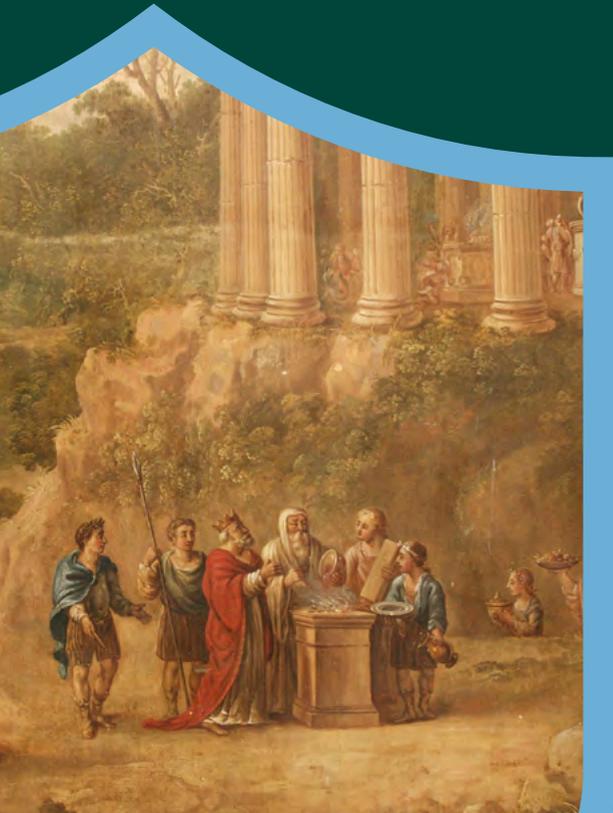




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NUI Policy and Guidelines on External Examiners for Taught Programmes in the Recognised Colleges





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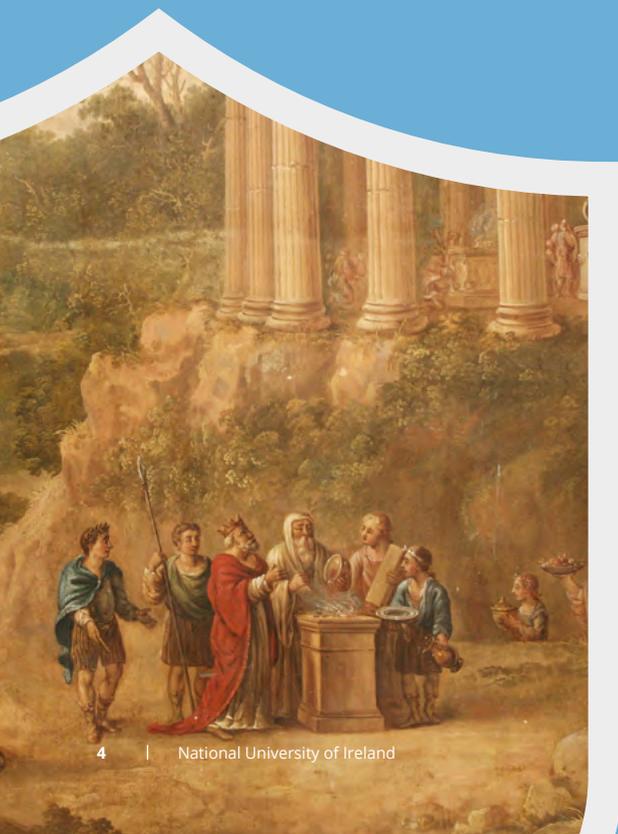
NUI Policy and Guidelines on External Examiners for Taught Programmes in the Recognised Colleges

May 2025
Version 2

Front cover inset image from NUI's murals (c.1820).
Read more about the murals in our digital booklet:
https://www.nui.ie/mural_paintings/mural_paintings.html.

