DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

EXTERNAL EXAMINER HANDBOOK
(last updated October 2023)

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Dublin City University is pleased to welcome you as a new external examiner.

This handbook has been produced to provide some background and guidance on your role as an external examiner at Dublin City University. We hope that you find it useful and that your experience at the University will be an enjoyable and mutually beneficial one.

This handbook should be read in conjunction with information sent by the relevant School for which you act as External examiner. A list of relevant University policies and hyperlinks are provided below:

- ➢ DCU's Privacy Policy
- ➢ DCU Marks and Standards
- ➢ DCU Programme Regulations
- ➢ Assessment and Feedback in Teaching and Learning at Dublin City University
- ➢ Review and Approval of results for taught programmes

All DCU's policies can be found at: https://www.dcu.ie/policies/policies.shtml.

Should you have any questions about your appointment as external examiner please contact the Academic Secretariat, Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs (Registrar):

E: academicsecretariat@dcu.ie
T: +353 (0) 1 700 5938.

Section 1: Introduction

DCU is Ireland's fastest growing university (>50% growth since 2011), has more than 17,000 students, and added three campuses (DCU St. Patrick's Campus, DCU All Hallows Campus, and DCU Alpha, the University's Innovation Campus) in the North Dublin region since 2015. October 2016 marked the completion of a process whereby St. Patrick's College Drumcondra, Mater Dei Institute of Education, and Church of Ireland College of Education were incorporated into DCU. This process enabled the establishment of Ireland's first Faculty of Education (DCU Institute of Education) and resulted in a major expansion of the University's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. DCU has also developed a significant international profile, with major academic and research partnerships across the globe. The University has a strong reputation for innovation and is ranked consistently as one of the world's top young universities (QS Top 100 under 50; Top 100 of Times Higher Education Young University Ranking).

DCU is made up of five Faculties
- DCU Business School
- DCU Institute of Education
- Faculty of Engineering and Computing
- Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
- Faculty of Science and Health

Each Faculty is made up of constituent Schools or Groups.

The appointment of external examiners process, which comes under the remit of the Vice President for Academic Affairs (Registrar), is an important part of the University's quality assurance system. External examiners play a vital role in the maintenance of academic standards for taught programmes and in ensuring fair assessment of students. The University ensures that there is consistency of standards across the University and adherence to all relevant University policies in its approval and appointment of external examiners.

Framework for Quality Assurance Higher Education in Ireland

IRISH GOVERNMENT

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

1) **UNIVERSITIES ACT 1997**
2) **QUALIFICATIONS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE (EDUCATION AND TRAINING) ACT 2012**
3) **QUALIFICATIONS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE (EDUCATION AND TRAINING) AMENDMENT ACT 2019**

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

Higher Education Authority (HEA)

European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
https://www.qqi.ie/

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2.1 Awards Offered by DCU on the NFQ and Award Credit Accumulation Structure

The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), established in 2003 and maintained by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), is a framework through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way. The many different types and sizes of qualifications included in the NFQ, are organised based on their level of knowledge, skill and competence.

The Irish Framework can be mapped to European and other frameworks, notably Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales. To learn more about the NFQ, please visit https://nfq.qqi.ie

DCU Award	NFQ Level	NFQ Award Types	Award Credit Accumulation Structure
Certificate	7	Minor Award Special Purpose Award Supplemental Award	Minimum of 30 ECTS credits Minimum of 30 ECTS credits Minimum of 30 ECTS credits
Diploma	7	Minor Award	Minimum of 60 ECTS credits
Certificate	8	Minor Award Special Purpose Award Supplemental Award	Minimum of 30 ECTS credits Minimum of 30 ECTS credits Minimum of 15 ECTS credits
Diploma	8	Minor Award Special Purpose Award Supplemental Award	Minimum of 60 ECTS credits Minimum of 60 ECTS credits Minimum of 60 ECTS credits
Higher Diploma	8	Major Award	Minimum of 60 ECTS credits
Honours Bachelor Degree	8	Major Award	180 to 240 ECTS credits
Professional Diploma	8	Major Award	Minimum of 60 ECTS credits
Professional Certificate	9	Special Purpose Award Supplemental Award	Minimum of 10 ECTS credits Minimum of 10 ECTS credits
Professional Diploma	9	Special Purpose Award Supplemental Award	Minimum of 30 ECTS credits Minimum of 30 ECTS credits
Graduate Certificate	9	Minor Award Special Purpose Award Supplemental Award	Minimum of 30 ECTS credits Minimum of 30 ECTS credits Minimum of 30 ECTS credits
Graduate Diploma	9	Major Award	Minimum of 60 ECTS credits
Professional Master's Degree	9	Major Award	Minimum of 90 credits
Master's Degree (taught)	9	Major Award	90 to 120 ECTS credits

| Master's Degree (research) | 9 | Major Award | 120 to 180 ECTS credits |
| Doctoral Degree | 10 | Major Award | 240 to 360 ECTS credits |

