

NUI SENATE POLICY DOCUMENT

NUI Extern Examiners

Primary Degree and Taught Postgraduate Courses in NUI Constituent Universities

December 2019



Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland



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Introduction

In accordance with the Universities Act 1997, extern examiners are appointed by the Senate to the constituent universities, on the recommendation of the universities, and their functions are determined by the Senate with the concurrence of the universities. While continuing to appoint extern examiners to the constituent universities, and to determine their functions, the Senate has devolved the administration of the extern examiner system to the constituent universities. This document sets out general policy on extern examiners appointed by the Senate to all NUI institutions, with particular reference to appointment of extern examiners in Constituent Universities.

It is complementary to documentation prepared in each constituent university and college for the guidance of staff and examiners. It includes specific arrangements relevant to Constituent Universities.

Extern examiners are appointed to oversee taught programmes leading to NUI degrees and other qualifications at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. They play a vital role supporting the University in assuring and enhancing the academic standards of courses, modules, programmes and awards. While primarily involved in the review of assessment instruments, processes and standards, extern examiners also fulfil an important consultative and advisory function in supporting the development of modules and programmes as well as the enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment practices.

Functions of extern examiners

Quality: The fundamental role of the extern examiner is to assure academic standards and the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and feedback. The extern examiner confirms that the academic standards of courses, modules and the awards to which they lead are consistent with the academic outcomes specified by the University, and are comparable with those achieved in the subject area in equivalent universities internationally. Due regard should be given for professional requirements where necessary.

Equity: The extern examiner helps to assure the fairness, validity and rigour of assessment at the University.

Enhancement: The extern examiner provides feedback on the quality of courses and modules and the overall learning experience in the subject area, and on how teaching, learning, assessment and feedback in the subject area may be enhanced.

Assessment: The role of the extern examiner is to review, moderate and enhance the assessment process, and they will not routinely act as an additional examiner. The conduct of assessment and the determination of marks, grades and awards is a matter for the internal examiners acting with the support of and the advice of the extern examiner.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Extern examiners should also be aware and supportive of the commitment across all NUI institutions to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. NUI Universities and colleges provide a positive working, research and learning environment which is open to all regardless of age, disability, gender, marriage or civil partnership, race (including ethnic or national origin, nationality or colour), religion or belief, sexual orientation, family status, membership of the travelling community, or socio-economic status. Extern examiners should, where possible, ensure that this principle is upheld by the assessment processes within their purview.

Criteria and guidelines for the appointment of extern examiners

- (i) An extern examiner's academic and professional qualifications should be appropriate to the discipline, programme or subject to be examined and at a minimum, should not be below the level of qualification(s) to be awarded on the basis of the examination(s)/assessment(s) in question. They should have up-to-date knowledge of international best practice in the design, development and assessment of relevant curricula.
- (ii) An extern examiner should have appropriate academic standing and expertise, and have sufficient university experience to adjudicate on comparability of standards.
- (iii) An extern examiner should not normally be appointed from a School/ College where a member of staff in the host School/College is currently serving as an extern examiner.
- (iv) An extern examiner may not be involved in the teaching of a subject/ degree programme which he/she will be called on to moderate.
- (v) An individual should not be appointed as extern examiner if his/her impartiality could be called into question because of a personal or professional relationship with a member of staff or a student in the NUI institution concerned. Care should be taken to ensure that no other possible conflict of interest may arise. Any potential conflicts of interest should be made known upon nomination or as may arise during the term of appointment.
- (vi) An extern examiner should not normally be appointed from the same institution as his/her predecessor. Exceptions may on occasion be permitted, for example, in the case of subjects taught only in a very small number of institutions or in specialised areas.
- (vii) Former members of staff may not be appointed as extern examiners to the same University until a period of at least five years has elapsed after they have left that University.