Contents

1	Introduction	6
2	Responsibilities of NUI	6
3	Responsibilities of the Recognised Colleges	8
3.1	Process-related and Procedural Responsibilities	8
3.2	Valuing External Examining	9
3.3	Workload Considerations	9
3.4	Communication regarding Expenses	10
3.5	Transparency	10
3.6	Withdrawal of an External Examiner	10
4	Role and Responsibilities of the External Examiner	11
4.1	Curriculum Content & Review	11
4.2	Academic Standards, Assessment and Student Attainment	12
4.3	Engagement with the Institution	13
4.3.1	Campus Visits	13
4.3.2	Examination Boards	13
4.3.3	Meetings with Staff and Students	13
4.4	Reporting	14
4.5	Transparency	14
4.6	Claiming Expenses	14
4.7	Data Protection	15
4.8	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	15
4.9	Withdrawal of an External Examiner	15
4.10	Serious Concerns	15
5	Appointment Term and Eligibility	16
5.1	Criteria for Appointment	16
5.2	Terms of Appointment	18
5.3	Programmes Requiring an External Examiner	18
5.4	Removal or Replacement of an External Examiner	19
6	Key Resources and References	19
	Appendix 1 – External Examiner Nomination: Required Information	20
	Appendix 2 – Guidance on Induction of External Examiners	22
	Appendix 3 – Sample Report Form	24



1 Introduction

As a federal university, NUI has responsibility for the appointment of external examiners¹ for all member institutions through its governing body, the NUI Senate. In accordance with the Universities Act 1997, external examiners are appointed by NUI Senate to the recognised colleges on the recommendation of the institutions, and their functions are determined by the Senate.² This document outlines the role and responsibilities of external examiners appointed to NUI recognised colleges and the responsibilities of NUI and the recognised colleges in respect of external examiners for taught programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level and the external examination process.

External examiners are appointed on the basis of academic and/or professional expertise and experience in their field, which enables them to provide independent advice on the appropriateness and comparability of the standards of awards and the related teaching, learning and assessment practices.

This document underpins the external examiner documentation prepared by NUI and complementary documentation prepared in recognised colleges for the guidance of staff and external examiners.

2 Responsibilities of NUI

NUI currently has two recognised colleges: the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, University of Medicine and Health Sciences (RCSI). IPA is a recognised college that is a linked provider of NUI and RCSI is a recognised college that is a university and designated awarding body (DAB) in its own right. Both institutions are chiefly responsible for the quality assurance policies, processes and procedures in their respective institutions, but NUI quality assures the suite

1. Please note that NUI statutes refer to 'extern examiners'. This policy uses 'external examiner' in line with the language of the Universities Act, 1997. Some related NUI documentation may refer to 'extern examiners' but 'extern examiner' and 'external examiner' should be understood to refer to the same role.

2. While this document applies to all recognised colleges, it should be noted that the relationship between NUI and recognised colleges that are linked providers is different to that between NUI and its recognised college, which is also a designated awarding body.

of policies and procedures in IPA whereas RCSI has a direct relationship with the national quality agency, Quality and Qualifications Ireland. NUI has a responsibility to ensure the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the recognised colleges is comparable to that in the constituent universities. One of the key mechanisms for this is through management of the external examining process in the recognised colleges.

NUI is responsible for:

- i. Updating policy and guidelines on external examiners for taught programmes (undergraduate and postgraduate) on a cyclical basis.
- ii. Administering the external examiner appointment process:
 - Facilitating the approval of new external examiners.
 - Issuing reminders to external examiners when end-of-year reports are due.
 - Processing reports of external examiners and ensuring the reports are shared with the recognised colleges efficiently.
 - Processing payment (of fees and eligible expenses) to external examiners on receipt of reports.
 - Providing appointment letters, external examiner guidelines, report forms and claim forms.
- iii. Publishing the policy and guidelines and providing a link to regularly updated published lists of approved external examiners.
- iv. Providing a synthesis report to the registrar in the recognised colleges in December each year for the previous academic year, highlighting commendations and recommendations from the reports.
- v. Analysing the reports of external examiners to identify issues with the process and trends regarding academic aspects of external examining (to be shared with NUI Senate and the member institutions) within the context of a federation-wide overview, on request.³
- vi. Arranging for the withdrawal/removal and replacement of external examiner appointments, in exceptional circumstances (see sections 3.5, 4.8 and 5.4 below).

3. In this overview of trends, the feedback from external examiners is considered in the aggregate and individual institutions are not identified.

