

# Subject Extern Examination



## Policy owner

Assessment, UCD Registry

## Approval date and body

28 November 2017, Academic Council

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## 1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy document is to provide clear guidance on the appointment, role and responsibilities of Subject Extern Examiners<sup>1</sup> at University College Dublin (UCD, hereafter, 'the University'<sup>2</sup>).

The University is responsible for the academic standards of awards made in its name, and for ensuring that the quality of learning experiences is adequate and appropriate to enable students to achieve these standards. In order to discharge these responsibilities, the University has a range of systems and procedures for assuring and enhancing the academic standards of awards and the quality of its educational provision. Extern Examination is one of these.

## 2 Scope

This policy applies to the external examination of the University's taught provision. External examination arrangements for Graduate Research Programmes are described in separate regulatory and guidance documentation.<sup>3</sup>

## 3 Definitions

**3.1** This document is to be read in conjunction with *University Academic Regulations*.

**3.2 Subject Extern Examiners.** Subject Extern Examiners provide an important consultative and advisory function in supporting the development of the subjects that contribute to UCD programmes as well as the enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment practices. While Subject Extern Examiners do not grade students' work, the title 'Extern Examiner' is retained here due to common international usage of this title for the role defined herein.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Extern Examiner' is used throughout the document, reflecting the language used by the National University of Ireland and referenced in University *Statute 6*, Chapter 7, Section 2, wherein distinction is made between Intern and Extern examiners available at <http://www.ucd.ie/governance/documentlibrary/>

<sup>2</sup> UCD is a constituent university of the National University of Ireland (NUI).

<sup>3</sup> Information on external examination arrangements for research programmes is described in the *Theses in Graduate Research Programmes Policy* available at <http://www.ucd.ie/governance/documentlibrary/> and the *Academic Regulations* available at <http://www.ucd.ie/governance/documentlibrary/>

Subject Extern Examiners play a vital role in assisting the University in fulfilling its obligations to assure the academic standards and integrity of its awards and form part of the University's broader system of quality assurance and enhancement.

Subject Extern Examiners are appointed to subjects at undergraduate or graduate level, as appropriate. Each subject on the University's subject register shall have an extern examiner. Some subjects may require more than one Subject Examiner while some Subject Extern Examiners may be given responsibility for more than one subject.<sup>4</sup>

- 3.3 Subject.** A Subject is that which appears on the register of approved subjects, as maintained and reviewed by Academic Council.<sup>5</sup>
- 3.4 Module.** A module is as defined in *University Academic Regulations*.
- 3.5 Head of School.** A Head of School is as defined in *University Statutes*.
- 3.6 Head of Subject.** A Head of Subject supports the Head of School in assuring that the highest standards are met for the design, delivery, assessment and quality of modules and programmes in their subject.<sup>6</sup>
- 3.7 Governing Boards.** Governing Boards are as defined in *University Academic Regulations*.

## 4 Principles

The key principles that underpin the role of the Subject Extern Examiner are:

### 4.1 Academic Expertise

The Subject Extern Examiner should have the necessary academic expertise and international standing to evaluate the subject to which they are appointed and its constituent modules at all applicable levels.

### 4.2 Quality

The fundamental role of the Subject Extern Examiner is to assure academic standards and the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and feedback. The Subject Extern Examiner confirms that the academic standards are comparable to those achieved in equivalent universities internationally. Due regard should be given for professional requirements where necessary.

### 4.3 Equity

The Subject Extern Examiner helps to ensure that the assessment practices at the University are fair, valid and rigorous.

### 4.4 Enhancement

Subject Extern Examiners provide feedback on the quality of subjects, the overall student experience, and on how teaching, learning, assessment and feedback may be enhanced.

### 4.5 Objectivity

Subject Extern Examiners provide objective feedback from a position of independence from the University's activities. As such, Subject Extern Examiners will not directly participate in the grading of students' work.

### 4.6 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Subject Extern Examiners should support the University's strategic commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. UCD provides a positive working, research and learning environment

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<sup>4</sup> Conditions for appointment of multiple externs for a subject are described in the associated guidelines.

<sup>5</sup> UCD's [Subject and Section Register](http://www.ucd.ie/governance/resources/policypage-headsofsectionsandsubjects/) and the definition of a subject can be found at <http://www.ucd.ie/governance/resources/policypage-headsofsectionsandsubjects/>.

<sup>6</sup> UCD's policy for *Head of Subject Role Description* is available at <http://www.ucd.ie/governance/resources/policypageheadsofsectionsandsubjects/>.

which is open to all regardless of age, disability, gender, marriage or civil partnership, race (including ethnic or national origin, nationality or colour), religion or belief, sexual orientation, family status, membership of the travelling community, or socio-economic status. Subject Extern Examiners should, where possible, ensure that this principle is upheld by the assessment processes within their purview.

## **5 The Appointment Procedure**

**5.1** The Academic Council Committee on Examinations (ACCE) is responsible for the approval of all Subject Extern Examiner nominations for the University. The Head of School, in consultation with the Head of Subject<sup>7</sup>, nominates Subject Extern Examiners to the ACCE subject to the following considerations:

- (a) All nominations should specify the subject(s) to which the Subject Extern Examiner is to be appointed.
- (b) Upon approval, the Head of School, Head of Subject and the Subject Extern Examiner will be notified by ACCE.
- (c) The University will forward the approved nominations to the National University of Ireland (NUI) for approval.

