



TITLE: APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

Version	4.1	Date Approved	21 May 2025
	<i>Policy revised to include greater distinction between external examiner reports.</i>	Review Date	4 October 2029 or as required
Approved By	Academic Council		
Owner	Office of the Registrar		
Version Control			
Version No.	Date Approved	Documented Changes	
1	Appointment of External Examiners – Policies and Procedures, <i>Quality Assurance Handbook</i> , pp. 77 – 78 (6 December 2011)	Initial Issue	
2	7 June 2017; 30 September 2020	Policy reviewed to ensure compatibility with the <i>Assessments and Standards</i> (Revised 2013), <i>Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining</i> (Rev. February 2015), discipline-specific external examiner reports in addition to programme external examiner reports, alignment with CCSP <i>Policy on Policies</i> and defined procedures / guidelines.	
3	30 September 2020	Policy re-approved by the Academic Council without any amendments.	
4	4 October 2023	Policy reviewed and revised as part of a cyclical review of the policy. The changes made to the policy were minor in scope (e.g. ensuring referenced documents are up-to-date regarding year of publication, gender neutral language included and more consistent use of title for Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar.	

1. Purpose of Policy

Carlow College, St. Patrick's (hereafter Carlow College) is committed to external examining procedures that support public confidence in our academic qualifications. Appointing appropriate, independent, impartial, and highly-qualified external examiners is a vital element in those procedures. The aim of this Policy is to ensure a transparent, effective and consistent procedure for the appointment of external examiners to the academic programmes delivered by Carlow College.

This Policy will replace *Appointment of External Examiners – Policies and Procedures* (2011) and draws upon guidelines and procedures outlined in the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) documents *Assessments and Standards* (Revised 2022), *Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining* (Rev. February 2015) and *Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers* (Rev. 2013, Version 2 - revised 2018). It has also been informed by *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (May, 2015), pp. 15 – 16.

2. Definitions

External examiner: 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 their likelihood of having the authority necessary to fulfil the responsibilities of the role.¹

3. Scope of Policy

This policy applies to the external examining of QQI approved programmes and modules currently delivered by Carlow College.

4. Policy Statement

External examiners are appointed to all taught programmes at Carlow College in order to report on and monitor the quality of the content, organisation and assessment of these programmes. Their role is also to ensure that the education provided by Carlow College programmes is benchmarked to that of comparable higher education institutions and universities.

The number of external examiners is determined by the needs of each programme and should ensure that both the overall programme and the core individual disciplines within each programme are adequately covered. When a programme has a number of examiners with specialist subject expertise, one of these examiners will be additionally asked to act as examiner for the programme.

Carlow College gives careful consideration to the appointment of eminent research-active external examiners who add value by virtue of their academic standing. These examiners are usually attached to a third level institution and in addition to having subject matter expertise,

¹*Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining*, (Dublin: Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2015), p. 10.

should also have experience of delivering similar programmes and knowledge of teaching, learning and assessment best practice. In some cases, particularly in the more practice-based subjects, external examiners may be drawn from the appropriate professions, provided they have the necessary expertise in degree awarding standards and learner achievement. In addition, the external examiners must be available to fulfil their duties and produce their reports at the appropriate times (see Appendix 1: *Guidelines on the Duties and Responsibilities of External Examiners* and Appendix 2: *Template for External Examiner Report*).

External examiners must be demonstrably independent of Carlow College and are required to declare any actual or perceived conflict of interest before agreeing to their nomination. The following will automatically render a candidate ineligible for appointment:

- a) They teach on the programme of study to which they are being considered for appointment.
- b) They hold a teaching or other appointment of the College or have held such an appointment within ten years prior to the date of commencement of the proposed appointment.
- c) They are a close relative of a member of staff of the College.
- d) They have served as External Examiner for the same programme for any period in the previous four years.