3 Responsibilities of the Recognised Colleges

3.1 Process-related and procedural responsibilities

The recognised colleges – through programme leads, heads of schools/ departments, central administration and senior leadership, as appropriate – are responsible for the following:

- i. Implementing an internal process for the nomination and approval of external examiners to be recommended for appointment by NUI Senate.
- ii. Giving due regard to the eligibility and other requirements for external examiners set out in this document.
- iii. Establishing appropriate guidance documents for external examiners of the institution in relation to academic, programme and practical matters (e.g. institutional academic regulations, marks and standards, programme/module outlines, handbook for using the virtual learning environment) – see also point vii below.
- iv. Providing induction/training for new external examiners (see Appendix 1).
- v. Providing NUI with a list of nominations to NUI by October in each academic year for approval by Senate in November.
- vi. Updating NUI if an existing external examiner informs the institution that they are resigning.
- vii. Providing contextual documentation to **new** external examiners necessary to support them in performing their role effectively. Such documentation might include:
 - a copy of institutional guidance for external examiners, where available
 - academic regulations applicable to the programme being examined
 - marks and standards documents
 - programme / module documents, as appropriate to the role
 - marking rubrics, where appropriate
 - the previous external examiner's final report
 - the most recent annual programme review, where available
 - external accreditation status and requirements, where relevant.
- viii. Providing access, appropriate to the individual examiner's role, to the online learning platform.

- ix. Sharing draft assessments/examination questions with external examiners, as appropriate.
- x. Ensuring external examiners have a secure method of accessing programme documentation and coursework/assessment samples.
- xi. Providing the following to all external examiners in advance of examination board meetings:
 - a list of marks for the relevant cohort
 - module/programme statistics (where available)
 - a representative sample of completed and marked assessments, to include assessments with failing grades
 - moderation information for all relevant cohorts.
- xii. Ensuring that the external examiner receives a response to their annual report from the relevant programme lead/head of school/ department within an appropriate timeframe.

In addition, recognised colleges that are linked providers must provide the NUI Registrar with a response to the annual synthesis report (on matters raised by external examiners).

3.2 Valuing External Examining

External examining is an important measure of esteem and a valuable mechanism for building professional and disciplinary connections that can promote and enhance the quality and standards of Irish higher education (as well as NUI and its member institutions) on a regional and international level. NUI member institutions will give due consideration to recognising this work by their own academic staff.

3.3 Workload Considerations

It is expected that the recognised colleges will give due consideration to the workload involved in external examining their programmes. Whatever sampling formula is used for selecting students' assessments/coursework, no one examiner should be expected to review materials exceeding the maximum of two working days (14 hours).

Where the number of days examining is likely to exceed the allowable number (as stated in the NUI external examiner's claim form), the programme lead or a senior representative in the recognised college must discuss this with the NUI Registrar in advance.

3.4 Communication regarding Expenses

While NUI is primarily responsible for advising external examiners regarding fees and (where applicable) travel and subsistence, colleagues in the recognised colleges can support NUI in complying with Department of Public Expenditure limits on expenses by highlighting the travel and subsistence regulations (included in the NUI external examiner claim form).

3.5 Transparency

Recognised colleges will publish a list of current external examiners on their website (or on the NUI website, if they prefer). The list will be updated following NUI Senate approval of new nominees.⁴ NUI will provide (a link to) that list on the NUI website. It may be useful to make clear that students and other stakeholders should not contact external examiners directly wherever this list is published.

3.6 Withdrawal of an External Examiner

If, after appointment, the institution becomes aware that an external examiner is no longer able to meet the responsibilities as outlined in Section 4 below, they should let NUI know at the earliest opportunity (by emailing externs@nui.ie). Similarly, if the institution becomes aware of a conflict of interest,⁵ they should inform NUI and liaise with NUI to arrange for a replacement appointment.

4. As this is a new practice for NUI, which will be applied to new external examiners from the date of publication of the regulations, previously appointed external examiners may not be included.

