## APPENDIX 3.5

**Guidelines for the effective practice of External Examining.**

1. **Preamble**

This Section outlines the expectations of and from external examiners in relation to the examination quality assurance procedures of IT Sligo.

These guidelines encompass the external examining of all full programmes and modules.

1. **Responsibilities of Institute of Technology Sligo**
   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 Institute’s external examining policy in regard to selection, and conditions of external examiners includes:
   3. a statement of the competencies to be demonstrated prior to nomination of the extern examiner recognising that the required competencies can be met by a team of external examiners where appropriate (for example, in relation to examining theory and practice);
   4. nomination of external examiners having regard to the need for independence, gender balance, and the avoidance of conflicts of interest;
   5. ratification of the external examiner nomination by academic council or equivalent and appointment;
   6. the role and responsibilities of the external examiner;
   7. the extent of the external examiner’s authority;
   8. formal agreement between the provider and the external examiner; and
   9. the process and criteria for the replacement of an external examiner.

The process of reporting and timeframes, as well as, notification of appointment and other contractual issues are also addressed.

* 1. The Institute will communicate to stakeholders the name and primary occupation of the external examiner(s) for each of its higher education and training programmes.

1. **Duties of the External Examiners As Agreed by Academic Council**
   1. External Examiners are normally appointed with responsibility for a programme or a module/subject or range of modules/subjects over a number of programmes. External Examiners deal primarily although not exclusively with the award year(s) of programmes.
   2. External Examiners should approach their responsibility with a view to ensuring that each candidate’s performance is properly assessed subject to the regulations and standards applicable generally for the award.
   3. It shall be the duty of the External Examiner to examine the relevant syllabi and the drafts of all examination papers, marking schemes and worked solutions before the examination papers are printed and copied. External Examiners have the right to make such suggestions regarding deletions, additions and amendments as appropriate to draft examination papers.
   4. External Examiners are expected to communicate with Internal Examiners within ten (10) working days following receipt of examination documentation e.g. draft examination papers.
   5. Correspondence between Internal and External Examiners including finalisation of examination papers should normally be by registered post.
   6. External Examiners should review a representative sample of scripts and other material presented for assessment especially work which contributes to a student’s final award and classification. e.g. projects, practical work and continuous assessment.
   7. The sample should include sufficient material to enable the External Examiner to form a judgement on the reliability and consistency of marking and on the levels of classification including borderline cases and proposed fails.
   8. The External Examiner should certify the agreed marks for each candidate on the appropriate documentation e.g. White Sheets and Broadsheets.
   9. External Examiners may be consulted about relevant matters concerning Examination Appeals requested by candidates.
   10. External Examiners are expected to visit the Institute **once** in each academic year. This visit will normally take place at the time of determination of final results at the Summer Examination Board Meeting.
   11. External Examiners shall ensure that the confidentiality of Examination Board Meetings is maintained at all times.
   12. External Examiners are required to submit a report on the prescribed form for each programme(s) module(s)/subject(s) for which they have responsibility. The payment of expenses and fees will be conditional on the submission of this report and claim form. Please note you must submit claim form with **PPS number** even if you are not claiming travel but getting paid honorarium & course fees.
   13. If there is any breach by the External Examiner of any of the terms and conditions or if at any time in the opinion of the Institute the External Examiner shall fail to provide a satisfactory service, the Institute may terminate the agreement by giving the External Examiner one month’s notice in writing to that effect.
   14. Once notice has been given the Institute may decide to pass over the duties to another External Examiner.
   15. In other circumstances the agreement may be terminated with a minimum of three (3) months’ notice by either party. Such notice shall be given in writing.
   16. Please be advised that the Institute deems that all documentation in the examination process is accessible under the Freedom of Information Act which came into force on 1 October 2001. Accordingly we recommend that following the completion of the Summer Examinations the External Examiner should hand over to the Institute all correspondence and documentation associated with the examination in his/her possession.
2. **The external examining process**
   1. External examining is a quality assurance mechanism employed by providers that supports public confidence in academic qualifications.
   2. The external examining process offers valued objective interface; a principal outcome of external examining is the introduction of an independent element into learner assessment procedures.
   3. An external examiner is an independent expert who is a member of the broader community of practice within the programme’s field of learning and whose accomplishments attest to his/her likelihood of having the influence necessary to fulfil the responsibilities of the role.
   4. External examiners will be selected from a variety of backgrounds – including industry, academic, module and programme. Typically, two external examiners are engaged for a full programme; one from academic and one from the world of work – although additional external examiners may be deemed necessary from time to time depending on the complexity of the programme.
   5. The main functions of the external examiner are

