates of appointment and termination, and request new nominees in advance of the end of contracts.

#### *Termination of Appointment*

4.7 External Examiners may resign from their role during a cycle by writing to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning.

4.8 The University may wish to terminate the contract of an External Examiner by mutual consent or for non-performance of duties. A letter of termination is sufficient notice in this case. In addition, a file note in Registry will be kept for 1 year with the reason(s) for termination.

#### *Preparation of External Examiners*

4.9 In addition to receiving copies of examination and assessment regulations and the University's overview of their role, External Examiners may want a briefing session either from the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning and/or from the appropriate School. In particular where the Examiner is a first time examiner, the Examiner may want to visit the University to become familiar with its regulations and policies. Any briefing or visit can be mutually arranged via the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning.

4.10 All information on the External Examination system will be placed on the University's web site. For ease of access, fees schedules and payment methods will also be provided online.

4.11 All newly appointed external examiners should be briefed by the appropriate Head of School/Department on the regulations, policies and procedures at the University.