5. In this context, NUI defines a conflict of interest as circumstances in which an individual has personal or professional interests that may make it difficult for that individual to fairly and objectively execute the role of external examiner. It is important that NUI institutions and prospective external examiners consider whether there may be a **perceived** conflict even where all concerned are satisfied that the prospective external examiner can execute the role fairly and objectively. Some potential conflicts are the basis for a number of eligibility criteria (section 5.1). For example, institutional and programme independence are both requirements for eligibility as certain professional relationships can give rise to (real or apparent) conflicts of interest.

4 The Role and Responsibilities of the External Examiner

External examiners are appointed to oversee taught programmes leading to NUI degrees and other qualifications at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Externs play a vital role supporting the University in assuring and enhancing the academic standards of programmes, modules and awards. While primarily involved in the review of assessment instruments, processes and standards, external 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.

The role of external examiner may be fulfilled by an individual or by a team. The nature of the programme will determine whether an individual or a team is necessary, e.g. where a range of specialisations need to be covered. External examiners are often drawn from the higher education community. They can be drawn from other communities of practice provided they have the necessary competences (or acquire them prior to engagement).

4.1 Curriculum Content & Review

External examiners will provide independent advice and feedback on the structure and content of learning, on the basis of academic and/or professional expertise and experience.

External examiners will have an opportunity to comment on programme/module content in a separate or integrated annual programme review process (i.e. during the end-of-year examination board or in the annual report).

External examiners may be invited to comment on material pertaining to cyclical programmatic review or to assess proposed changes to the programme.

4.2 Academic Standards, Assessment and Student Attainment

External examiners will have responsibility for the following:

- i. reviewing and advising on assessment methodologies and assessment questions
- ii. assessing the standard of academic awards and student attainment with regard to learning outcomes, institutional marks and standards documents and academic regulations as well as external/sectoral standards
- iii. ensuring that the policies, procedures and rubrics of the institutions have been applied fairly and consistently to all learners (and advising where practice requires improvement)
- iv. commenting on student learning and support experience, as appropriate
- v. attending programme/examination boards (in person or online)
- vi. identifying good practice in assessment
- vii. comment on trends in assessment and attainment
- viii. submitting a report that captures the above areas (see ss.4.4 below).

External examiners may request further samples of assessments if they have any concerns about standards, assessment practice or individual/cohort learner attainment.

The external examiner will not be expected to mark/double mark assessments. In serious cases of disagreement between internal assessors, the extern may provide independent advice.

In exceptional cases, an external examiner may recommend the re-scaling or adjustment of grades for individual students, a group of students or entire cohorts of students with reference to the programme learning outcomes, institutional marks and standards and/or NUI grade descriptors. Where the external examiner recommends adjustments to the results of a subset of students, it is important to ensure that consistent standards are applied to other students in the programme. In the event that the external and internal examiners disagree on such a matter, the relevant institutional body shall determine the marks awarded, and its decision shall be final.

4.3 Engagement with the Institution

4.3.1 Campus Visits

External examiners, based within a short travel distance, will ordinarily visit the institution in-person once during a standard three-year term of appointment.⁶ This visit would ideally take place during the first year of the appointment (to maximise the benefit to the external examiner) but where there are multiple external examiners, it may be more advantageous to alternate visits regardless of the year of appointment. Additional visits will be permitted exceptionally, with the agreement of the NUI Registrar, if the nature of the programme or the assessment requires it. It is understood that some clinical programmes would require annual visits.

4.3.2 Examination Boards

External examiners should be invited to attend School/Departmental meetings on examination results, either virtually or in-person, and may be invited to attend examination board meetings.

Where relevant, the procedures governing examination board meetings should be provided to external examiners in advance by the Registrar of the institution.

4.3.3 Meetings with Staff and Students

External examiners may engage in discussions with key personnel within the institution at any time during their appointment. It is expected that a formal period for such discussions would be arranged during the external examiner's visit, as appropriate.

External examiners may also meet with a representative group of students to assess the student experience and student quality at the institution. This can be done either virtually or in-person, as appropriate.

6. It would be expected that external examiners based outside the region would attend virtually only and not travel during their appointment; for this reason, it would be advisable that such appointments be made in cases where there is a team of external examiners.

