

4.4 ICD's External Examination Policy

ICD appoints appropriately qualified panels of external examiners to provide impartial, independent advice and informed comment on every aspect of the college's assessment practices, programme design, and academic standards. This section details the college's external examination policies, criteria for appointments, nomination process, the external examiner's role and scope of responsibility, the reporting process, and procedures for terminating examinerships.

- External examiners can be nominated by the college Registrar but must be approved by the Academic Council.
- The college will ensure that all appointed external examiners are suitably qualified and have the disciplinary knowledge, experience, and authority necessary to fulfil the responsibilities of the role
- The external examining process will always be managed by ICD in a spirit of openness and transparency.
- To ensure the independence of appointees, and to avoid conflicts of interest, ICD will not appoint examiners who have recent or past relationships with the college. Where potential conflicts of interest do arise, these must be resolved before any appointment is made.
- The college will appoint a team of external examiners that meets the needs of each programme in terms of specialisation.
- The college's Academic Council will be responsible for outlining the competences required of external examiners, evaluating the suitability of proposed appointees, and approving appointments.
- In keeping with precept 1.6 of QQI's 'Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining' (2015), all external examiners' terms of appointment should be sufficiently long to allow them to assess trends, and sufficiently short to provide diversity and maintain the required level of independence. ICD follows the QQI-stated norm of a three-year term of appointment. In exceptional cases External Examiner tenure may be extended from 3 up to a maximum of 5 years in total, but only by agreement of the Academic Council, and with a specific rationale.
- All appointed external examiners will sign a formal agreement with the college which outlines the expectations and responsibilities of both the provider and the examiner.
- The college must clearly communicate and agree the purview, or scope of operation, of the external examiner from the outset of any new appointment. Further to this, external

examiners must always be permitted to offer any additional comment that is not already covered in this scope of operation.

- The college Registrar is responsible for communicating examination schedules, reporting processes, and time-frames to appointed external examiners.
- External examiners will visit the college at the time of examination board meetings and/or at any such times as may be determined by the college in consultation with external examiners.
- All members of academic staff must be made fully aware of the purpose and nature of the external examination process. Where new staff members are hired, a unit on external examining must be included in their induction training.
- It is essential that external examiners be provided with all of the information required for the effective performance of their functions, and that any additional request for information be responded to fully and in a timely fashion.
- External examiners will be provided with drafts of examinations and major assessments—including solutions and marking rubrics - twice per annum.
- All assessments or examinations submitted to the external examiner(s) must be accompanied by module and programme assessment strategies, marking schemes/rubrics, and any other pertinent documentation. Where this information is not fully furnished by a lecturer, it is the responsibility of the college Registrar and relevant Programme Director to address this.
- External Examiners report to the Registrar and are expected to attend and deliberate at Examination Board meetings
- The results of all external examiners' reports must be fully and seriously considered by the college, and communicated to all lecturers by its Academic Council and Registrar. Due consideration must be given to all of the comments, proposed adjustments, and other matters recommended by external examiners.
- The Academic Council will ensure that key recommendations made by external examiners are systematically addressed and integrated into the college's quality assurance processes.
- The Academic Council is responsible for implementing any changes in programme design or assessment strategy recommended by the external examiners' report, notifying external examiners of any recommendations followed, and revising the college's external examination policy when necessary. Actions arising from examiners' reports must be recorded and communicated as appropriate.
- External examiner's reports must be securely retained by the college.

4.4.1 Guidelines for the nomination of External Examiners

Examiner Attributes/Criteria for Appointment:

- External examiners must have academic qualifications and/or professional qualifications/experience appropriate to the programme/modules being examined.
- External Examiners must have at least five years of relevant academic or professional experience.
- Ideally, they should have several years' experience of lecturing, assessing student work, setting exams, and moderating results at appropriate NFQ levels.
- If the candidate has no external examining experience, they will be expected to have several years' worth of internal examining or other relevant experience.
- It is desirable that External Examiners have several years' worth of experience in programme design.
- The candidate must have no close past relationship with ICD either as a member of staff, student, examiner, or partner. They must also have no personal relationship with any current or past member of ICD's staff.
- There should be no reciprocal external examining relationship between the candidate's employing faculty/school/department and ICD.
- An external examiner must be able to devote sufficient time to their duties, and so must not hold more than two concurrent external examinerships with other institutions.

The Nomination Process

- Overall responsibility for the identification and nomination of external examiners rests with the college registrar, working with academic staff.
- The college may periodically seek recommendations for nominations from the Academic Council.
- The Registrar and college Director may also nominate persons to act as external examiners.
- The registrar will engage with any proposed examiner to seek their consent and provide information about the external examiner's role and scope of responsibility.
- At this stage, the registrar and nominee are responsible for identifying/declaring any conflict of interest with the college.

- The registrar must further confirm that the nominee meets all of the criteria for appointment specified in the college's QA framework.
- The Academic Council has overall responsibility for approving the appointment of persons to act as external examiners.
- Where the nomination/approval process does not align with the schedule of Academic Council meetings, an extraordinary committee will be convened for the purpose of approval.
- Where it is determined that a nominee does not meet the college's criteria for appointment, the Academic Council can reject an appointment and request further information through the registrar.
- Following the approval of a nomination by the Academic Council, the Registrar's will issue a letter of appointment to the external examiner. This will be accompanied by an acceptance form - to be signed by the nominee – as well as a document outlining the role of the external examiner, their scope of responsibility, reporting relationships, termination of contract procedures, and a conflict of interest declaration.
- Appointed External Examiners will be asked to take part in an induction process in which matters such as the college's mission, external examining policy, overall programme structures, assessment strategies, and grading system will be explained.

4.4.2 The External Examiner's Role

- The primary role of external examiners at ICD is one of quality assurance, the confirmation of standards, the moderation of marking, and the appraisal of assessment methods.
- External examiners are appointed, more generally, to provide impartial, independent advice and informed comment on every aspect of the college's assessment practices.
- External examiners will visit the college at the time of examination board meetings and/or at any such times as may be determined by the college in consultation with the external examiner. Where an examiner cannot attend, they must inform the college Registrar and make necessary arrangements to ensure they assess relevant materials. A schedule of outputs and meetings will be agreed between the college and external examiner(s) for each academic year.
- External examiners are encouraged to evaluate and provide feedback on the fit between assessment methods, module design, and intended learning outcomes.
- ICD will send drafts examination papers and major assessments – including solutions and marking rubrics – to examiners twice per year. External Examiners will then review these and provide feedback as they see fit.
- External Examiners are asked to pay particular attention to the reliability and validity of each programme's assessment procedures.
- External Examiners will be expected to make comparisons between learners' attainments on ICD's programmes and that of similar programmes on the NFQ.
- External Examiners should be confident that expected learning outcomes have been articulated precisely for each module and assessment, and that students' relative achievement of these has been clearly documented and fairly and consistently judged.
- External Examiners may comment on individual student, module, or programme performance as they deem necessary.
- External Examiners may request to meet with individual learners and lecturers.
- External Examiners may suggest adjustments to any grades proposed by the internal examiner.
- At the award stage, external examiners are responsible for ensuring that learners have attained the standard that is certified by their qualification in the context of the National Framework of Qualifications.
- External Examiners may be asked to consider so-called 'borderline cases', and where necessary, to arbitrate between first and second markers on individual grades/propose adjustments to grades.

- External Examiners will be provided with module and stage broadsheets and asked to review the proposed results for each. Where they identify any significant issues with the grading practices in a particular module, they are encouraged to share this information at the exam board (and in their full report).
- External Examiners may propose adjustments to the grades for a group of students as a whole, but shall consult with the internal examiner and registrar in advance of the meeting of the exam board. While all dissenting opinions must be respected, efforts should be made to achieve consensus in relation to such proposed amendments.
- The external examiner shall sign the broadsheet of results for each programme, indicating their approval.