## **6 Criteria for the Appointment of Subject Extern Examiners**

**6.1** The appointment of Subject Extern Examiners will be based on the following criteria:

- (a) They should have the appropriate academic expertise, experience and, where necessary professional qualifications relating to the subjects to which they are appointed.
- (b) They should have up-to-date knowledge of international best practice in the design, development and assessment of relevant curricula.
- (c) They should be adequately experienced to adjudicate on comparability of academic standards with peer Universities.
- (d) They may not be a staff member or be involved in teaching or assessment in any capacity at the University. Care should be taken to ensure that no other possible conflict of interest may arise. Any potential conflicts of interest should be made known to the ACCE upon nomination or as may arise during the term of appointment.
- (e) They should not be appointed from the same institution as their predecessor. Exceptions may, on occasion, be permitted in cases where no other option exists.
- (f) Former members of UCD staff may not be appointed as Subject Extern Examiners for a period of at least five years after they have left the University. Once a Subject Extern Examiner has completed their duties, a three-year time interval is required before a Subject Extern Examiner can be reappointed as an Extern Examiner in the University in any capacity.

## **7 Term of Appointment**

- (a) Subject Extern Examiners may be appointed for a term of up to four years.
- (b) In very exceptional circumstances, an extension to the appointment of one year may be sought.
- (c) Should a Subject Extern Examiner not be able to fulfil their term of appointment, formal notification from the Head of School should be given to ACCE, giving at least three months' notice where possible.

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<sup>7</sup>This may include consultation with other relevant staff in the School such as Programme Directors or Module Co-ordinators.

- (d) The University reserves the right to terminate the appointment if the Subject Extern Examiner fails to fulfil their responsibilities or if serious conflicts of interest arise.

## **8 Role and Responsibilities of the Subject Extern Examiner**

- 8.1** The Subject Extern Examiner shall visit the University at least once per year during the period of appointment. The duties and responsibilities of the Subject Extern Examiner shall include the following:
- (a) Review curricula and learning outcomes of modules associated with a subject.
  - (b) Review the content of modules to ensure appropriateness and enhance quality.
  - (c) Review module terminal examination papers in advance of the examination.
  - (d) Review assessment strategies and feedback practices.
  - (e) Meet with a representative group of students to assess the student experience and student quality at the University.
  - (f) Engage in discussions with Schools or key committees within Schools. It is expected that a formal period for such discussions would be arranged by the School during the Subject Extern Examiner's visit.
  - (g) Audit of a sample of graded assessments to confirm standards.
  - (h) Review grade distributions for modules.
  - (i) Recommend enhancements to teaching, learning, assessment and feedback practices.
  - (j) Advise on enhancements to module or subject development with reference to applicable Programme Outcomes.
- 8.2** Additionally, the Subject Extern Examiner may:
- (a) Exceptionally, advise on the potential re-scaling or adjustment of grades for a student or cohort of students.
  - (b) Raise any appropriate equality, diversity and inclusion issues (covering disability, race and gender etc.) relevant to the assessment of students with the School.
- 8.3** The Subject Extern Examiner shall prepare a report at regular intervals (see Section 11) for the Registrar.

## **9 Role and Responsibilities of the School, Head of School and Head of Subject**

- 9.1** The Head of School shall:
- (a) Identify, in consultation with the Head of Subject and wider academic community an Extern Examiner for the relevant subject. This must be done in alignment with the UCD Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
  - (b) Submit nominations for Subject Extern Examiners for approval as set out in this policy and in the manner required by ACCE.
  - (c) In consultation with the School, and with the agreement of the Subject Extern Examiner, determine the timeline and specific tasks of the External Examiner as outlined in Section 8.
  - (d) Ensure that assessments, including examination papers, have been properly reviewed before being submitted to Subject Extern Examiners for consideration.
  - (e) Provide the Subject Extern Examiner with full information on the subject(s) and associated modules under examination, including any relevant materials such as Module Descriptors and the Programme Outcomes of Programmes in which subjects or modules are involved.
  - (f) Agree with the Subject Extern Examiner which assessment components are to be reviewed in advance of the completion of the assessment, and which may be reviewed in retrospect.
  - (g) Provide statistical reports of module grading outcomes.

- (h) Ensure that a report is completed and submitted by the Subject Extern Examiner within the required timeframe.
- (i) The Head of Subject shall, as soon as practicable following receipt of the Subject Extern Examiner's report, provide a formal response to the Registrar on that Report. The response shall address how any issues raised by the Subject Extern Examiner shall be dealt with, or why, having reflected on the issues raised, a decision is made not to take any further action.