4.4 Reporting

Reporting is an essential mechanism through which the University NUI assures quality in programme delivery and assessment. These reports feed into internal and external quality reviews (at programme and unit level), and programme monitoring and curriculum reviews in the relevant institution. Annual reports are also essential for NUI to identify trends over time and across the federation.

External examiners are required to submit an electronic copy of their report to externs@nui.ie, within **six** weeks of completing external examination duties for the year (ordinarily, following the final examination board).

4.5 Transparency

External examiners will understand NUI's commitment to transparency (see 3.5 above) and efforts to support public confidence in the quality assurance and academic standards of awards. Member institutions and/or NUI will publish a list of external examiners for each award with the primary occupation/affiliation of the relevant external examiners for each award.

4.6 Claiming Expenses

External examiners should submit a claim for their fee and any travel and subsistence expenses with their end-of-year report. If travel is required mid-year, an interim report may be submitted instead.

External examiners must claim their fees and expenses within one year of the applicable examining duties.

External examiners will have regard for the daily subsistence rates and maximum fees payable (as stipulated on the claim form). Where the examining duties take more than the allowable number of days, the programme lead (or a senior representative from the recognised college) should speak with the NUI Registrar. If travel expenses (e.g. accommodation) will exceed the allowable rate, external examiners are asked to contact NUI (externs@nui.ie) in advance of booking travel.

4.7 Data Protection

External examiners accept, upon appointment, responsibility to store electronic student files securely while under review and to permanently delete the files upon completion of external examining duties.

4.8 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

External examiners should be aware and supportive of the commitment across all NUI institutions to equality, diversity and inclusion. NUI member institutions provide a positive working, research and learning environment that 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 Traveller community, or socio-economic status.

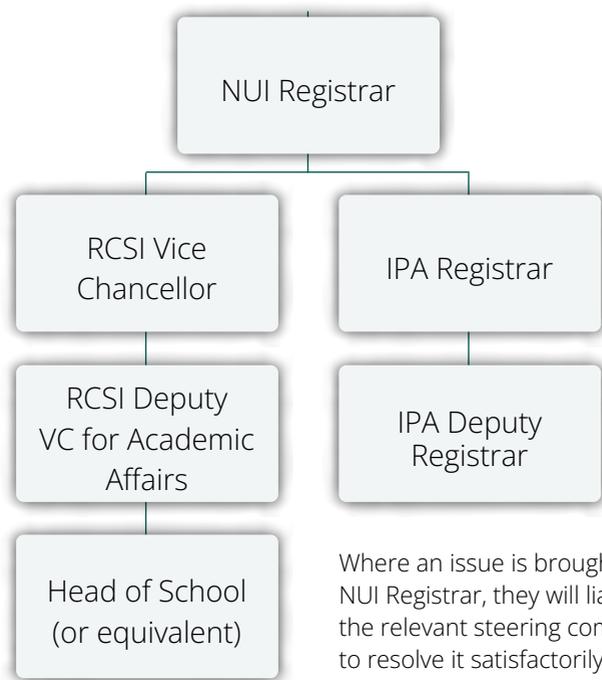
External examiners should, where possible and applicable, ensure that this principle is upheld by the assessment processes within their purview.

4.9 Withdrawal of an External Examiner

If, after appointment, an external examiner is no longer able to meet the responsibilities as outlined above, they should let NUI know at the earliest opportunity (by emailing externs@nui.ie). Similarly, if the extern becomes aware of a conflict of interest, they should inform NUI and a replacement will be arranged with the institution.

4.9 Serious Concerns

In the exceptional circumstance that an external examiner has serious and immediate concerns, these should be raised internally (within the relevant institution) in the first instance but, if necessary, approach more senior colleagues in the institution. The NUI Registrar may be contacted where issues are not resolved by the relevant institution to the external examiner's satisfaction. The below diagram indicates the appropriate contacts in the current recognised colleges.



5 Appointment Term and Eligibility

5.1 Criteria for appointment

- i. **Qualifications and expertise:** An external 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. **Academic standing:** An external examiner should have appropriate academic standing and expertise and have sufficient university experience to adjudicate on comparability of standards.
- iii. **Institutional independence:** An external 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 external examiner.