Term of Appointment

- (i) Extern examiners will normally be appointed for a term of up to three, or four, years. Exceptionally, an extern examiner may be re-appointed for a further term of up to three years, where the initial appointment was for three years or for up to two years in the case of four-year initial appointments. No extern examiner should be called on to serve for more than six consecutive years.
- (ii) Extern examiners who have acted previously for a term of up to three years should not normally be re-appointed until at least three years have elapsed since their previous appointment. Where an extern examiner has served for a term longer than three years, at least five years should elapse before the examiner is considered for appointment for a further term.
- (iii) An extern examiner who retires during the period of appointment, may continue for the remainder of that appointment period but should not normally be re-appointed for a further period.
- (iv) The appointment of an extern examiner may be terminated if the extern fails to fulfil their responsibilities or if serious conflicts of interest arise.

Duties and responsibilities of extern examiners:

(i) **Reviewing curricula and outcomes of programmes, subjects and modules.**

The extern examiner should receive full information on the programmes, subjects and modules under examination/assessment, including any relevant materials describing the learning outcomes and descriptors, syllabi and/or curricula. The extern examiner should also be provided with general information on the College and the School or Department.

(ii) **Reviewing assessment strategies and assessment instruments and feedback practices**

The extern examiner should receive full information on the assessment strategies and instruments of assessment including the way in which the results of individual papers or other units of assessment are aggregated, averaged or profiled to produce an overall result. The extern examiner should be provided with copies of any relevant assessment procedures, guidelines, regulations or statutes. The extern examiner may require

copies of assessment strategies and instruments from previous years. The extern examiner will normally review and approve major assessment instruments such as end-of-semester formal examinations/assessments. It is accepted that, given the complexity and variety of assessment instruments in use, it is often not practicable for extern examiners to approve in advance each and every instrument. The extern examiner should agree with the School or Department which assessment instruments are to be reviewed in advance, and which may be reviewed in retrospect.

In relation to the approval of examination/assessment papers, draft examination/assessment papers should be sent in sufficient time for the extern examiner(s) to be able to propose changes and for discussion of the proposed changes to take place where necessary. In the relevant disciplines, draft papers should be accompanied by model answers or solutions and a marking scheme for each paper.

Extern examiners may be invited to submit questions for inclusion in examination/assessment papers.

(iii) Auditing a sample of graded assessments to confirm standards and to make any relevant recommendations on learning outcomes, assessment and grading practices.

All student work that contributes to the overall final assessment should be available on request to extern examiners.

(iv) Reviewing where appropriate, the distribution of grades for courses or modules.

(v) Advising on enhancements to assessment and grading practices or aspects of course, module or programme development and feedback.

(vi) Advising on enhancements to module or subject development with reference to applicable Programme Outcomes

(vii) The extern examiner may be invited to participate in practical, clinical or oral assessments, and will normally review the assessment of major projects, dissertations or theses.

While the extern examiner will not routinely act as a second or additional examiner, and will not normally be involved in the assessment of individual students, there are circumstances where a constituent university may request an extern or externs to become directly involved in the determination of marks or grades for individual students. These include the examination/assessment of major projects, theses or dissertations, or major practical, oral, clinical or professional assessments. Furthermore, the extern examiner may, on the basis of their participation in such assessments, or on the basis of a review and audit of graded assessments, recommend changes in marks or grades for individual students or cohorts of students, or may recommend the award of particular marks or grades where there is a difference of opinion between internal examiners. Where the extern examiner is involved in the assessment of a subset of the student cohort, it is important to ensure that those students are assessed against the same overall standards and criteria as other students. The final decision in relation to the award of marks or grades rests with the University, which shall be informed by the recommendations of the Examination Board/ Academic Council of the institution.

(viii) Exceptionally, extern examiners may recommend on the re-scaling or adjustment of grades for individual students, a group of students or entire cohorts of students.

Extern examiners may also be consulted in relation to matters arising from examination appeals. Extern examiners may raise any appropriate equality, diversity and inclusion issues (covering disability, race and gender, etc.) relevant to the assessment of students with the School.

(ix) Extern examiners shall visit the University at least once during each year of their term of appointment.

Where assessment is semesterised, the extern examiner should agree with the College what information they require to assure the standards, fairness and validity of semester grades that are awarded when the extern examiner cannot be present, and how this information is to be provided.