## 10 Role and Responsibilities of the University

- 10.1 Acting on the authority of Academic Council, ACCE shall review and approve nominations for Subject Extern Examiners. Approved nominations shall be forwarded to the NUI Senate for final approval.
- 10.2 It is the responsibility of the Registrar to:
  - (a) Notify Subject Extern Examiners of their appointment on behalf of the NUI.
  - (b) Ensure that Subject Extern Examiners receive adequate information in relation to the University's *Academic Regulations* and relevant policies.
  - (c) Provide induction guidelines for Subject Extern Examiners.
- 10.3 The Registrar shall circulate Subject Extern Examiners' reports to the relevant Head of School, Head of Subject and Governing Boards.
- 10.4 The University shall supply copies of the Subject Extern Examiners' Reports to the NUI.
- 10.5 The University shall remunerate Subject Extern Examiners according to approved rates and make payment upon submission of their report.
- 10.6 The Registrar shall report annually to Academic Council on issues raised in Subject Extern Examiners' reports and highlight examples of good practice across the University.
- 10.7 ACCE shall report annually to Academic Council on gender balance in Subject Extern Examiner appointments and suggest actions with a view to achieving and maintaining the gender balance target in line with the *UCD Gender Equality Action Plan*.<sup>8</sup>

## 11 The Subject Extern Examiner's Report

- 11.1 Subject Extern Examiner Reports provide valuable and independent feedback to the University about its academic standards and the rigour of the assessment process.
- 11.2 Subject Extern Examiners shall submit a completed Annual Report, in the form required by the University, for each year of their term of appointment. The report should normally be submitted within six weeks of the end of the academic year.
- 11.3 Subject Extern Examiners shall complete all relevant sections of the Subject Extern Examiner's Report.
- 11.4 Subject Extern Examiners are asked to report specifically on the principles outlined in Section 4, drawing attention in particular to good practice, areas requiring attention and opportunities to make enhancements.
- 11.5 An Interim Report may be submitted should the Subject Extern Examiner identify any issues that require immediate action to facilitate a review before the next academic session.
- 11.6 The Subject Extern Examiner Report will be used for review:
  - (a) At module and subject level by Schools.
  - (b) At programme level by Governing Boards.
  - (c) At University level by the Registrar.
- 11.7 In addition to the annual report, Subject Extern Examiners may, in exceptional circumstances, submit a confidential report at any time to the Registrar highlighting matters of concern.

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<sup>8</sup>The *UCD Gender Equality Action Plan* is available at <http://www.ucd.ie/equality/support/athenaswan/>

**11.8** At the end of their term of appointment, Subject Extern Examiners shall complete a final report in addition to their annual report. This should provide the University with a synopsis of the Subject Extern Examiner's experiences during their term of appointment. In particular, the final report should focus on:

- (a) The practicalities of their experience.
- (b) Whether the roles and responsibilities of a Subject Extern Examiner, as defined by the University, were adequate.
- (c) Analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the subject and its constituent modules.
- (d) Trends observed over their term.
- (e) Suggested developments and improvements.
- (f) Final comment on overall quality of the subject and its constituent modules.

## 12 Related documents

[Guidelines for Subject Extern Examiners](#)

[Guidelines for Subject Extern Examiners - UCD Staff](#)

[Subject Extern Examiner Claim Form](#)

## 13 Version history

| Consultation and Approval                         |                                |         |                        |  |
|---|--------------------------------|---------|------------------------|--|
| Committee/Group                                   | Meeting Date                   | Version | Action                 | Decision   |
| Academic Council                                  | 4 March 2010                   | V1.10   |                        | Approved:<br>Effective from September 2010               |
| Policy Working Group                              | 16 February 2017               | V2.0    | For discussion         | Revisions required based on Group discussion             |
| Academic Council Committee on Examinations (ACCE) | 2 March 2017                   | V2.1    | For discussion         | Revisions required based on ACCE discussion              |
| Policy Working Group                              | 14 March 2017                  | V2.2    | For discussion         | Revisions required based on Group discussion             |
| Academic Council Committee on Examinations (ACCE) | 30 March 2017                  | V2.3    | For discussion         |  |
| Academic Council Executive Committee (ACEC)       | 26 April 2017                  |         | Oral report from Chair | Approved for consultation                                |
| Academic Council Committee on Examinations (ACCE) | 28 April 2017                  | V2.3    | For discussion         | Approved pending Equality Impact Assessment              |
| Equality Impact Assessment Policy Sub-Group       | 2 June 2017                    | V2.3    | For discussion         | Revisions required based on Group discussion             |
| Equality Impact Assessment Policy Sub-Group       | 3 July 2017                    | V2.4    | EIA sign-off           | For submission to ACCE following agreed revisions        |
| Academic Council Committee on Examinations (ACCE) | 31 July 2017                   | V2.4.1  | For consultation       | Final consultation with ACCE prior to wider consultation |
|   | 31 August 2017                 | V2.4.2  | Revisions post ACCE    |  |
| Academic Council Committee on Examinations (ACCE) | 21 September 2017              | V2.4.2  | For consultation       | Approved for wider consultation                          |
| University Programmes Board                       | 5 <sup>th</sup> October 2017   | V2.4.2  | For review and comment | Revisions required based on feedback                     |
| Academic Council                                  | 28 <sup>th</sup> November 2017 | V2.4.3  | For approval           | Approved   |