

CHAPTER F – EXTERNAL EXAMINING

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F.1. UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Chapter B7: External Examining

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about external examining, which higher education Institutions are required to meet.

Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Indicator 1

Awarding Institutions appoint one or more external examiner(s) to carry out the role(s) defined in this Chapter for all provision that leads to a higher education award of the Institution.

Indicator 2

Awarding Institutions expect their external examiners to provide informative comment and recommendations upon whether or not:

- an Institution is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements
- the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the Institution's policies and regulations
- the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education Institutions of which the external examiners have experience.

Indicator 3

Awarding Institutions expect their external examiners to provide informative comment and recommendations on:

- good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment observed by the external examiners
- opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students.

Indicator 4

Institutions have explicit policies and regulations governing the nomination and appointment of external examiners. Institutions can terminate an external examiner's appointment at any time, subject to approved Institutional procedures, for failure by the external examiner to fulfil his/her obligations or if a conflict of interest arises which cannot be satisfactorily resolved.

Indicator 5

Institutions apply the following UK-wide set of criteria for appointing external examiners and make every effort to ensure that their external examiners are competent to undertake the responsibilities defined by the Institution. Institutions use the criteria to ensure that potential conflicts of interest are identified and resolved prior to appointing external examiners or as soon as they arise.

Person Specification

- a) Institutions appoint external examiners who can show appropriate evidence of the following:
 - i. knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality
 - ii. competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof

- iii. relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate
- iv. competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures
- v. sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers
- vi. familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed
- vii. fluency in English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that external examiners are provided with the information to make their judgements)
- viii. meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies
- ix. awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula
- x. competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience

Conflicts of interest

- b) Institutions do not appoint as external examiners anyone in the following categories or circumstances:
 - i. member of a governing body or committee of the appointing Institution or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the appointing Institution or one of its collaborative partners
 - ii. anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study
 - iii. anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study
 - iv. anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study
 - v. anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme(s) or modules in question
 - vi. former staff or students of the Institution unless a period of five years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s)
 - vii. a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another Institution
 - viii. the succession of an external examiner from an Institution by a colleague from the same department in the same Institution
 - ix. the appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same Institution.

Terms of Office

- c) The duration of an external examiner's appointment will normally be for four years, with an exceptional extension of one year to ensure continuity.
- d) An external examiner may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.
- e) External examiners normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time.

Indicator 6

Institutions ensure that all external examiners they appoint are informed about organisational procedures, practices, and academic regulations, and the crucial value of external examiners' feedback to the Institution as part of the broader system of quality assurance and enhancement.

Indicator 7

Institutions communicate clearly in writing to all concerned the:

- modules, programmes and/or award(s) to which each external examiner is appointed
- various roles, powers and responsibilities assigned to their external examiners, including the extent of their authority in examination boards.

Indicator 8

Institutions include the name, position and Institution of their external examiners in module or programme information provided to students.

Indicator 9

Prior to the confirmation of mark lists, pass lists or similar documents, Institutions expect external examiners to endorse the outcomes of the assessment processes they have been appointed to scrutinise.

Indicator 10

Institutions provide external examiners with sufficient evidence to enable them to discharge their responsibilities.

Indicator 11

Institutions recognise the importance, and mutual benefit, of the work undertaken by many of their staff as external examiners for other Institutions and agree with staff the time they need to fulfil these duties.

Indicator 12

External examiners submit a report annually, at a time determined by the Institution, to the head of the Institution or to one or more named individuals that he/she designates.

Indicator 13

External examiners' annual reports provide clear and informative feedback to the Institution on those areas defined for the role in Indicators 2 and 3 (the core content).

In addition, their reports:

- confirm that sufficient evidence was received to enable the role to be fulfilled
- (where evidence was insufficient, they give details)
- state whether issues raised in the previous report(s) have been, or are being, addressed to their satisfaction
- address any issues as specifically required by any relevant professional body
- give an overview of their term of office (when concluded).

