

# TRINITY LABAN CONSERVATOIRE OF MUSIC & DANCE

**Trinity Laban Conservatoire for Music and Dance**

**Handbook for External Examiners**

Version 2020/2021

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## Foreword

Thank you for accepting the role of External Examiner at the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. This handbook should provide assistance in your role and responsibilities as an External Examiner.

We hope that you will enjoy the opportunity to play an important role in underpinning our academic quality and enhancement processes and practices during the next phase of our strategic development over 2018-2028. We welcome your input to our community as a critical friend, a role that has been described by Costa and Kallick as:

*... a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work.<sup>1</sup>*

You are welcome to raise any general questions relating to your role with the Assistant Registrar (Academic Administration) of Trinity Laban; in addition the individual leader for the programme to which you are attached will be delighted to help you in understanding any other matters relating to the specific programme of study or the experience of students engaged on it.

We value your contribution and look forward to working in partnership with you over the coming months and years.

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<sup>1</sup> Costa, A. and Kallick, B.(1993) "Through the Lens of a Critical Friend". *Educational Leadership* 51(2) 49-51.

## **1 INTRODUCTION TO TRINITY LABAN**

Formed in 2005 through the merger of Trinity College of Music and contemporary dance centre Laban, Trinity Laban is the only conservatoire of music and dance in the UK.

Trinity College of Music was founded in 1872 and relocated to the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich, a World Heritage site, in 2001, acquiring its public concert venue, Blackheath Halls, in 2003. Laban, originally the Art of Movement Studio based in Manchester and later in London, was founded by Rudolf Laban, an Austro-Hungarian dancer, choreographer and dance/movement theoretician. In 2002, Laban relocated to its purpose-built, Stirling Prize landmark building in Deptford, designed by Herzog & de Meuron.

Trinity Laban's portfolio of undergraduate, postgraduate and professional development programmes provides a range of opportunities for those wanting to enter the music and dance professions as well as supporting continuing professional development for artists and practitioners. Trinity Laban also provides significant opportunities for younger learners including the flourishing provision offered by its Saturday school for children and young people at Junior Trinity, and the Centre for Advanced Training in the Faculty of Dance which trains young people aged 13 – 17 who show exceptional potential in dance.

Alongside our HE and pre-HE provision, we have a significant investment in knowledge exchange and public engagement activity, and our Education and Community programme provides an extensive range of activities reaching out to schools and community groups, generating interest and involvement in dance within the local community, across London and nationwide.

Trinity Laban has a strong historic link with Trinity College London. Founded in 1877 as the examinations department of Trinity College of Music, Trinity College London is now a wholly independent company which operates in over 60 countries around the world, providing a range of grade and diploma examinations in music, dance and the performing arts, in addition to communication and English language qualifications. In retaining their close links with us, Trinity College London offers opportunity for our students to take additional advanced externally accredited qualifications.

Trinity Laban was granted taught degree awarding powers by HM Privy Council from February 2016. All students on taught degree programmes are validated by Trinity Laban. Research degrees are validated by City, University London with which Trinity Laban has a long-standing arrangement.

## **2 AIMS OF THE SYSTEM OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

2.1 Our external examiners help to ensure that:

- assessment methods are appropriate and measure student achievement against the intended outcomes of the programme
- assessment is fair and just, operated in line with the institutional regulations
- appropriate academic standards are set and maintained
- standards are comparable with similar awards conferred by other institutions

2.2 External Examiners also assist with the enhancement of quality by contributing to the development of programmes and learning and teaching practice.

2.3 We seek to align our practices with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education's relevant Core and Common Practices for Standards and Quality, which indicates that external examiners are a source of external, impartial academic and/or professional expertise.

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

External Examiners also assist the Institution by providing advice on:

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

### **3 APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The appointment process is intended to ensure that our external examiners are suitably qualified; that we avoid potential conflicts of interest through appointments and that we regularly refresh the availability of external insight on quality and standards. Nominations for the appointment of External Examiners are made by the Programme Leader and endorsed by the relevant Programme Committee for submission to the Academic Standards and Quality Board (ASQB). ASQB appoints External Examiners under delegated authority from Academic Board.

#### **3.2 Term of office**

External Examiners are usually appointed for an initial period not exceeding four years, with the option of a fifth year, under exceptional circumstances, in order to ensure continuity. Examiners are usually appointed to start their duties at the beginning of an academic year, with the period of office normally extending beyond the end of the final academic year of their period of appointment to take account of the assessment board and any final resit board.

#### **3.3 Letters of appointment**

You will receive a letter from the Registry offering you the appointment, including:

The appointment letter will include:

- The academic year that your appointment is due to commence
- The length of your appointment and the programme you have been assigned to
- The External Examiner Handbook
- Details of the annual fee
- A separate form for you to provide your employment details
- An HMRC new starter form

Please check that all information is correct, and if so, complete and return the acceptance/ External Examiner details form. This is important to confirm your agreement to the appointment to enable timely

fee payment. Please inform us if your relevant details or circumstances change during the course of your appointment.