Section 3: Objectives of the External Examiner process

3.1 Objectives

The objectives of the external examiner process are to ensure:

3.1.1 that examinations leading to degree and other awards of Dublin City University are comparable in standard to similar examinations and awards obtained nationally and internationally

3.1.2 that the assessment methodology is fair and is applied equitably in the classification of candidates for such awards.

In order to achieve these objectives, external examiners need to be able to:

3.1.3 review the assessment processes for the award of degrees and other qualifications

3.1.4 advise on problem cases

3.1.5 comment and give advice on the assessment methodology in use

3.1.6 comment and make suggestions, as requested, on any other features of the programme in relation to their role as an external examiner (this includes engagement with the APR (Annual Programme Review) process and may include engagement with the PPR (Periodic Programme Review) process

3.1.7 participate, where feasible and appropriate, as requested by the University, in the (re)accreditation of programmes with a view to professional recognition.

Section 4: Terms of Appointment

4.1 Period of appointment

The period of appointment for external examiners is normally four years from 1 October in the year of engagement to 30 September in the year of expiry. An external examiner cannot be reappointed at the end of this period, however if a School wishes to reappoint an external examiner, then a period of four years from the initial service must elapse before a reappointment can be considered.

The reappointment can be for a maximum period of four years. Following such a period of reappointment, an external examiner cannot be considered for any further service, for taught programmes, to the University or to any linked college.

4.2 Retirement during period of appointment/change of circumstance during appointment

If an external examiner retires from employment during the period of appointment, he/she may continue to act as external examiner until the period has been completed.

4.3 Retired nominees

An individual who has already retired from employment may be nominated as external examiner provided the retirement has taken place in the recent past (normally within the previous four years) and the individual remains professionally active and continues to contribute to his/her discipline.

4.4 Maternity/parental leave/leave of absence during period of appointment

If external examiners are on maternity/parental leave/leave of absence from their own institution during the four-year engagement period, they will remain engaged as an external examiner and resume duties by agreement with their host school. Maternity/parental/leave of absence related leave will not be counted in the duration of service.

4.5 Illness during period of appointment

In the event of illness which would impact on duties as an external examiner, please contact the host School as soon as is feasible.

4.6 Resignation from and termination of appointment

External examiners who wish to resign before the end of their normal period of appointment should write to the Head of School or nominee, giving at least four months' notice to allow for a replacement to be identified.

External examiners must notify the School immediately of any changes in their circumstances that could lead to a conflict of interest that cannot be resolved satisfactorily and that may, therefore, require an engagement to be terminated. This is particularly important in cases where an external examiner changes his/her home institution since this may result in more than one external examiner in an area being based there.

An external examiner's appointment may be terminated by the University if, without reasonable cause, an examiner fails to engage with the duties as outlined at the outset of appointment or breaks the confidentiality with regard to personal information on students or otherwise acts counter to the University's Regulations.

4.7 Data Protection Obligations

By accepting the appointment, external examiners undertake to comply with DCU's Data Protection obligations (as provided to them on the Guru documents link page) in their capacity as DCU External Examiners.

Section 5: The role of the School/Faculty in briefing the External examiner

5.1 Initial confirmation of appointment

Following successful nomination, the Academic Secretariat team confirms the appointment of the nominated external examiners and provides them with access to DCU's digitised system (Guru) which facilitates and supports the work of its external examiners. (Please see paragraph 6.1 for additional information)

This guidance document provides specific institutional procedures however, Schools will discuss School-level procedures and expectations specifically.

5.2 Initial briefing by the School or Faculty for Programme External examiner

The School/Faculty will ensure that each programme external examiner is provided with:

- Information on the programme, including a handbook, if available, the programme specification and other regulatory material e.g., programme specific regulations
- Access to module specifications
- Access to continuous assessment work
- Assessment Principles and Procedures and local practices
- Annual Programme Reviews, to existing external examiners.