Indicator 14

Institutions make external examiners' annual reports available in full to students, with the sole exception of any confidential report made directly, and separately, to the head of the Institution.

Indicator 15

At both Institutional and subject/programme level, Institutions give full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiners' reports. The actions taken as a result of reports, or the reasons for not taking action, are formally recorded and circulated to those concerned.

F.2. Aims of the System of External Examiners

2.1 Introduction

Chapter B7 of the UKHE Quality Code indicates that external examiners are a source of independent, external advice. Examiners comment on whether:

- The Institution is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education, qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements
- the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the Institution's policies and regulations
- the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education Institutions of

External Examiners also assist the Institution by providing advice on:

- good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment;
- opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities for students

2.2 Criteria for appointments

The criteria are intended to secure the appointment of external examiners of suitable standing, experience and expertise; to avoid potential conflicts of interest, as defined in the UKHE Quality Code, and to refresh the availability of external insight on quality and standards:

- a) knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality
- b) competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof
- c) relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate
- d) competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures
- e) sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers
- f) familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed
- g) fluency in English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that external examiners are provided with the information to make their judgements)
- h) meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies
- i) awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula
- j) competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

2.3 Process for nomination and appointment

Programme committees will consider recommendations for the nominations of external examiners from the Assistant Director/Head of Programmes or the Programme Leader. Nominations should be made before the end of one session for appointments and reappointments, allowing for a handover from the outgoing to the incoming external examiner.

Nominations will be presented to the Academic Standards and Quality Board (ASQB) on the standard nomination form (appendix [F.3.4](#)) with the nominee's CV and a brief statement of his/her suitability for the role, together with any other supporting documentation, including information about the proposed number of years and level of appointment, membership of professional bodies and examining experience.

ASQB has delegated authority from the Academic Board to appoint external examiners on the recommendation of programme committees.

ASQB is responsible for assuring the Academic Board that appointments are made in a timely manner and in accordance with the regulations. ASQB will seek approval from the Academic Board for any exceptional case where the appointment of an external examiner does not fulfil the standard criteria.

The nominee will be offered the role by letter from the Registry. The letter and contract will set out the terms of engagement and annual fees and expenses, the duration of appointment and notice required for early termination, as well as providing an outline of the expected duties.

The duration of appointment will normally be for an initial period **not exceeding four years with an exceptional extension of one year for continuity**. Where an examiner moves from one programme to another, the total period of office will not normally exceed four years. The approval of the Academic Standards and Quality Board must be sought for any exception to this rule.

Examiners will normally be appointed to start from the beginning of an academic year and to conclude the term of office after the final (or resit) assessment board following the fourth year of appointment.

An external examiner with limited or no experience of the role will normally be appointed one year before the expiry of the contract of an established examiner and will be able to overlap with and shadow the established examiner.

An external examiner may be re-appointed, in exceptional circumstances, but only after a period of five years has lapsed since the last appointment. The Academic Board must approve such appointments.

External Examiners will not normally be allowed to hold more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time. The Academic Board must approve any variation to this rule.

2.4 Termination by the external examiner

An external examiner may apply to the Deputy Registrar to interrupt the term of office for a defined period of time. ASQB may approve interim arrangements or alternative temporary appointments.

External Examiners wishing to terminate their contract with Trinity Laban will be required to give reasonable notice. A notice period of six months will apply for all External Examiners appointed from September 2016.

2.5 Termination by the Institution

The Institution will normally give not less than six months' notice of the Institution's intention to terminate an external examiner's contract.

The Academic Board will decide whether to approve the termination of appointments, on the recommendation of ASQB.

The Academic Board may exceptionally approve termination without notice on the following grounds:

- irretrievable breakdown in the relationship between the External Examiner and the Institution

- persistent unavailability/ inability to perform duties on the part of the External Examiner (e.g. non-submission of reports within a reasonable timescale and/or failure to attend an assessment board for good reason)
- new conflict of interest following a change of role of the examiner
- loss of eligibility to work in the UK
- any other grounds of misconduct on the part of the External Examiner

2.6 Duties and rights of external examiners

The duties and rights of external examiners are defined in Trinity Laban's External Examiner Handbook and the assessment regulations.

External examiners

- approve the assessments compiled by the Internal Examiners
- review assessment materials
- attend meetings of assessment boards
- approve recommendations of the Assessment Board
- perform any other special duties (such as involvement in the revalidation process) as may be agreed
- reports on the standards of the awards, the standard of student performance and the soundness and fairness of processes for awards
- by arrangement, attend any oral or practical assessment in addition to the standard assessment programmes in which they participate
- have the right - if necessary - to submit comments on any aspects of the assessment to the Principal and (in the case of externally validated provision) to the Vice-Chancellor of City University London
- where applicable, the external examiners will be required to witness performance and other practice-based assessment outcomes

The responsibilities of the examiners cover both particular modules within programmes and awards within named programmes, including interim qualifications and exit awards.

2.7 Approval of draft assessments

The Programme Leader will correspond with the Examiner in liaison with the Registry and provide confirmation that any recommended changes have been incorporated into the assessments as appropriate.

2.8 Review of assessment materials and moderation

External examiners have the right to see any or all assessment materials as they think fit, and they should view enough evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and are consistent.

The Programme Leader - in liaison with the Registry- will agree with each External Examiner in advance what and how materials will be supplied.

Examiners should see a sample of assessed work from the top, middle and bottom of the marking range, together with all borderline fails and an extended sample of full failures and first class assessments. The Examiner should normally also see all work for which the internal markers have had difficulty agreeing a mark.

Since External Examiners only view a sample of assessed work it would not be appropriate for individual marks to be amended. Instead the examiner should offer advice about whether the marking of the sample as a whole is accurate and consistent with marks awarded in relation to similar awards elsewhere in the HE sector. Any concerns External Examiners may have regarding marking should be reported in the first instance to the relevant Programme Leader.

2.9 Resolution of differences of judgment about marks and role of external examiners

Internal Examiners will hold a discussion to attempt to resolve any differences of opinion about marks for a student.

Where agreement between the Internal Examiners cannot be arrived at, the issue will be referred to the External Examiner(s) and the Chair of the Assessment Board, or a nominee for resolution. In the case of a performance panel failing to agree a mark, each member is asked to submit a separate report with a proposed mark. The assessment board has ultimate authority to decide the marks.

2.10 Participation in assessment boards

Each External Examiner is a full member of the assessment board and has the right to attend all examiners' meetings at which significant decisions are to be taken, including the setting of assessments. External Examiners should attend all award assessment boards and may attend resit boards.

The External Examiners are asked to confirm the appropriateness of the standards of the awards, the standards of student performance and the soundness and fairness of processes for the assessment and determination of awards, including the types of assessment, the consistent and fair application of the marking scheme/grading criteria and the appropriateness, fairness and reliability of internal marking; the fair and equitable operation of procedures for mitigating circumstances, academic integrity and borderline performances. The External Examiners have an opportunity to make initial comments at meetings of the assessment boards; they should incorporate those comments - as appropriate - into their annual written reports.

The Assessment Board may decide not to accept the advice of an External Examiner, but must formally record the reasons in the minutes of the meeting.

The External Examiner will be asked to sign the mark sheets, with details of the decisions of the assessment board to confirm acceptance. The Chair and the Programme Leader also sign the sheets.

An External Examiner who is unwilling to approve recommendations or decisions by the assessment board may, exceptionally, make independent representations to the Academic Board via the Registrar.

External examiners may also:

- exceptionally submit comments on any aspects of assessments to the Principal
- by arrangement, attend any oral and practical assessment or interview in addition to those at which your attendance is agreed with the Programme Leader

2.13 Absence from assessment boards

External Examiners who cannot attend an award/final assessment board must advise the Secretary as soon as possible and provide written feedback prior to the meeting, as well as being available for consultation by telephone or email and confirming consent for the decisions of the meeting.

2.14 External Examiners' Reports

Pro-forma reports: Trinity Laban issues a pro-forma for completion by External Examiners for validated provision.

Examiners are particularly asked to comment on:

- Whether the standards set are appropriate for the awards, by reference to published national subject benchmarks (where applicable), the national qualifications frameworks, Institutional programme specifications and other standards
- The standards for performance by students in the programmes or modules under assessment and on the comparability with those of similar level programmes in other UK higher educational Institutions

- The extent to which the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are sound and have been fairly conducted
- The operation and content of the programmes
- Additionally, examiners in the final year of appointment are asked to provide an overview report on developments in the programme during the term of office
- Examiners should not refer, in their reports, to the names of individual students

The External Examiner has the right, exceptionally, to send additional, confidential reports to the Principal to raise any sensitive issues relating to the management of quality and standards. The External Examiner has the right, in the event that internal procedures have been exhausted, to raise issues through the QAA Causes for Concern scheme.

External Examiners' reports and responses to the reports will be published on Moodle with access for staff and students.

2.15 Procedure for acting on external examiners' reports

The annual report is received by the Registry and is annotated by the Academic Quality Unit, identifying points for specific consideration, including points of good practice and strengths, as well as any issues of concern.

The Registry will then send an annotated copy of the report to the Programme Leader, the Registrar and Director of Music/Dance. The Registry will analyse all reports for items requiring attention in liaison with the Faculty Director and the Registrar, monitoring the comprehensive preparation of responses.

The Programme Leader is responsible for completing the response form and returning it to the Registry to be sent to the External Examiner. The response is presented to the next meeting of the Programme Committee for information and decisions on any actions are noted in the minutes.

The Programme Leader's response and the list of actions are included with the Annual Programme Evaluation report (APE) submitted to ASQB. ASQB and the Academic Board will consider an annual, Institution-wide summary of issues raised in external examiners' reports, prepared by the Registry.

External Examiners will be provided with a copy of the Annual Programme Evaluation report for information.

2.16 Induction

The Institution aims to ensure that external examiners:

- Understand and are fully equipped for their roles
- Are familiar with the programmes and modules for which they are appointed
- Understand external examining, assessment and award processes and associated administrative procedures
- Understand the assessment regulations
- Develop effective working relationships with the Institution

Trinity Laban will provide induction sessions, which are attended by the Programme Leader and members of the Registry. The Registry will liaise with the programme leader to ensure that each external examiner is briefed as appropriate (using the checklist in appendix [F.3.3](#)), with the examiner receiving all necessary documentation.

The timetable for the External Examiners' visits to Trinity Laban for briefing/induction will be co-ordinated by the Registry in liaison with the Programme Leader. The Programme Leader will arrange a detailed briefing about the programme and ensure the receipt of all necessary programme documentation, including:

- The Programme Handbook (including the aims, objectives and intended learning outcomes of the programme and module/component specifications, marking schemes and assessment criteria)
- The web link to the Trinity Laban Academic Quality Handbook
- Trinity Laban Institutional Strategy
- Reports from previous external examiners in the year directly preceding the appointment
- Any specific procedures relating to moderation
- Details of the assessment structures, methods and tasks
- The marking practices in relation to the programme as a whole and within specific modules/components
- The grading criteria (including any Subject Benchmark statements) and grading schemes
- Arrangements for submission/presentation of work for moderation
- Details of how and when they will receive feedback on actions taken as a result of their annual report

2.17 Information about external examiners

All programme handbooks will include the names and home Institutions of the external examiners.

The Registry will maintain the list of external examiners, reporting annually to ASQB and the Academic Board.

2.18 Payment and expenses

Payment of annual fees and expenses is made on completion of the annual cycle of examining work and on receipt of the external examiner's report.