The external examiners' functions are of critical importance to the reputation of Carlow College and the procedure for their appointment involves the whole academic community. The following procedure is in place:

- a) The Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar seeks nominations for the position of External Examiner from the Programme Director.
- b) The Programme Director consults with the academic staff on the Programme seeking suitable nominations. These nominations should be submitted in writing and should outline the suitability of the proposed examiner. The Programme Director will review the nominations with regard to the criteria for appointment.
- c) The Programme Director then reports to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar (VPA) on the nominations made. The VPA may suggest alternative names for nomination if they decide it is necessary to do so.
- d) The Programme Director or the VPA then consults with the person proposed for nomination, without commitment, to seek their consent and availability to act as External Examiner.
- e) Nominations for the appointment are submitted to the Academic Council by the VPA.

Following approval by the Academic Council, the VPA issues a letter of appointment to the External Examiner specifying the following:

- Guidelines on the duties and responsibilities of the External Examiner
- Term of office
- Conflict of interest declaration

- Programme schedule and module descriptors
- *QQI Assessment and Standards (2022)*
- *Carlow College Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy (2017)*.
- College Prospectus and Student Handbooks
- External Examiners reporting arrangements and requirements
- External Examiners Report Form
- Termination of contract procedures

An external examiner's term of appointment is sufficiently long to allow them to assess trends, and sufficiently short to provide diversity and maintain the required level of independence. Therefore, the appointment of external examiners is normally for a period of three years and commences from 1 September. In exceptional cases, the appointment may be extended by one further year. In this case the circumstances shall be advised to the Academic Council prior to the proposed extension taking effect.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The **Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar (VPA)** maintains a register of External Examiners' appointments and period of tenure. They will notify the relevant Programme Director when an external examiner is within six months of completion of their term of office.

The **Programme Director** will consult with **academic staff on the programme** and request nominations. These nominations will then be reported to the VPA.

The **VPA** will submit those nominations and/or **their** own nominations to **Academic Council**. **Academic Council** will approve the nomination of the external examiner.

6. Associated Documentation

- Appendix 1: Guidelines on the Duties and Responsibilities of External Examiners
- Appendix 2: Template for the External Examiner Report

7. Monitoring and Review

The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee will monitor the implementation of the *Policy on the Appointment of External Examiners* annually and provide a report to the VPA. It will review the Policy at the direction of the VPA, but at a minimum of every three years and provide a report with recommendations to the VPA and the Academic Council.

Appendix 1: Guidelines on the Duties and Responsibilities of External Examiners



Guidelines on the Duties and Responsibilities of External Examiners

The Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) document *Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining* (Rev. 2015) defines the main functions of the external examiner as follows:

- (a) Review the appropriateness of the minimum intended programme learning outcomes (i.e. the programme's basic educational goal), and other programme objectives. These should accord with the relevant awards standards and any other standards the programme is designed to satisfy, e.g. professional standards.
- (b) Probe the actual attainment of learners (actual programme learning outcomes) using information agreed with and supplied by the provider.
- (c) Compare and contrast both the minimum intended programme learning outcomes and the actual attainment of learners with the relevant awards standards, with the National Framework of Qualifications, and with corresponding data from other programmes in the same discipline in other higher education institutions in Ireland and beyond.
- (d) Determine whether or not the applied procedures for assessment are valid, reliable, fair and consistent
- (e) Review the appropriateness of the programme assessment strategy and the assessment procedures and, flowing from this, consider subsidiary module assessment strategies.
- (f) Review key assessment tasks prior to their assignment in light of the programme and module assessment strategies and learners' prerequisite (prior) learning. Where key tasks include key continuous assessment tasks, it might not be feasible to review them prior to assignment, but they should still be reviewed by the external examiner.
- (g) Report findings and recommendations to the provider.

In order to facilitate the external examiner in carrying out these duties, Carlow College undertakes to:

- Ensure that the external examiner is provided with all relevant programme and module descriptors outlining learning outcomes and assessment strategies.

- Ensure that the external examiner has access to the relevant QQI documentation on Assessment and Standards.
- Ensure that the external examiner is provided with all relevant assessment criteria and rubrics.
- Ensure that the external examiner is sent details of key assessment tasks, in particular, examination papers (and their associated marking schemes), to review before the assignment is set.
- Ensure that the external examiner is given access to the full range of assessed material and statistics relating to same as well as sufficient samples of work achieving high, middle and low grades.
- Facilitate the examiner on their visit to the College and attendance at the QQI External Exam Board meeting.
- Ensure that the findings and recommendations of the external examiner are systematically addressed by the College's quality assurance system and are considered as important inputs into the programme's quality assurance cycles and related processes.