* to comment on the programme standard (educational goal);
* to probe the actual attainment of learners using information agreed with and supplied by the provider;
* to comment where appropriate on the qualification-related assessment strategy and procedures and proceeding from there to probe the overall assessment strategy;
* to review written examinations prior to their assignment;
* to review continuous assessment work, either during the academic year or at the time of the final examination period;
* to review any recommendations for exemptions arising from the evaluation of prior learning, at the time of the final examination period;
* to report findings and recommendations to the Institute.
  1. An extern examiner is expected to comment on the design, structure, and content of a programme and its constituent components, and on the standard of the programme and its assessment in a national and international context.
  2. The term of appointment of an external examiner is sufficiently long to allow the extern to assess trends and sufficiently short to provide diversity and maintain the required level of independence. A typical term of office would be of 3 years duration.

1. **Determining scope and fulfilling the role of the external examiner**

**5.1** The Institute will agree with the external examiner:

* 1. the information required to enable the external examiner to carry out his/her functions effectively (for example, module and programme descriptors, draft examination papers and model answers); and
  2. a schedule of outputs and meetings including meetings with learners where appropriate.
  3. It is a normal requirement that external examiners visit the institute at least once in the academic year. The purpose of this visit is to, in addition to tasks under Section 4.5 above, ensure that the full range of assessments is covered, including continuous assessment.
  4. The Institute requires each external examiner to take part in an induction process (this might be delivered as an information pack) shortly after his/her appointment. Following this he/she will be able to:
  5. describe the mission of the Institute and place it in context with the Irish higher education system;
  6. (where the programme is a professional one) outline the relevant professional infrastructure (regulation, associations, etc.) in Ireland, the professional educational requirements, and how the programme prepares learners for entry into the profession;
  7. compare and contrast the **programme standard** with similar programmes with which they are already familiar;
  8. outline the overall structure of the programme and be familiar with the module and programme descriptors and the Approved Programme Schedules;
  9. discuss and critique the **programme assessment strategy**; marking schemes etc.
  10. explain how the programme standard relates to the **award standard** and how the award standard relates to the **National Framework of Qualifications,** and if the examiner is from outside Ireland how the NFQ relates to the other HE Qualifications Frameworks with which the extern may be familiar;
  11. outline the programme assessment procedures and explain the grading system and how awards are classified; and
  12. (for external examiners who are not academics) discuss the principles of learning outcome criterion referenced assessment.
  13. effectively carry out the functions of an external examiner.
  14. be familiar with the layout of the campus, and how to locate the appropriate meeting rooms.
  15. From time to time, the Institute may require external examiners to attend refresher meetings to update on, for example, new procedures, marks and standards and developments in the Higher Education sector.

1. **The report of the external examiner**

External Examiners are required to submit to the Registrar, not later than 1st October in each year, a full report on the examinations with which they are involved. One report covering the academic year will normally be sufficient. The report should be submitted in accordance with the standard Report Form supplied by the Institute (see Appendix 3. 6).

* 1. 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.
  2. The external examiner issues a written report each time an individual or a cohort of learners is assessed. The report addresses the following:
  3. the evidence considered including meetings and interviews with learners and academic staff and others;
  4. the appropriateness of the provider’s programme standard (i.e. intended learning outcomes) in light of the external examiner’s experience and having regard to the award standard and the National Framework of Qualifications;
  5. the external examiner’s perception of the attainment of learners;
  6. the external examiner’s opinion of the quality of the programme (as distinct from the programme standard) citing strengths and areas for improvement;
  7. the quality of the assessment instruments (examination papers, dissertation guidelines, etc.) and scoring rubrics/schemes etc.
  8. the fairness and consistency of assessment procedures;
  9. the reliability of the provider’s benchmarking of its assessment procedures
  10. appropriate national and international comparisons
  11. any substantial concerns (even if they have already been communicated verbally) so that these may be addressed
  12. changes from previous years if not reporting for the first time
  13. the design, structure, and content of a programme and its constituent components, and on the standard of the programme and its assessment in a national and international context.
  14. It is important that the report is well balanced in terms of highlighting positive aspects and areas for concern.
  15. External examiner reports are securely retained in accordance with the adopted records retention policy by the Institute and will contribute to the quality assurance procedures and institutional research review activities.
  16. The Institute considers external examiner reports at all appropriate organisational levels. Actions arising from the report are recorded, communicated to learners, and other staff as appropriate.
  17. The external examiner is provided with a timely, considered response to his/her comments and recommendations, including information on any actions taken by the Institute.
  18. The Registrar shall provide a copy of the External Examiner’s report to the Head of School and School Secretary. The formal response of the School and the Department to the report is incorporated in the annual Programme Monitoring Report (see Appendix 4.1 of the Institute’s QA procedures), which are reviewed by the Academic Council.