An external examiner should not normally be appointed from the same institution as their predecessor or another extern on the same programme. 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.

Former members of staff may not be appointed as external examiners to the same institution for a period of at least five years after they have left that institution.

Former students may not be appointed as external examiners to the same institution until a period of at least five years has elapsed and the graduate has obtained sufficient experience at another institution.

- iv. **Impartiality:** An external examiner should not have a close personal relationship to staff or students on the relevant programme. An individual should not be appointed as external examiner if their 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.
- v. **Programme independence:** An external examiner may not be involved in the teaching of a subject/degree programme that they will be called on to externally moderate.
- vi. **Concurrent appointments:** An external examiner will not normally hold more than two external examiner appointments at once.
- vii. **Equality, diversity and inclusion:** In identifying potential external examiners, institutions should ensure that the pool of external examiners (on a programme over time or on a team of examiners) reflects the diversity of the higher education sector. Nominators should review the profile of previous and, where relevant, current external examiners and consider factors such as gender, race/ethnicity and dis/ability in recruiting externs.
- viii. **Geographical location:** In identifying potential external examiners, institutions will have due regard for the environmental and financial impact of appointing external examiners based in countries outside of Europe (see also s.4.3 above). Within an external examiner team for a large programme, it may be possible to appoint an international external examiner who is not expected to travel as long as there is sufficient capacity to travel amongst the team as a whole.

5.2 Terms of Appointment

- i. External examiners will ordinarily be appointed for a term of up to three years, but a four-year term would be appropriate in the case of a four-year degree programme. An external appointed on a three-year term may be re-appointed for a fourth year. Exceptionally, an external examiner (with a three-year appointment) may be re-appointed for a further term of up to three years. No external examiner should be called on to serve for more than six consecutive years.
- ii. External 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 external 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. An exception would be made in the case of newly established extension programmes overseas, where experience of the local programme would benefit the establishment of the programme at an international campus.
- iii. An external 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 external examiner may be terminated if the extern fails to fulfil their responsibilities or if a serious conflict of interest arises.

5.3 Programmes Requiring an External Examiner

All programmes leading to an NUI qualification that is placed on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) require an external examiner.

Broad multidisciplinary programmes (e.g. BA or medicine) will require an external examiner for each subject and programmes with large learner cohorts may require more than one external examiner to ensure reasonable cover and to avoid undue burden on individual external examiners.

5.4 Removal or Replacement of an External Examiner

If an extern fails to fulfil key elements of the role, particularly if they do not submit an annual report, their appointment may be terminated early.

If an extern's circumstances change such that a conflict of interest arises or if it becomes known that a pre-existing conflict of interest exists, their appointment may be terminated early.

In such circumstances, the institution should inform NUI and the NUI Registrar will notify the external examiner directly regarding termination of the appointment. This will always be done in consultation with the relevant institution.

6 Key Resources and References

AdvanceHE (2019) [Fundamentals of External Examining](#).

Maynooth University (2017) External Examiners for Taught Programmes.

NUI (2023) [Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework](#).

NUI (2022) [Policy on Extern Examiners for Research Degrees in the Recognised Colleges](#).

[Universities Act](#), 1997

O'Sullivan, S, Uí Chonnachtaigh, S & Irfan, M (2025) [ExPeRA: A reflection on external examining roles and practices in Irish universities](#).

QAA (2022) [External Examining Principles](#).

QQI (2015) [Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining](#).

UCC (2024) [Guidelines for Extern Examiners: Primary Degree and Taught Postgraduate Courses](#).

UCD (2023) [Extern Examiners for Taught Programmes Policy](#).

University of Galway (2022) [Role of External Examiners – Taught Programmes](#). QA005.