Newly appointed external examiners will additionally be provided with:

- Carlow College policies relating to external examining, assessment, plagiarism etc.
- Carlow College, St Patrick's Strategic Plan with mission and context of the college.
- Copies of recent external examiner reports for the programme and/or discipline.

Carlow College determines the number of external examiners by the needs of each programme and the number of individual disciplines covered by each programme. When a programme has a number of examiners with specialist subject expertise, one of these examiners will be additionally asked to act as examiner for the programme.

The Report of the External Examiner

The external examiner is required to provide both verbal and written feedback using formal and informal channels of communication. The VPA is the principal point of contact and should, in the first instance oversee the induction of new external examiners. Comments and recommendations arising out of the review of assessment components, primarily exam papers, should be communicated to the VPA.

It is useful for external examiners to meet with Programme Directors when they visit the college to view learner assessments in situ. Meetings with individual lecturers can also be arranged at this time and it is envisaged that informal meetings of this kind may also follow the External Exam Board meeting.

External examiners are expected to attend the External Exam Board meeting and deliver a verbal report on their findings.

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Formal feedback, in the format of a written report, constitutes the official record. The external examiners are asked to submit this report within four weeks of the External Exam Board meeting and to follow the Carlow College Template for External Examiners' Reports.

External examiners' reports are securely retained by Carlow College and contribute to both quality assurance/enhancement and institutional research activities. Recommendations of the external examiner are discussed at the September meeting of the relevant programme board. Responses and actions taken are recorded in the annual Programme Monitoring Reports by the Programme Director. The external examiner is provided with a timely, considered response to their comments and recommendations, including information on any actions taken by the programme.

Appendix 2: Templates for the External Examiner Report Form

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM (Programme)

Part 1: Examiner and Programme Details

(To be completed by Carlow College, St Patrick's prior to forwarding the template to the external examiner)

 External Examiner Report [Academic Year] Carlow College, St Patrick's		
Date		
Name of External Examiner		
Institution/Company of External Examiner		
e-mail address of External Examiner		
Year of Appointment		
Date of Visit		
Programme Details	Programme Reference	
	Award Title:	
	NFQ Level:	
	Main Modes of Delivery Offered:	
	Semester (if applicable indicate whether first or second):	
Programme Learning Outcomes	On successful completion of this programme, graduates should be able to:	

Part 2: Programme Classification, Distribution and Trends (To be Completed by Carlow College, St Patrick’s prior to forwarding the template to the external examiner)

Progression, Classification Distribution and Trends (Award Year)		Current Year ²	Previous Year	Previous Year	Previous Year	Previous Year
	Number who started the stage					
	Number who completed the stage (i.e. attempted final stage examinations)					
	% H1/D					
	% H21/M1					
	% H22/M2					
	% P					
Classification Distribution and Trends (Years 1-3)		Current Year	Previous Year	Previous Year	Previous Year	Previous Year
Year 3	Number who started the stage					
	Number who completed the stage (i.e. attempted final stage examinations)					
	% 70+					
	% 60-69					
	% 50-50					
	% 40-49					
Year 2	Number who started the stage					
	Number who completed the stage (i.e. attempted final stage examinations)					
	% 70+					
	% 60-69					
	% 50-59					
	% 40-49					
Year 1	Number who started the stage					
	Number who completed the stage (i.e. attempted final stage examinations)					
	% 70+					

² Current year statistics are based on the first sitting of exams and do not include results from autumn repeats.

	% 60-60					
	% 50-59					
	% 40-49					

Part 3: Report of the External Examiner

Please note that the purpose of the programme report is different to that of the discipline report. Where an examiner is the programme extern for more than one programme then each programme should be considered separately. Where a programme is comprised of two or more disciplines the programme examiner is not expected to comment on the different disciplines but to take an overview of the programme and the performance of its learners.

Please consult Appendix 1 of the *Appointment of External Examiners Policy* before beginning to write your report.