At the start of your first year, you will be provided with a number of key documents, normally accessed via the Trinity Laban website or through the online learning platform Moodle with hardcopies provided on request.

## **4 INDUCTION**

4.1 We aim – through induction - to ensure that you:

- understand and are fully equipped for your role
- are familiar with the programmes and modules for which you are appointed.
- understand external examining, assessment and award processes and associated administrative procedures
- understand the assessment regulations
- develop effective working relationships with us

As part of the induction process, all newly appointed External Examiners will be invited to a briefing provided by the Programme Leader and the Registry to familiarise them with the structure of the programme and Institution's systems and procedures.

4.2 The timetable for your 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 that you receive all necessary programme documentation, including:

- The Programme Handbook (including the aims, objectives and intended learning outcomes of the programme and module/component specifications and marking schemes)
- Assessment Regulations
- The 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 you will receive feedback on actions taken as a result of your annual report

## **5 DUTIES AND RIGHTS OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

External Examiners play a vital role in assuring academic standards, enhancing programme delivery and the supporting the ongoing development of Trinity Laban's programmes.

#### 5.1.1 External examiners:

- Approve the assessments compiled by the Internal Examiners
- Review assessment materials
- Attend meetings of assessment boards
- Approve recommendations of assessment boards
- Perform any other special duties 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 head of the institution
- Where applicable, the external examiners will be required to witness performance and other practice-based assessment outcomes.

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

5.1.2 The Programme Leader – liaising with the Trinity Laban Registry – will agree with you the programme and timetable of work for the year, including your visits and the despatch of assessment materials.

#### 5.3 **Approval of draft assessments**

Due to the nature of some assessment tasks, briefs will remain unchanged from year to year. Where new assessment briefs are drafted, the Programme Leader will correspond with you in liaison with the Registry and provide confirmation that any recommended changes have been incorporated into the assessments as appropriate.

#### 5.4 **Review of assessment materials and moderation**

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

5.4.2 The Registry – in liaison with the Programme Leader – will agree with you in advance a moderation schedule, confirming which assessments should be attended in person and for which sample assessments will be made available through the Moodle VLE.

5.4.3 You should be provided with a structured sample of all assessment tasks contributing to the award for which you 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 you at least once during your 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 subjected to additional marking (in order to resolve a dispute between markers)

5.4.4 Because External Examiners only view a sample of assessed work it would not be appropriate for individual marks to be amended. Instead you should come to a conclusion 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 that you may have regarding marking should be reported in the first instance to the relevant Programme Leader.

## **5.5 Resolution of differences of judgement about marks and the role of external examiners**

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

5.5.2 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.

## **6 MEMBERSHIP OF ASSESSMENT BOARDS**

6.1 The formal assessment boards effectively combine the functions of subject and conferment boards. The formal boards are preceded by preliminary, internal examiners' meetings, which confirm marks for presentation to the boards. The Assessment Boards have delegated authority from the Institution's Academic Board to make decisions.

6.2 There are panels to consider mitigating circumstances, which act with delegated authority from the assessment boards and in accordance with the Academic Regulations. Mitigating Circumstances are unforeseen, unpreventable circumstances that significantly disrupt student performance in assessment.

6.3 Prior to the Assessment Boards, there may be internal assessment panels in order to confirm the marks for modules and components at each level of the degree, for submission to the Assessment Board for approval. The conditions under which the panels operate are defined in the award specific regulations. The meetings normally include the Head of Studies/Programmes), the Programme Leader, one or more internal examiners and a secretary, with appropriate representation from those engaged in the internal assessment process; the external examiner is not required to be present.

6.4 You are a full member of the assessment board and have the right to attend all examiners' meetings at which significant decisions are to be taken, including the setting of assessments. You should attend all award assessment boards and may attend resit boards.

6.4 You are asked to report on the standards of the award, the standard of student performance and the soundness and fairness of processes for the assessment and determination of awards through:

- i initial comments at meetings of assessment boards,
- ii. a written report following the final meeting of the Assessment Board in each year of the programme. This should incorporate the initial comments made at assessment board meetings. This report is reviewed independently upon receipt, at which time examples of good practice, strengths or areas of potential concern that require specific response are identified.

- 6.5 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.
- 6.6 You will be invited 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 mark sheets.
- 6.7 In the event that you were unwilling to approve recommendations or decisions by the assessment board, you could – exceptionally – make independent representations to the Academic Board via the Trinity Laban Registrar.
- 6.8 You 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.

#### 6.9 **Absence from assessment boards**

In case you cannot attend an award/final assessment board, you should:

- advise the Registry as soon as possible
- provide written feedback prior to the meeting
- be available for consultation by telephone or email and confirm consent to the decisions of the meeting.