Extern examiners should be invited to attend School/Departmental meetings on examination results and may be invited to attend Examination Board meetings.

The procedures governing Examination Board Meetings should be provided by the Registrar of the Constituent University.

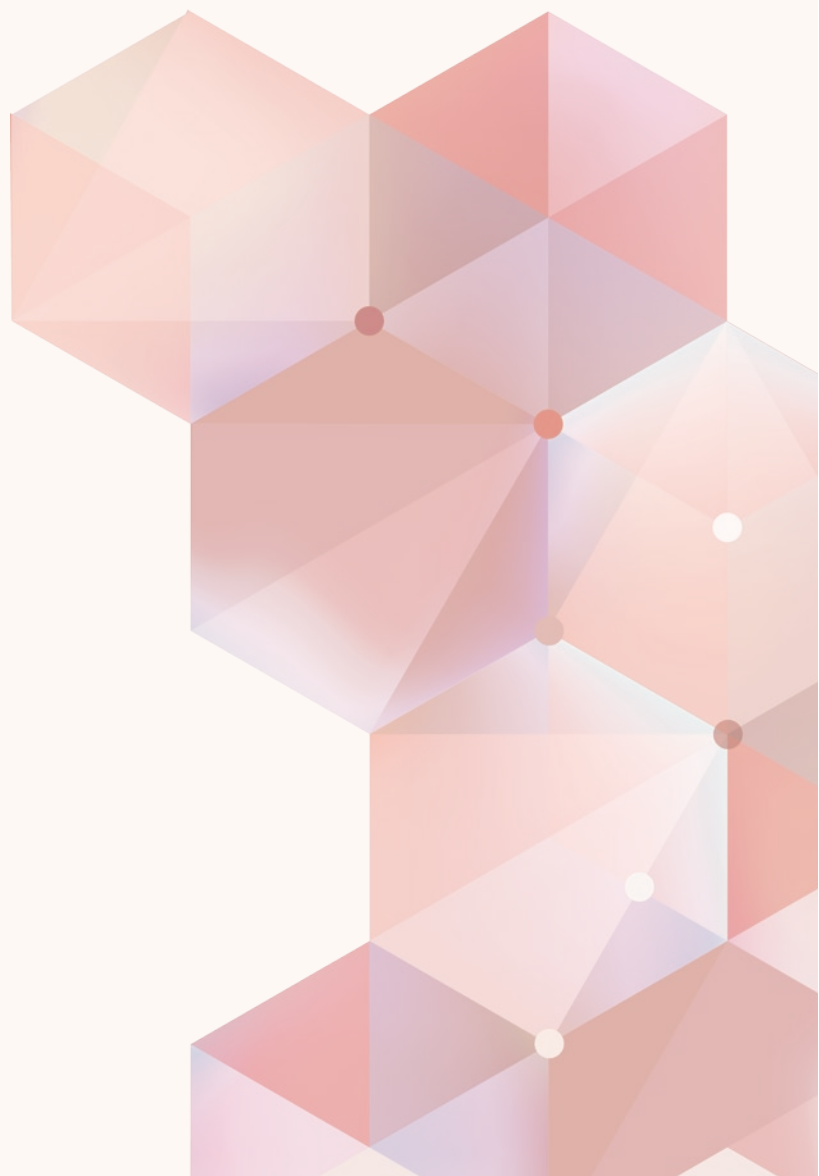
(x) Extern examiners may engage in discussions with key personnel within the University at any time during their appointment.

It is expected that a formal period for such discussions would be arranged during the extern examiner's visit, as appropriate.

(xi) Extern examiners may also meet with a representative group of students to assess the student experience and student quality at the University.

(xii) Following completion of their participation in the examinations/assessments process, the extern examiner is required to provide a report on their findings to the constituent university concerned

In addition to reporting and acting on the findings of extern examiners within their internal structures, the constituent universities forward extern examiners' reports to the NUI Registrar for analysis and a general report to Senate.





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