



## **Code of Academic Policy No 7**

### External Examining in GMIT

#### Policy and Procedures

**As Approved by the Academic Council on 7 May 2010  
and by the Governing Body on 27 May 2010**

# **EXTERNAL EXAMINING IN GMT**

## **POLICY and PROCEDURES**

### **Introduction**

External Examiners assist Higher Education Institutions to monitor the standards of their awards.

External Examiners act as independent and impartial advisors providing Institutions with informed comment on the standards set and student achievement in relation to those standards.

External Examining is an integral and important part of Institutional Quality Assurance.

The purpose of External Examining is

- a) To verify that standards are appropriate for the award or award elements which the External Examiner has been appointed to examine,
- b) To assist the Institute in the comparison of academic standards across Higher Education awards and award elements, and
- c) To ensure that their assessment processes are fair and are fairly operated and are in line with the Institute's regulations.

### **SECTION A: POLICY STATEMENTS**

The following policy statements are in line with guidelines issued by HETAC for external examining (2009):

1. The Institute is responsible for the assessment of learners and the maintenance of programme standards that accord with the relevant award standards.
2. The following principles underpin this external examining policy:
  - 2.1 The integration of the external examining policy with other relevant Institutional policies, such as Marks & Standards, and the Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy
  - 2.2 An external examiner is an independent expert within the programme's fields of learning, whose accomplishments attest to his/her likelihood of having the authority necessary to fulfil the responsibilities of the role. The sections to be discharged by an individual or by a team of external examiners are to be decided by the Head of Department. The appointment of Programme

externals should consider the range of expertise and discipline diversity within the Department.

- 2.3 The competencies to be demonstrated prior to the nomination of the external examiner include the necessity of the external examiner to have an award at least equivalent to the level of the award that they have responsibility for external examining.
- 2.4 The Head of Schools, in consultation with Programme Boards, will nominate the external examiners to the Registrar for ratification, having regard to the requirements of the programme, and discipline area, the need for independence, and avoidance of conflicts of interest. These recommendations are required to have regard to the following:
  - a) the reviews of relevant external bodies
  - b) the Business Advisory Committee for each School / Centre, and
  - c) any panel devised at national level by the Council of Registrars.
- 2.5 The Assessment Sub-Committee of the Academic Council will review the nominations for external examiners and will make recommendations for formal appointments to the Academic Council. External Examiners have to be approved by the Academic Council.
- 2.6 The role and responsibilities of the external examiner is to assure standards both in the relevant modules and in the overall award, subject to the requirements of the Institute's regulations.
- 2.7 The extent of the external examiner's authority should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders, and should include *inter-alia*:
  - That they are entitled to meet students on programmes or parts of programmes they are examining;
  - That they may request any evidence they need to judge the quality and appropriateness of assessment and to assure themselves that assessments are testing the intended student-learning outcomes of the programme;
  - That they will be given adequate opportunity to hold meetings with internal examiners.
- 2.8 On appointment the external examiner will receive a contract for a period equal to the duration of the programme, up to a maximum of two years. They can be reappointed twice. No External Examiner can exceed six years maximum in GMIT.
- 2.9 The Head of Department will ensure that appropriate support is made available for the external examiners, to include:
  - A representative sample of the assessment material;
  - Staff availability;

- Appropriate documentation in relation to the programmes and the Institute.
  - Required documents (as outlined in Section B, sub-section 10).
- 2.10 The external examiner will prepare and submit an end of year report by the agreed date to the Head of School and the Registrar. A template for the External Examiners end of report is included in Appendix No.1. The Institute will issue payment for the external examining service only on receipt of this report from the external examiner.
- 2.11 External examiners who fail to submit a report or to engage with the external examining process will have their contracts terminated.
3. The Institute will publish the name and primary occupation of the external examiners for each of its Higher Education & Training Programmes. This will be available on the intranet for the current year and will also be published in the Annual Report.
4. The external examining process is a quality assurance mechanism that purports public confidence in academic qualifications. External examining is concerned with programme-learning outcomes, because ultimately public confidence rest on its belief graduates have been objectively judged to reach the standard that is certified by their award.
5. The main functions of the external examiner (or external examiner team) are:
- a) To be familiar with the intended programme learning outcomes;
  - b) To probe the actual attainment of learners (actual programme learning outcomes) using information agreed with and supplied by the Institute;
  - c) To review the programme-assessment strategy and procedures, and proceeding from there to probe subsidiary-assessment strategies;
  - d) To review key-assessment tasks prior to their execution, especially in modules that are assessed in part or in full by continuous assessment;
  - e) To report findings and recommendations to the Institute.
6. The external examiner may be requested to take a wider purview; he/she may, as example, provide advice and guidance to the programme team.
7. The Institute requires each external examiner to take part in an Induction/Training Workshop shortly after his/her appointment. This will include:
- a) Outline the Institute's policy on external examining, including the reporting requirements;
  - b) Outline of the mission of the Institute and place it in context with the Irish Higher Education system;
  - c) Where the programme is a professional one outline the relevant professional infrastructure (regulation, associations, etc.), the

professional educational requirements, and how the programme prepares learners for entry into the profession;