4.4.3 Information provided to Examiners

- Appointed External Examiners will be asked to take part in an induction process in which matters such as the college's mission, external examining policy, overall programme structures, assessment strategies, and grading system will be explained.
- External Examiners will be sent draft examination papers and major assessments – including solutions and marking rubrics – for review, twice per year.
- It is essential that external examiners be provided with all of the information required for the performance of their functions. Any request for additional information must be dealt with in a timely and transparent manner by ICD's registrar and administrative staff.
- External Examiners should ensure that all assessments are accompanied by contextualising documents such as assessment briefs, module outlines, marking schemes/ rubrics, model answers, and any other pertinent information.
- For each module, External Examiners will be provided with a representative sample of student work (e.g. assessments or exam scripts) across grade bands. However, at any time the External Examiner can request to see all of the student work for any module and to select their own sample.
- External examiners must be provided with broadsheets for each module
- For assessment tasks that have been completed in Moodle, the External Examiner has a right to request access to the module from ICD (where they feel that sufficient documentation has not been provided).
- External Examiners will be provided with a copy of the programme manual, most recent validation report, and teaching and learning strategy for each programme.

4.4.4 External Examiner Reporting

- External examiners are responsible for reporting any significant proposed adjustment to the registrar in advance of the exam board meeting.
- External Examiners are encouraged to provide verbal feedback on any matter they deem relevant at examination boards. Examiners may also request to meet with, and provide feedback to, individual lecturers and programme directors as they see fit.
- The external examiner(s) shall submit a full report, to be sent electronically to the college registrar, within four weeks of the visit to ICD. The report will be completed on the approved ICD *pro forma*.
- The external examiner(s) may submit a separate written report to the registrar on such matters as they deem appropriate, and may request that such reports are treated confidentially.
- On the completion of their term of appointment, External Examiners are invited to submit a final report to the college registrar.
- The college reserves the right to withhold any External Examiner's fees and associated expenses subject to the completion of the final report.

The external examiners' report will be expected to address the following:

- A full outline of the evidence considered by External Examiners, including assessment materials, programme documents, and meetings with academic staff, learners, and others. Where information requested was not provided, or not provided in a timely manner, this should be indicated.
- External Examiners will indicate whether or not they believe that the threshold standards set for each module/award are appropriate.
- An evaluation of the appropriateness of each programme/module's minimum intended learning outcomes, having regard to the relevant award standards on the NFQ.
- The External Examiners' perspectives on the actual attainment of learners.
- External Examiner's general opinion on the quality of the programme, citing strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.
- The quality and appropriateness of assessment instruments, including grading schemes/marking rubrics (and their consistency across modules).

- External Examiner's evaluation of the fairness and consistency with which learners have been assessed (both in relation to other students on the same programme, and in other higher education institutions nationally)
- Appropriate national and international comparisons and benchmarking.
- External Examiners are encouraged to identify areas of good practice.
- Where appropriate, External Examiners should indicate whether or not any professional body requirements for a module/award have been met (such as in relation to ACCA exemptions).
- Commentary on the college's external examination processes – including the conduct of exam boards - and any recommendations for improvement.
- Where applicable, External Examiners should provide commentary on the college's efforts to respond to any recommendations made in previous years' reports.
- Feedback on the integration of Moodle (the college's learning environment) into modules and assessments.
- Commentary on the adequacy of curriculum, course materials, reading lists, and resourcing
- Any other matters or substantial concerns that examiners see fit to include.

ICD is currently in the process of development a new *pro forma* for the external examiner's report. This will be based on the template provided by QQI in *Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining Revised 2015*.

4.4.5 External Examiner Conflicts of Interest

- The external examiner must declare any circumstances which may constitute a conflict of interest with the college in their role as external examiner.
- Where undeclared conflicts of interest are discovered, ICD reserves the right to dismiss the examiner.
- External examiners cannot be dismissed without the approval of the college's Academic Council. This process must be initiated by the college Registrar, who is responsible for notifying the examiner of same.

4.4.6 Termination of External Examiner Contract

- Should it prove necessary to terminate a contract of employment with an external examiner, the college registrar must recommend termination to the Academic Council for approval. This recommendation must be accompanied by a detailed account of the reasons for the proposed termination.
- The registrar is responsible for notifying external examiners, in writing, of an approved contract termination.

