

CHAPTER F – EXTERNAL EXAMINING

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F.1. UK Quality Code for Higher Education – External Expertise

Core Practices (Standards)

The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.

The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.

Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.

The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.

Core Practices (Quality)

The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.

Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.

Common Practice (Standards)

The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

Common Practice (Quality)

The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise.

Guiding Principles

- Providers use one or more external experts as advisers to provide impartial and independent scrutiny on the approval and review of all provision that leads to the award of credit or a qualification.
- Degree-awarding bodies engage independent external examiners to comment impartially and informatively on academic standards, student achievement and assessment processes for all provision that leads to the award of credit or a qualification.
- Degree-awarding bodies have processes for the nomination, approval and engagement of external examiners and other independent external experts.
- Providers ensure that the roles of those providing external expertise are clear to students, staff and other stakeholders.
- Providers ensure that external experts are given sufficient and timely evidence and training to enable them to carry out their responsibilities.
- Providers have effective mechanisms in place to provide a response to input from external examiners and external advisers.

F.2. Aims of the System of External Examiners

2.1 Introduction

The UK Quality Code indicates that external examiners are a source of external, impartial, academic and/or professional expertise. External examiners comment on the consistent application of the provider's standards and confirm their alignment with UK-recognised standards in determining awards. External Examiners also assist the Institution by identifying:

- good practice in learning, teaching and assessment
- areas of enhancement that inform the continuous improvement of learning opportunities

2.2 Criteria for appointments

The Quality Code advice and guidance states that the degree-awarding body should demonstrate that its external examiners:

- have a high degree of competence and experience in the fields covered by the course of study, or parts thereof, and have a good understanding of the UK higher education sector
- are appropriately experienced in course design and student assessment at the level of the award
- have the necessary academic experience and subject knowledge to assess standards in an effective manner, identify good practice and recommend enhancements to enable informed course development
- are experienced in acting as an external examiner or are supported by the provider in undertaking their duties, for example, through training and mentoring
- are impartial in judgement and wholly independent of the provider and its staff (including the governing body), and any relevant partners
- do not personally benefit from any student outcomes, nor have any connection to any student being assessed
- have had sufficient experience in quality assurance to enable them to discharge their role effectively
- are drawn from a relevant variety of institutional or professional contexts and traditions in order that the course benefits from wide-ranging external scrutiny
- comply with all relevant employment legislation, including safeguarding, as appropriate
- normally hold a limited number of concurrent external examining engagements (for example either one or two).

2.3 Process for nomination and appointment

Programme committees will consider recommendations for the nominations of external examiners from the Head of Programmes or the Programme Leader. Nominations should be made before the end of the spring term for appointments commencing at the start of the next academic year, 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.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 level of appointment, the nominees academic qualifications, 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.

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

An external examiner with limited or no experience or the role may be appointed before the expiry of the contract of an established examiner and will be encouraged to overlap with and shadow the established examiner. Inexperienced external examiners will also be invited to complete the Advance HE Professional Development Course for External Examiners.

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 be allowed to hold more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time.

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 a minimum of one full term's notice.

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
- report 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
- 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 external 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.

External examiners should be provided with a structured sample of all assessment tasks contributing to the award for which they are responsible. Depending on the nature of the assessment task, such samples may be written or filmed (accessed through Moodle), or viewed live. Where the number of assessment components is large, a rolling schedule may be implemented so that all assessments are viewed by the external examiner at least once during their term.

For each assessment, the sample should include (where the size of the cohort permits):

- a selection of assessments from each classification band
- a sample of fails (or all fails for independent projects/dissertations)
- any work marked on the borderline of a classification boundary (e.g. 49, 59, 69)
- any work that has been subject to additional marking (in order to resolve a dispute between markers)

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

Trinity Laban issues a pro-forma for completion by External Examiners at the end of each academic cycle.

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 and annotated by the Registry, 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 inform 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), 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 marking criteria 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 is made on completion of the annual cycle of examining work and upon receipt of the external examiner's report. Claims for expenses should be made as soon as possible after being incurred and in accordance with the Staff Expenses Policy.