- d) Need for comparison of the programme standards with similar programmes with which they are already familiar;
  - e) Outline the overall structure of the programme;
  - f) the programme-assessment strategy;
  - g) how the programme standard relates to the award standard, and how the award standard relates to the National Framework of Qualifications;
  - h) the programme-assessment procedures and explain the grading system and how awards are classified;
  - i) the principles of learning outcomes, criterion referenced assessment.
8. An external examiner will be facilitated in providing both verbal and written, informal and formal, feedback. Formal feedback in the format of a written report will constitute the official record.
9. The external examiner will issue a separate written report for each programme that he/she is involved with. The report will include the following:
- a. The evidence considered – including meetings and interviews with learners and academic staff and others;
  - b. The appropriateness of the intended programme-learning outcomes in light of the external examiner's experience and having regard to the award standard and the National Framework of Qualifications;
  - c. The external examiner's perception of the actual attainment of learners;
  - d. The external examiner's opinion of the quality of the programme (the teaching and learning environment) and the processes as distinct from the intended learning outcome addressed under 'b', citing strengths and areas for improvement;
  - e. The quality of the assessment instruments (strategy, examination papers, continuous assessments guidelines, dissertations guidelines, etc.) and scoring rubrics/schemes, etc.
  - f. The fairness, consistency and fitness for purpose (valid, reliable, authentic, robust) of assessment procedures;
  - g. The reliability of the Institute's benchmarking of its assessment procedures;
  - h. The appropriate national and international comparisons;
  - i. Any substantial concerns (even if they have already been communicated verbally) so that these may be officially addressed;

- j. Changes from previous years if not reporting for the first time.
- 10. External examiner reports will be considered at all appropriate organisational levels, in particular at Programme Board level. Actions arising from the report will be recorded, communicated to learners, and other staff as appropriate.
- 11. The external examiner reports will be *securely retained* by the Institute and will contribute to the quality assurance procedure and institutional research activities.
- 12. The external examiner will be provided with a timely, considered response to his/her comments and recommendations, including information on any actions taken by the Institute, by the Head of School / Centre by the 31 December of each year.

## **SECTION B: SPECIFIC DUTIES OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER**

- 1) Recommend approval or make such recommendations for amending examination papers as deemed appropriate, in order to ensure the consistency and fairness of the assessment and maintain academic standards.

- 2) Visit the Institute once in each academic year. This visit will normally take place at the time of determination of final results in summer. All marks in the first semester of each year are provisional until agreed in summer. Marks can also be agreed by correspondence, following the procedures applicable in the school/department.
- 3) Sign the official record of marks, be it the broadsheet or a spreadsheet, as provided by the internal examiner or Head of Department.
- 4) Prepare an end of year report for the Institute, addressing the maintenance of academic standards, classification of awards and the comparability of standards with other relevant institutions.
- 5) Prior to an assessment of a module taking place:
  - Review the drafts of all examination papers, worked solutions where appropriate and marking schemes;
  - Review the CA guidelines (whether for part or for 100% of the module). Examples of CA guidelines may include project brief, lab requirements, marking criteria, etc.;
  - Review the continuous assessment strategy and in particular the repeat continuous assessment strategy;
  - Ensure that the assessments adequately reflect the learning outcomes of the programme;
  - Agree with the internal examiner on the final form of the examination papers and the continuous assessment brief and requirements.
- 6) After an assessment takes place (namely, winter, summer and autumn):
  - Agree with the internal examiner the criteria for the selection of the sample scripts;
  - Agree with the respective internal examiners, the final marks to be awarded to a student for the module;
  - Review borderline cases;
  - If requested, to carry out a review of marks awarded in any assessment in accordance with the GMIT review procedures, (see student code of practice on rechecks, reviews and appeals);
  - Contribute to an annual review of assessment procedures to affect continuous improvement in the process;
  - Share experience of good practice in Learning and Teaching;
  - Recommended moderation of all results where the overall average variance in marks in the reviewed sample exceeds +/- 5%;
  - Recommend remarking of scripts where there is evidence the marking scheme was not adhered to.
- 7) Special arrangements in relation to oral examinations. Where oral or performance

based examinations constitute a substantial part of the assessment procedure, the internal examiner and external examiner shall together examine the candidates concerned. The internal examiner and the external examiner may agree that, where special circumstances so require, the assessment can be conducted in the absence of the external examiner, provided a third person is in attendance as a witness.

