

School of Natural Science
Some comments from disciplines on the role of external examiners

Botany

We and the examiners (a number have been asked or voluntarily stated) and the students like the way they operate with us at present – that is that they see (and read) all the answers that the students have done in the exams and their thesis; that they viva all the students and that though they look at borderline cases in particular, they do look at our entire class. They are then able to comment in the examiners' meeting on the performance of the students and on the structure and breadth and suitability of the course and what, if anything, should be tweaked. So, we have not gone down the UK type route where this does not generally occur. Obviously, as we try to integrate our mods more and perhaps reduce the number of examiners (going towards 2 for 3 mods), vivaing everyone will become, probably, impossible but whilst it is still possible we want to continue with it.

Geography

External examiners should continue to have a role in the following: review of examination papers; review of selection of dissertations prior to examination board meetings; review/moderation of borderline cases (Geography provide guidelines for review of borderline cases); overview of modules to ensure consistency of workload and assessment standards; provision of comments/advice regarding curriculum structure and content. External examiners' input should be advisory rather than prescriptive but feedback to externs should be provided regarding their recommendations and any actions taken/ not taken. Guidelines from College would be useful but should allow for local variations.

Geology

We feel strongly that external examiners are useful, although somewhat dependent on the choice of examiner. We feel it should be left to individual moderatorships to organise the process, with admin handled by the school.

Earth Science

Current system for Earth Sci works well. Externs consider candidates (and informally viva them - more of an interview about the course and their projects but does feed into discussions about project mark which is used as an instrument for final mark modification). There is also an overview on modules, flagging where any peculiarities in marks etc arise.

Whilst we maintain a moderatorship and have hard boundaries for degree classes I would argue that the current process of considering candidates is the way forward. Inputs from the extern are valuable as an independent set of experienced eyes.

If we are to go down the route of a degree by numbers with extensive sets of criteria

for raising or lowering marks etc etc then the role of an extern changes. They in effect become auditors of the process rather than examiners. I am not in favour of that approach and ultimately I would argue we could dispense with externs altogether if that is to be the framework.

Final point, Earth Sci externs have come from the UK system in which their duties were different. One in particular was very concerned about vivas and only reluctantly agreed to do them. After his three year term, his view on them had completely changed and he commented on how valuable they were. Both externs commented on how enjoyable the process in TCD is compared to some UK institutions where they don't consider individuals but just module profiles. They noted they actually felt a part of the examining process and were impressed at the level of attention that was paid to the students - this is only really possible given our small class sizes.

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