## 7 **EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' ANNUAL REPORTS**

### 7.1 **Pro-forma reports**

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

7.2 You 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.

7.3 You are also invited to comment on the operation and content of the programmes.

7.4 In the event that you are in your final year of appointment, you are asked to include an overview report on developments in the programme during their terms of office.

7.5 You have the right – exceptionally – to send additional, confidential reports – to the Principal to raise any sensitive issues relating to the management of quality and standards. You are also entitled, in exceptional circumstances, to refer issues to the QAA Causes for Concern Procedure where internal procedures have been exhausted.

7.6 All reports must be returned to Trinity Laban within 30 days of the relevant Assessment Board.

7.7 All reports (and programme leader responses) are made available to students and may be made public. It is paramount that appropriate language is used throughout, and that External Examiner's ensure that the report is anonymised so as not to identify individual students or members of staff, unless appropriate.

## 7.8 Procedure for acting on your reports

7.8.1 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.

7.8.2 The Deputy Registrar arranges for the Programme Leader to receive the report, together with the Registrar and the Director of Music/Dance. The Registry will analyse all reports for items requiring attention in liaison with the Director and the Registrar, monitoring the comprehensive preparation of responses.

7.8.3 The Programme Leader drafts a response to the report, which is considered by the Programme Committee. Decisions on any actions are noted in the records of the Programme Committee

7.8.4 The Programme Leader is responsible for writing a letter to you responding to the report and explaining how any points raised will be addressed. The Registry is responsible for forwarding the response to you.

7.8.5 The Programme Leader's response and the list of actions inform the Annual Programme Evaluation report (APE) submitted to the Trinity Laban Academic Standards and Quality Board (ASQB).

7.8.6 ASQB will consider an annual, institution-wide summary of issues raised in external examiners' reports, prepared by the Registry and will alert Academic Board to the issues arising and proposed responses.

7.8.7 The Programme Leader's response will be sent to you once it has been approved by the Programme Committee.

7.8.7 You will also receive a copy of the Annual Programme Evaluation report for information.

## 8 EXPLANATORY NOTE ON THE ROLE OF SPECIALIST ADVISERS (Music)

8.1 The Institution appoints Specialist Advisers for music performance assessment panels. Specialist Advisers are performers or composers who act as external specialists in the discipline. Each panel includes a Specialist Adviser, together with the Chair and a generalist examiner. Specialist Advisers help to ensure fairness in the application of standards and criteria in the assessment of the Professional Studies module.

## 9 TERMINATION OF APPOINTMENTS

9.1 You can apply to the Trinity Laban Registry if you need to interrupt your term of office for a defined period of time. Our Academic Standards and Quality Board can approve interim or temporary arrangements.

9.2 External Examiners who wish to terminate their contact will be required to give a minimum of one full term's notice. This is necessary due to the need to ensure continuous coverage by an External

Examiner for each programme and the fact that it takes at least one term for nominations to be recommended and accepted via the formal nomination process.

- 9.3 The Institution may terminate appointments on any of the following grounds:
- Discontinuation of the provision for which the External Examiner was appointed
  - Irretrievable breakdown in the relationship between the External Examiner and the Institution
  - Persistent unavailability/inability to perform duties (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
  - Other grounds, as applicable, as agreed by ASQB and recommended to Academic Board

## **10 PAYMENT AND ACCOMMODATION**

- 10.1 On appointment we will send you an appointment letter, an External examiner Details form and a Starter Checklist. It is important that you return this form so that you can be added to the payroll. You will also need to bring proof of your eligibility to work in the UK to your induction session in order to be paid.
- 10.2 External Examiners are paid through the Institution's payroll system by electronic transfer into their nominated bank accounts. Payment is credited on the last working day of the month. Payment may be credited on the last working day of the same or following month depending when a report or expenses claim arrives.
- 10.3 The Institution is required by HMRC to deduct the basic rate of income tax from all fee payments to External Examiners of taught programmes. External Examiner fees are excluded from National Insurance deductions. Travelling and subsistence expenses reimbursed are not subject to income tax. A payslip is sent by email in the month of payment detailing fee and expenses payments and deductions made, and a P60 at the end of the financial year
- 10.4 Where an overnight stay is required to view assessments on consecutive days, or to attend activities scheduled in the early morning or late evening, the Academic Administration Manager in the relevant faculty can make accommodation arrangements in advance with at least one week's notice. Alternatively, you may book your own accommodation and submit the receipt with your expenses claim. The Institution requires the original receipts for any travelling and subsistence expenses and claims for expenses must be made as soon as possible after being incurred and in accordance with the Staff Expenses Policy.
- 10.5 Payment is made on completion of the annual cycle of examining work and on receipt of the external examiner's report.

## 11 LIST OF CONTACTS

### Trinity Laban Registry

#### Academic Quality Unit

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