- 8) Special arrangements in relation to Art & Design and Film & Television. External examiners shall visit the Institute to:
- a. Review the exhibition of candidates work and to interview a selection of candidates;
  - b. Agree the final marks or grades for each candidate, and
  - c. Attend appropriate meetings of the Progression and Awards Board as required.
- 9) When visiting the Institute following the summer suite of examinations, the external examiner will be required to attend the Progression & Awards Boards. While attendance is not required at the Autumn Progression & Awards Boards by the external examiner, it is envisaged that the internal examiner will communicate the distribution of results following the repeat examinations to the external examiner for ratification. Should instances arise where the Institute requests an external examiner to make more than one visit, this will not attract an additional appointment fee.
- 10) Information and documentation available to the external examiner will include inter alia:
- Strategic Plan of the Institute;
  - The Code of Practice No. 3;
  - The External Examining Policy & Procedures;
  - The programme documentation that they are appointed to external examine to include the programme assessment strategy;
  - The programme handbook;
  - Recent external examiner reports to newly-appointed external examiners.

The above information will be available on the GMIT website <http://www.gmit.ie/policies/>, or else will be made available through the appropriate responsible area.

## **Section C: External Examiners for Research Postgraduate Students**

- 1) The Head of School is responsible for co-ordinating the nomination of persons to act as External Examiners for postgraduate awards. A special postgraduate nomination form must be completed and signed by the Head of School, at least three months before planned submission of the thesis, and sent to the Registrar.
- 2) The Head of School may seek recommendations for nominations from the relevant postgraduate supervisors and Head of Department, and may consult the person proposed for nomination to seek his/her consent to be nominated and determine his/her availability to act as External Examiner. Such consultation shall be without commitment to appointment as External Examiner. This nomination must comply with the criteria specified for appointment in the GMIT code of practice for postgraduate students. An Internal Examiner is also appointed for all postgraduate research awards.
- 3) The Head of School may recommend persons nominated for appointment as External Examiners for postgraduate awards to the Academic Council of the Institute at any time.
- 4) Examiners must be experienced in research in the general area of the student's submission and, where practicable, have experience as a specialist in the topic(s) to be examined and have qualifications at least as high as the level of award sought. The External Examiner shall normally have experience of examining research degree students. In an examination for Ph.D., the External Examiner shall normally have experience of Ph.D. examining.
- 5) An External Examiner shall be independent of the Institute and shall not have acted previously as the student's supervisor or adviser. An External Examiner shall not normally be either a supervisor of another student of the Institute or an External Examiner on a taught course in the same department at the Institute.
- 6) The examiner shall read and examine the submission and present an independent written report on it to the Registrar, before any oral or alternative form of examination is held. In completing the report, the examiner must consider whether the submission satisfies the requirements of the award and where possible make an appropriate recommendation subject to the outcome of the oral examination, which is required for all Ph.D. awards and may be requested for some master degree awards
- 7) Internal and External Examiners shall, where they are in agreement, present a joint report and recommendation relating to the award to the Institute. The reports and joint recommendation of the examiners must together provide sufficiently detailed comments on the scope and quality of the work to enable the Registrar to satisfy himself/herself that the criteria for the award have been met. Copies of the reports shall be sent to the Head of School.

- 8) Where the examiners are not in agreement, separate reports and recommendations shall be submitted in writing to the Institute. They shall be presented to the Board of Examiners.

External Examiner's Report

GALWAY-MAYO INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA NA GAILLIMHE-MAIGH EO

External Examiner's Report

This report should be based on the programme examined during the year and sent to the Registrar, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology Galway, before the 30th June of the year of the assessment.

External Examiner: \_\_\_\_\_

Address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Programme / Module Titles: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date of Visit: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Documentation

1.1 Did you receive appropriate programme documentation such as approved programme schedules/syllabuses?

Yes  No

Examination Papers and Assessments

2.1 Did you receive draft examination papers, marking schemes and worked solutions, where appropriate, in reasonable time prior to the examinations?

Yes  No

2.2 Did you approve the examination papers which were presented to the students?

Yes  No

2.3 To what extent did the examination papers/assessment material cover the programmes (s) as approved?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2.4 Did you receive a representative sample of examination scripts and/or other material presented for assessment?

Yes  No

2.5 Have the learning outcomes specified for this level of award been achieved:

Yes  No

2.6 Were the assessment methods used appropriate?

Yes  No

2.7 a) Did you recommend moderation of results for any module?

Yes  No

b) Number of modules where moderation of results was recommended?

**3. Please comment succinctly on your findings, conclusions and recommendations in relation to the following:**

**3.1** Were you consulted re the sampling criteria to be used for the selection of scripts?

Yes  No

**3.2** What evidence did you consider scripts, continuous assessments, meetings and staff, students, others)?

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**3.3** The appropriateness of the intended programme learning outcomes having regard to the national Framework of Qualifications.

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**3.4** Your perception of the actual attainment of students.

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**3.5** Your opinion on the quality of the programme (the teaching and learning environment and processes as distinct from the intended programme learning outcomes)

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**3.6** The quality of the assessment instruments used and scoring rubrics / schemes.

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**3.7** The fairness, consistency and fitness for purpose (valid, reliable, authentic, robust) of assessment procedures.

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**3.8** The reliability of the provider's benchmarking of its assessment procedures.

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**3.9** Appropriate national and international comparisons.

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**3.10** Are there any matters relating to the programme and results that you would like to bring to the attention of GMIT?

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**3.11** Changes from previous years if not reporting for the first time.

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