



Ollscoil na hÉireann  
National University of Ireland

# NUI POLICY ON EXTERN EXAMINERS



*For Primary Degree and Taught  
Postgraduate Programmes*



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## **NUI SENATE POLICY DOCUMENT**

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April 2014

## 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. In addition, the Senate appoints extern examiners to recognised colleges where NUI awards are made. 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. NUI continues to administer extern examiner appointments in recognised colleges. This document sets out general policy on extern examiners appointed by the Senate to all NUI institutions. It is complementary to documentation prepared in each constituent university and college for the guidance of staff and examiners and to the documentation prepared by NUI in connection with extern examiner appointments at recognised colleges.

Extern examiners are appointed by the University 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 and assessment. 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 to those achieved in the subject area in equivalent universities internationally.

**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 and assessment 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. Nonetheless, in particular circumstances, extern examiners may be involved in the assessment process as second or additional examiners. The Extern Examiner will also be concerned that the assessment strategy is aligned with the stated learning outcomes.

## 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) in question.

- (ii) An extern examiner should have appropriate academic standing and expertise, and have sufficient university experience to adjudicate on comparability of standards.
- (iii) The appointment of Extern Examiners should be consistent with the policy on Conflict of Interest of the Constituent University concerned or of NUI (in the case of Recognised Colleges).

## Term of Appointment

- (i) Extern examiners will normally be appointed for a term of up to three years. Exceptionally, an extern examiner may be re-appointed for a further term of up to three years. 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.

## 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, 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**  
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. 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 papers, draft examination 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 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) **Auditing, 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.**

(vi) **Reviewing the content of courses and modules and, where relevant, the subject or programme, to ensure appropriateness and enhance quality.**

(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 under which externs may be directly involved in the determination of marks or grades for individual students. These include the examination of major projects, theses or dissertations, or major practical, oral, clinical or professional assessments.

- (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.**

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 College.

Extern examiners may also be consulted in relation to matters arising from examination appeals.

- (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.

- (x) **Following completion of the aforementioned activities, the extern examiner is required to provide a report on their findings to the Constituent University concerned.**



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