5.3 Initial briefing by the School or Faculty for Module External examiner

The School/Faculty will ensure that each module external examiner is provided with:

- Programme specific regulations and other regulatory material
- Access to module specifications
- Access to continuous assessment work
- Assessment Principles and Procedures and local practices

Section 6: Roles and Responsibilities of External examiners

6.1 System to facilitate the External examiner role

The Guru system is a 'one-stop shop' for the external examiner. It is dual authenticated for added security. Once logged into the system the external examiner will have access to:

- Examination papers, once available—notification that papers are available on Guru comes through notification from the School/Faculty through automated e-mail notifications
- Continuous assessment assignments set, if relevant
- The report pro-forma for completing the annual report
- DCU's Marks and Standards
- Access to provide financial information securely
- Progression and Award Board Schedules (posted by the Academic Secretariat)
- Relevant statistical reports will be available on the Guru system at the time of reviewing of results

Once appointed an external examiner will be provided with a login to the system. The system is quite intuitive and there are instructional videos for any functions that are needed. However, should assistance be required please contact **gurusupport@dcu.ie.**

6.2 Programme or module level

External examiners are normally appointed with responsibility for a specific programme or specific programmes or a range of modules.

6.3 Duties of programme External examiner

6.3.1 External examiners should deal primarily with the <u>final year(s) of the programme(s)</u> or study periods that contribute to the award and should approach the task with a view to ensuring that each candidate's performance is properly assessed, subject to the regulations and standards applicable generally for the award of a degree or other award of the University.

6.3.2 External examiners are very welcome to attend the University in person and are encouraged to attend, at a minimum, in the first year of their four-year term.

6.3.3 The external examiners should review the relevant module descriptors and the drafts of all examination question papers, marking schemes and worked solutions before the exam papers are finalised. External examiners have the right to make such suggestions regarding deletions, additions and amendments as appropriate. A response should be made by the School to suggestions made by the external examiner indicating whether or not the advice has resulted in the modification of the paper or continuous assessment.

6.3.4 External examiners should see a representative sample of material presented for assessment, e.g., projects or practical work, particularly for those years of a programme that contribute directly to the final degree award and classification. The sample, which should be drawn on a basis agreed between the internal and external examiner(s), should include sufficient material to enable the external examiner(s) to form a judgement on the reliability and consistency of marking and on the levels of classification including borderline cases and proposed cases of failure.

6.3.5   The External examiner should discuss with their appropriate School or Faculty contact whether they attend the **Progression and Award Board (PAB)** (either in person or on Zoom). In advance of the Progression and Award Board, the Programme Chair/Faculty contact will be in touch to discuss a pro-forma summary report (templates in appendices) of the outcomes of the internal **Examination Review Committee(s) (ERC)** and to seek the external examiner's views on the completed report and on their review of an indicative sample of assessments.

The basis for discussion at this stage of the process should be the report(s) generated by the Examination Review Committee(s) plus the review of an indicative sample of assessments by the external examiner(s).

- Discussions should include, as appropriate, Programme Chair, Teaching Convenor, Head of School, and some module coordinators; Faculties will need to determine (as needed in discussion with the external examiner(s)) the composition, recognising that a large group would be unwieldy.
- The outcomes should be:
  (i) feedback and observations on our processes – assessment, review of results, etc.,
  (ii) recommendations to the Progression and Award Board

- It is important to note that the role of the External Examiner is to review standards in general; it is not to make recommendations solely in respect of individual cases in the sample of assessments reviewed.
- A note of this discussion will be kept using the template provided (See relevant form in the appendix)

6.3.6   The external examiner should submit an annual report via Guru using the pro-forma online form.

6.3.7   Where appropriate, provide evidence to demonstrate that the requirements and standards of professional bodies are being met, including practice.

6.3.8   External examiners may be consulted about relevant matters in respect of examination appeals submitted to the Examination Appeals Board or be asked to participate in the review of an assessment, formally requested by a student through the Examination Appeals process.

6.3.9   Where oral examinations constitute a substantial part of the assessment procedures, then the procedures to be used for oral assessments should be determined following consultation between the internal and external examiners.

6.4   Assessment of postgraduate taught dissertations and the external examiner

6.4.1   The assessment of dissertations for postgraduate taught programmes is carried out by two internal examiners and reviewed by a Programme external examiner.