In presenting opinions under the following headings the external examiner can make national and international comparisons.

All external reports should follow the template outlined below (italicised instructions should be discarded by the external examiner when drafting the report).

Programme Documentation Considered

Examiners should be supplied with Programme Documentation and Learner Handbooks and can comment on them here

Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes

Comment on the educational objectives including their explicitness, appropriateness and consistency standards with the relevant awards standards and the National Framework of Qualifications

Actual Attainment of Learners

Comment on the Programme Classification, Distribution and Trends

The Programme

This section should identify some notable strengths and areas for improvement. It is not intended that the external examiner would attempt to systematically review the programme

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Owner: Office of the Registrar

Conclusions and Recommendations

External examiner's signature and date

EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT FORM (Discipline)

Part 1: Examiner, Programme and Module Details

(To be completed by Carlow College, St Patrick's prior to forwarding the template to the external examiner)

 <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle; margin-left: 10px;"> <p>COLÁISTE CHEATHARLACH NAOMH PÁDRAIG</p> <hr style="width: 100%;"/> <p>CARLOW COLLEGE ST. PATRICK'S</p> </div>		<p>External Examiner Report [Academic Year]</p> <p>Carlow College, St Patrick's</p>
Date		
Name and discipline of External Examiner		
Institution/Company of External Examiner		
e-mail address of External Examiner		
Year of Appointment		
Date of Visit		
Programme Details	Programme Reference	
	Award Title:	
	NFQ Level:	
	Main Modes of Delivery Offered:	
	Semester (if applicable indicate whether first or second):	
Modules examined	1	
	2	
	3	
	4	
	5	
	6	
	7	
	8	
	9	
	10	

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Part 2: Module Classification, Distribution and Trends (To be Completed by Carlow College, St Patrick’s prior to forwarding the template to the external examiner)

		Current Year ³	Previous Year	Previous Year	Previous Year	Previous Year
Module 1 (insert name and stage of module)	Number who started module					
	Number who completed the module					
	% 70+					
	% 60-69					
	% 50-59					
	% 40-49					
Module 2 (insert name and stage of module)		Current Year	Previous Year	Previous Year	Previous Year	Previous Year
	Number who started module					
	Number who completed the module					
	% 70+					
	% 60-69					
	% 50-59					
	% 40-49					
Module 3 (insert name and stage of module)		Current Year	Previous Year	Previous Year	Previous Year	Previous Year
	Number who started module					
	Number who completed the module					
	% 70+					
	% 60-69					
	% 50-59					
	% 40-49					
Module 4		Current Year	Previous Year	Previous Year	Previous Year	Previous Year

³ Current year statistics are based on the first sitting of exams and do not include results from autumn repeats.

(insert name and stage of module)						
	Number who started module					
	Number who completed the module					
	% 70+					
	% 60-69					
	% 50-59					
	% 40-49					

Part 3: Report of the External Examiner (Discipline)

Please note that the purpose of the discipline report is to comment on the evidence received for the specific discipline or disciplinary area.

Please consult Appendix 1 of the *Appointment of External Examiners Policy* before beginning to write your report.

In presenting opinions under the following headings the external examiner can make national and international comparisons.

All external reports should follow the template outlined below (italicised instructions should be discarded by the external examiner when drafting the report).

The Evidence Considered

Summarise the documentary evidence considered and any communications, meetings etc with academic and academic support staff.

Appropriateness of the module learning outcomes

Comment on the educational objectives including their explicitness, appropriateness and consistency standards with the relevant awards standards and the National Framework of Qualifications.

Actual Attainment of Learners

Include informed perception of the actual attainment of learners (knowledge, skill and competence).

Discipline-specific observations

This section should identify some notable strengths and areas for improvement. It is not intended that the external examiner would attempt to systematically review the discipline.

Assessment Procedures

This section should address the quality of the assessment instruments, the fairness, consistency and fitness for purpose of assessment procedures.

Trends

Where an examiner has been in the role for two or more years, it is useful to reflect on any trends that are apparent and also on the extent to which teaching, learning and assessment arrangements have changed in response to the feedback provided in former years

Conclusions and Recommendations

External examiner's signature and date