



UNIVERSITY  
*of*  
LIMERICK  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

# **UL External Examiner Policy (Taught Programmes)**

**Approved Academic Council March 6<sup>th</sup> 2013**

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## **Overview**

The Academic Council of the University of Limerick is charged under the University of Limerick Act with ensuring academic standards and the quality of all awards made by the University. In accordance with the University's quality assurance procedures, Academic Council appoints external examiners to all taught programmes to provide an independent view and report on student performance, programme outcomes and proposed awards. Academic Council examination boards will consider recommendations from faculty examination boards and submissions from both internal and external examiners before determining students' final awards.

## **External examiner role and function**

External examiners are appointed as independent and impartial advisers by Academic Council to:

- Consider whether or not the academic standard attained by a student is at the appropriate level for the grade or award recommended by the Examination Board for that student.
- Review assessment methods and student performance and advise Academic Council whether or not students' attainment of the programme's learning outcomes has been fairly assessed.
- Consider whether or not the programme of study meets the professional requirements of the discipline.
- Provide a formal annual report to the University on how the programme and student attainment compares with accepted standards in the particular discipline.

Academic Council requires that deans, heads of department and course directors ensure that external examiners are provided with information detailing the syllabus, learning outcomes and structures of all programmes and modules in sufficient time for the information provided to be fully assimilated by the external examiners and for them to take into account the implications of individual assessment instruments on the overall academic curricula concerned. The external examiner and the department are encouraged to communicate informally to discuss teaching, assessment, and grading and to seek agreement on the most appropriate ways in which the University can best achieve compliance with the highest internationally accepted academic standards.

Academic Council requires that external examiners see a representative sample of scripts and/or other material presented for assessment, such as projects, practical work, coursework, etc. The sample should be drawn on a basis agreed between the internal and external examiner(s) and should include sufficient material to enable the external examiner(s) to form a judgement on the appropriateness of the marking at all levels of classification, in borderline cases and in proposed Deferred and Failed results.

All external examiners will be expected to visit the University once in each academic year. This visit will normally take place at the time of the Academic Council Examination Board meeting or at the time when final results are determined and should conform to the arrangements made in this regard by the University. In cases where the University permits the presentation of candidates at a second examination board for the purpose of determining final results, a further visit of the relevant external examiner(s) is not required. However, full consultation shall take place between the external and internal examiner(s), a written record of which shall be available to the examination board.

External examiners should be advised and consulted on any proposed programme modifications. External Examiners and the University shall ensure that all communications in relation to Examinations are secure and confidential. External Examiners should note that all correspondence to, from, or within the University of Limerick may be the subject of a request under the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 & 2003 and/or the Data Protection Acts 1988 & 2003.

External examiners are required to submit a formal report, through an online reporting system, to the Office of the Vice President Academic & Registrar (VPA&R) each academic year for each programme with which they are involved. The report template (Appendix 1) will be emailed to the external examiner and should be returned 30 days after the examination board. The Head of Department should ensure that course boards consider the report and provide a formal response to the external examiner on issues raised by the external examiner in his/her report. In the event of an unresolved matter between the external and internal examiners, Academic Council shall adjudicate on the matter in question, and its decision shall be final.

### **Appointment of external examiners**

Faculties and departments are responsible for identifying potential external examiners, seeking their agreement to be nominated and processing the nomination forms in accordance with the procedures approved by Academic Council. The guiding principle to be followed when identifying potential nominees is that they must have the required academic experience and professional standing to review the curriculum content and assessment, student performance and appropriateness of the recommended award. Nominees for the position of external examiner should be independent of the University and its staff, and any potential conflict of interest, either professional or personal, should be declared.