6.4.2   The role of the external examiner is to comment on the overall standards of the assessment of dissertations by reviewing a sample of at least two.

6.5   Review of examination papers

Examination papers are reviewed once per semester through the Guru system. Generally, the review of examination papers takes place in October and February of each academic year. External examiners are provided with the examination paper and solutions to those papers through

the secure Guru system and can provide comments and updates through it. External examiners should expect to have a dialogue with the module co-ordinator in response to the suggestions made.

External examiners are requested to review the appropriateness of the exam paper.

6.6 Review of continuous assessment assignments

Some Faculties/Schools request that the external examiner review continuous assessment assignments set at the beginning of each semester (September and January), however in the majority of cases, the external examiner will be asked to review student submitted continuous assessment at the time of the review of results. This information is made available on the Guru system.

6.7 Periodic Programme Review

Periodic Programme Review (PPR) at DCU involves, in an agreed cycle (every five years), an extended annual review, which enables Programme Teams to evaluate, comment upon and monitor the impact on their taught programmes of cumulative, incremental change over a longer review period than is involved with APR and to identify further opportunities for enhancement of the student learning experience.

The PPR procedure involves a person external to DCU, normally a programme external examiner, who is asked to comment on the Programme Team's summary report and accompanying documentation by means of an External Reviewer report.

6.8 The role of the External examiner at Progression and Award Boards (PABs)

External examiners who attend PABs will be briefed on relevant rules and programme regulations prior to the PAB. The PAB Chair may invite external examiner(s) in attendance to comment briefly following the deliberation of the results; to make recommendations on the distribution of results or trends within modules/programmes during the PAB. Detailed feedback from external examiners on modules or programme is reserved for the formal written report submitted by the external examiner to the University. External examiners act as an important element of the quality assurance process and in some instances only wish to comment on the execution of the process as per regulations and standards

6.9 Calendar of External Examiner Duties

External Examiner Schedule

Month	Activity
May – Oct	Provision of appointment letter, Academic Affairs
May-September/November	Access to External Examiner Guru System 1. Exam paper/Continuous Assessment Review 2. Important Regulatory links 3. Financial Information 4. Data Protection Statement 5. Template forms for consideration of results
August/September	Initial contact by School for newly appointed external examiner and provision of programme documentation
September/October	Review of first semester continuous assessment assignments (where applicable)
October	Review of Semester 1 examination papers, model answers, solutions
February	Review of Semester 2 examination papers, model answers, solutions
Mid May	Examination Review Committees (ERCs) and consultation with the external examiner
Late May	Progression and Award Boards
June/July	Submission of Annual Report and claim for expenses
August/September	Resit examination consultation
November (where applicable)	Taught postgraduate programme consultation on final results

6.10 Distinction between the role of Programme External Examiner and Module Examiner

DCU engages two types of external examiner: Programme external examiners (relates to a programme or group of cognate programmes) and Module external examiners.

The work of a programme external examiner relates to a taught undergraduate or postgraduate programme or group of cognate programmes and the examiner has specific responsibilities for the whole programme.

A programme external examiner may also be a subject external examiner. When there is only one programme examiner per programme, these roles are combined.

6.11   Formal reporting

External examiner feedback and reports are a key source of information in the monitoring of programme quality. Reports are submitted online through the Guru System via a pro-forma report form. Reports that relate to semester one and summer examinations only are submitted by a specified date in summer; all other reports are submitted following the autumn examinations.

Reports are reviewed in the initial instance by the Heads of School who may discuss them with the Programme Chairs, Module Co-ordinators, or Teaching Convenors. A formal response to each report should be sent via Guru by the Head of School or Programme Team to the external examiner within four weeks of receipt explaining the outcomes of any such considerations. Deans of Faculty also have access to reports.

External examiner reports are reviewed on an annual basis by the Vice-President Academic Affairs/Registrar and the Deputy Registrar and items of note are discussed with the relevant Deans of Faculty and Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning.

Section 7: Administration Information

The Academic Secretariat manages the administration relating to external examiners, managing the process from nomination through to payment of fee, upon submission of the annual report.

7.1   Progression and Award Board Schedules

The PAB schedules are made available on Guru by the Academic Secretariat in the tab 'Documents and Links' and are posted on Guru as soon as they become available (generally in March). All external examiners are sent a notification by e-mail. It would be expected that each School-nominated liaison would contact the external examiner at this time. If external examiners are travelling to attend the PAB, it is highly recommended, as soon as the PAB schedules are available and confirmed with the host School, that they would make travel arrangements and book accommodation. It would be usual to arrive a day before the Progression and Award Board to facilitate review of assessments/scripts and to stay the evening of the Progression and Award Board, should it suit. DCU will cover reasonable expenses for up to two nights. If there is a need to stay a third night, this should be notified in advance to academicsecretariat@dcu.ie.

7.2   Travel / accommodation

If attending DCU campus the Examiner normally arranges his/her own travel and accommodation. Reimbursement is processed on the Expense Claim Form on Guru. External examiners are asked to stay in or around the environs of DCU. The Faculty/School can provide assistance with hotel bookings.

7.3 Financial Information (for payment of fees and expenses)

7.3.1 Fees

The fee is paid upon receipt of the external examiner's report on Guru. It is paid through the University's salary function. Accordingly, each external examiner is requested to complete and submit the '**Financial Information Form**' on Guru. The form will ask for bank details. It also acts as a declaration to the Revenue Commissioners. Payment is made on the 15th day of each month and is subject to tax deduction. A payment certificate with details of deductions will be emailed a week or two following receipt of payment.

7.3.2 Expenses

Reimbursement of travel and related reasonable expenses will be made in accordance with current regulations and for a maximum of two nights (unless notified otherwise in advance).
Please note and review DCU subsistence rates effective from 1 September 2022.

Motor Travel Rates per kilometre (effective from 1 September 2022		
Distance	**Engine Capacity up to 1200cc**	**Engine Capacity 1201cc to 1500cc**	**Engine Capacity 1500cc and over**
	41.80 cent	43.40 cent	51.82 cent

Subsistence Rates (effective 14 December 2023)		
Overnight rate	**Day Rate 10 hours or more**	**Day Rate 5 hours but less than 10 hours**
€195.00	€42.99	17.92

The subsistence rate is to cover accommodation and meals if no receipts are available.

Vouched Accommodation (VA) Dublin only			
Vouched Accommodation ("VA") Rate	**Day Rate 10 hours or more**		**Meals**
VA Rate	Vouched cost of accommodation up to €195.00	Plus	€42.99

The 'Expenses Claim Form' can be printed from the Guru system (located in tab 'Documents and Links'). It can be scanned and sent by email to academicsecretariat@dcu.ie or it can be returned in the post along with receipts. Payment is made on the 15th day of each month. A payment certificate will be emailed a week or two following receipt of payment by bank transfer.

Appendix

Template for review with Programme External Examiners

Programme:	
Date:	
Membership of Examination Review Committee:	
1. Consideration of module results vis-à-vis previous years' module results for equivalent modules	
• Is the pattern of results for the modules on the programme broadly in line with previous years' patterns for the same/equivalent modules?	Yes/No + commentary
• If NO, please comment on differences	
2. Consideration of equivalence of module results across the cohorts of students	
• Is the pattern of results for all modules broadly in line with the overall patterns of results in other modules for the same cohorts of students?	Yes/No + commentary
• If NO, please comment on differences	
3. For the award years of programmes only	
• Is the distribution of award classifications consistent with expectations?	Yes/No + commentary
• Is this distribution of award classifications broadly in line with past patterns?	Yes/No + commentary
4. Are there any particularly unusual results – individual or module – that should be noted?	

Template for review with Subject/Disciplinary External Examiners

Subject/discipline:	
Date	
Programme(s):	
Subject representatives:	
1. Consideration of module results vis-à-vis previous years' module results for equivalent modules	
• Is the pattern of results for the modules broadly in line with previous years' patterns for the same/equivalent modules?	Yes/No + commentary
• If NO, please comment on differences	
2. Consideration of equivalence of modules across years of programme(s)	
• Is the pattern of results for these subject/disciplinary modules broadly in line with the overall patterns of results in other disciplinary modules for the same cohorts of students? • Is the pattern of results for these modules out of sync with expectations?	Yes/No + commentary
3. Are there any particularly unusual results – individual or module – that should be noted?	

Template for note of discussion with External Examiner(s)

External examiner(s) present:	
Others present:	
Relevant Programmes/PABs:	
Date:	
Feedback and observations on our processes:	
Recommendations to the Progression and Award Board:	