Appendix 1 – External Examiner Nomination: Required Information



To facilitate the timely approval of new external examiners, recognised colleges should provide the following data in a format that is editable by NUI:

Personal details

Title

First name

Family name/surname

Email address

Professional Details

Affiliation (university, college or organisation)

Note: if not a typical appointment, requisite qualifications/experience should be provided

Term Details

School/unit

Programme/subject/module

Term of appointment (start date plus number of years or end date)

Nominator

Type of appointment*: academic/professional/practice

Confirmation they have not acted in the previous 3 years

Appendix 2 – Guidance on Induction of External Examiners

The induction of external examiners is a matter for each institution. It is recommended that inductions include the following:

- A brief introduction to the institution (history, mission, values and purpose).
- A brief introduction to NUI and the relationship between NUI and the institution with a clear delineation of responsibilities regarding the administration of external examining (responsibilities of the programme team, central administration in the institution and NUI).
- Guidance on the role of the external examiner and expectations of the institution.
- Guidance on what to do if there is a problem (e.g. unable to fulfil duties, concern regarding a programme or assessment standards).
- Emphasis on the importance of end-of-year reports and information on payments.
- Key contacts for the programme team, central administration in the institution and NUI (externs@nui.ie).

NUI will support institutional induction/briefing processes for external examiners subject to availability.

Appendix 3 – Sample Report Form

Report of the External Examiner

Please complete reports within **6 weeks** of the completion of work for the academic year and return to externs@nui.ie. Please ensure the report is signed and dated (end of report).

External Examiner Details

Title		Institution	
First name(s)		Email address	
Family name			

Academic year examined: 20__ - 20__

Programme(s) and/or subject(s) *(Insert additional rows if necessary)*

College(s) Visited

RCSI (Dublin)	RCSI Bahrain	RCSI Soochow	RUMC	IPA
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Time(s) of visit(s): Spring Summer
*(Please note only **one** annual report is required at the end of the academic year.)* Autumn Winter

A. To be completed if you acted as external examiner last year:

	Questions	Yes	No	Your Comments
1	Were you provided with evidence that your recommendation(s) from previous years were considered and acted upon?			
2	Did you receive timely payment following your visit and submission of your report?			

B. To be completed by all external examiners

In respect of the programme(s)/subject(s)/modules for which you were appointed as external examiner, please report on the following:

	Questions	Yes	No	Extern's Comments
1	Information provided to Externs			
	Did you receive adequate information on the following: - learning outcomes - structure and content - learning strategy and assessment.			
2	Administration of the exam process			
2.1	Was the administration of the examination process satisfactory?			
2.2	Were the facilities and material for practical and/or clinical assessment adequate?			
2.3	Was there access to a sufficient number and range of examination papers to enable a view to be formed that internal marking was appropriate and consistent?			
2.4	Was there sufficient access to other assessment instruments (continuous assessments, practicals, clinical assessments, exhibitions etc), to enable the exercise of effective external judgement?			
2.5	Was there adequate opportunity to see scripts and/or other assessment material presented by borderline candidates?			

	Questions	Yes	No	Extern's Comments
3	Learning outcomes, structure & content			
3.1	Are learning outcomes sufficiently well-defined and appropriate to the subject matter and to the students?			
3.2	Is the structure satisfactory?			
3.3	Is the content current and appropriate to the level at which it is taught?			
4	Learning strategy & assessment			
4.1	Are you satisfied that the assessment strategy is aligned with the learning outcomes?			
4.2	Is the range and scope of the assessment instruments sufficiently comprehensive in relation to the expected learning outcomes?			
4.3	Do the assessments enable students to demonstrate achievement of the expected learning outcomes?			
4.4	Is the extent of the assessment requirements appropriate to the programme and level of award?			

	Questions	Yes	No	Extern's Comments
5	Standards and quality			
5.1	Is the general quality of candidates' work satisfactory?			
5.2	Is the failure rate a cause for concern?			
5.3	Is the distribution of final honours classes comparable with the distribution in other institutions?			
5.4	Were the standards achieved by students consistent with standards in your own university and/or elsewhere in other universities in which you have examined?			
6	Impartiality and equity			
6.1	Were the procedures followed during the grading and assessment process, and where relevant by the Examination Board, impartial and equitable?			
7	General comments			
7.1	Please provide additional/overall comments on the assessment process:			

7.2	Please comment on aspects of the assessment process that demonstrated good practice:
7.3	Please comment on aspects of the assessment process that give cause for concern:
7.4	Please include your recommendations for developments, enhancements and improvements to the programme/module:

Signed:

Date:

Once completed, please return with your claim form to externs@nui.ie



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