- External examiners should have sufficient professional standing and experience of examining at the level for which he/she is to be appointed. While some external examiners are from industry, most tend to be academics. However, this is not a requirement. All external examiners must be well qualified in their field of expertise.
- External examiners can be appointed on a subject or programme basis. Where the programme incorporates minor awards, supplemental or special-purpose awards or exit awards, these should also be included on the nomination form. Where the programme includes distinct subject specialisms, it may be desirable to nominate additional external examiners. On the other hand, where the appointment is subject-based, there could be several examiners per programme to examine the various subject areas.
- In situations where it is not possible to identify a candidate with the required professional and academic experience or where particular expertise has been identified that will provide the department with an opportunity to enhance the quality of the programme, additional external examiners may be nominated. The role and responsibilities of the external examiner will be identified on the nomination form.
- External examiners are appointed for a maximum of four years, renewable at the end of each year. In exceptional circumstances, application may be made to the Office of the VPA&R by the head of department for the reappointment of an external examiner for a fifth year.
- External examiners should not hold any post in the University of Limerick and should not teach on any programme of study delivered in whole or part by the University. Departments are requested to identify any links between the department and its staff with the home institution of the proposed nominee for the post of external examiner.

External examiners may not be reappointed to any taught programme until a period of three years has elapsed since their departure. Where possible, the appointment of external examiners from the same institution as the previous appointee should be avoided where possible.

- Members of staff in Mary Immaculate College, NUI Galway and St Patrick's College, Thurles are not eligible for appointment as External Examiners. Former members of staff of the University of Limerick, Mary Immaculate College, National University of Ireland Galway and St Patrick's College Thurles are not eligible for appointment as external examiner until a period of three years has elapsed since their departure as employees of the respective institutions.

## **Annual fee and expenses**

The University will pay an annual fee to the external examiner on receipt of the annual report at the end of the reporting period.

Actual and reasonable subsistence expenses that are incurred solely in the performance of one's duties as an external examiner will be allowed. Such expenses must be supported by receipts when claiming reimbursement.

Travel should be by public transport where possible. Where convenient public transport is unavailable, expenses incurred for private car use will be paid at the prevailing University rate.

Air fares, where applicable, will be reimbursed at economy class rate. When the cost of travel exceeds €1,000, prior approval must be sought from the Office of the VPA&R.

## **Administration**

- External examiner appointments are approved by Academic Council, and noted at the next Governing Authority meeting.
- Following Academic Council approval, letters of invitation from the VPA&R are sent to each prospective external examiner by the External Examiners administrator. The letter is copied to the Dean of Faculty, Head of Department and Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs.
- In cases where external examiners are appointed for more than one year, letters of renewal are sent to them from the VPA&R at the beginning of each subsequent academic year of their term of appointment.
- External examiners are sent a completion-of-term letter from the VPA&R on conclusion of their term of appointment.
- The department books external examiners' accommodation for their visits to UL. The examiners usually make their own travel arrangements. All expense claims are submitted directly to the VPA&R's office, not to the department. Expense claim forms are available online or by emailing [Externalexaminers@ul.ie](mailto:Externalexaminers@ul.ie).
- Claim forms must be returned with all original receipts and signed before they can be processed. Please forward to: Vice President Academic & Registrar's Office, Plassey House, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland.

**Appendix 1: External examination report (template format updated Oct 2014)**

## **2014 - External Examiner's Report**

Report for Academic Year 2014/15

This Report Form is intended for use by the following:

Email address:

Submitted:

Full Name

Prog/Modules

### **Section A: Examiner/Programme/Module Details**

Review the particular Programme(s), Modules and/or subject areas upon which you have been asked to comment?

### **Section B: External Examiner Feedback**

Q1 Comment on whether the recommended grades and/or awards reflect the academic standard attained by the students.

Q2 Comment on the suitability of the assessment methods in providing feedback, assessing student attainment and achievement of the learning outcomes of the modules and programme.

Q3 Comment on any suggested modifications to the Programme or Module Learning Outcomes?

Q4. Additional Comments concerning the taught Programme(s) and/or Modules which you were asked to evaluate.

Q5. Did you formally meet any students during your site visit and, if so, is there anything arising from those meetings that you would like to comment on?

(This question is optional but your comments would be very welcome).

Please send the completed form and your claim form to: