



## Procedure for External Examination

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### 1. Purpose

This procedure describes all aspects of the appointment, function, duties, reporting requirement and contract management for the purpose of external examination for taught programmes.

## 2. Scope

This procedure applies to the external examination for all taught programmes in Atlantic Technological University (ATU) and to all ATU staff and external examiners engaged in fulfilling the requirements of this procedure.

## 3. Reference Documents

QQI Effective Practice Guidelines for external Examining (Revised Feb 2015).

## 4. Procedure

### 4.1 Introduction

External examining is a quality assurance mechanism employed by the university and is designed to ensure independence and external governance in the assessment and grading of student performance.

External examiners have a responsibility to assure standards in the modules to which they are appointed, as well as in the overall programme and award to which they are appointed, subject to the requirements of the ATU *Quality Assurance & Enhancement Framework (QAEF)*.

External examining provides confidence that graduates have met the programme learning outcomes and the standard that is certified by their award within the context of the National Framework of Qualifications. The university shall appoint sufficient external Examiners to ensure that the standard of its programmes and student performances can be adequately moderated and the assessment, examination and determination of award processes are being fairly conducted.

External examiners assist the university in ensuring the adequacy of standards applied at examinations and in particular the award classification achieved and that comparability of standards between equivalent level programmes from other Higher Education Institutes is achieved and maintained as far as is feasible. They may share experiences in relation to good teaching and learning practices.

Notwithstanding the main function of the external examiner as described above the external examiner may be requested to provide advice to the programme board in relation to a wider purview of the design, structure, learning outcomes, of a programme and modules therein if requested by the university to provide such input.

External examiners are expected to act in an independent and ethical manner, and demonstrate a fair and consistent approach through objectivity, confidentiality, declaration of interests, and the avoidance of conflicts of interest. Where a conflict of interest arises or is perceived to arise, an external examiner shall inform the Assistant Registrar with responsibility for external examining who shall inform the responsible committee of Academic Council. The committee shall advise whether the external examiner be required to stand aside.

The university reserves the right to publish the name and the primary occupation of all external examiners for each university award, on the website or other university report in order to support public confidence in the standards obtained by its graduates.

## **4.2 External Examiners for Taught programmes**

### **4.2.1 Criteria for Appointment**

The criteria for appointment are set out below. Where a nomination does not meet any one of the criteria outlined below, a written justification must be provided with the nomination.

- i) An appointed external examiner should be an independent person of demonstrated academic or professional excellence, whose association with a particular programme(s) is considered to enhance the academic integrity of the programme(s).
- ii) They should have both current and relevant experience in the areas of academia or professional practice (industry, business, research etc) and should be of senior standing in their discipline fields. External examiner nominations/appointments should be such as to ensure maximum objectivity in relation to the programme award.
- iii) All major awards shall have a minimum of one external examiner. Two examiners may be appointed, one from academia and one from professional practice where the required competencies are more appropriately met by a team of external examiners.
- iv) External Examiners may be appointed as a programme external examiner (preferred), or module/subject external examiner as determined by the needs of the university. External Examiners appointed on the basis of module / subject expertise may be involved with modules across multiple programmes, department or schools/faculties.
- v) An external examiner may be appointed to more than one programme or a combination of programme(s) and modules.
- vi) An external examiner drawn from academia should hold a minimum of an honours degree (or equivalent) academic qualification, in the relevant discipline. Ideally they

should hold a qualification at a higher level than that of the programme to which they have been nominated. They should be associated with the same level programmes in their own academic institution.

- vii) An external examiner drawn from academia may be nominated from a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Ireland or abroad. ATU seeks to draw nominations from a variety of HEIs, and within a single discipline should avoid multiple nominations from the same institution.
- viii) An external examiner drawn from professional practice should ideally, hold a qualification equal to or higher than that of the programme to which they are appointed. If they do not hold such a qualification, they may still be nominated on the basis of holding significant experience or specific expertise required by the programme and can act as part of a team with a suitably qualified academic external examiner.
- ix) The nominations should also take cognisance for the desirability of gender balance when nominating teams of external examiners.
- x) For programmes/modules at level 9 at least one, ideally both, external examiners must hold a qualification equal or higher than that of the programme(s) to which they have been nominated.
- xi) Former staff should not be appointed as external examiners until a minimum of 4 years have elapsed since ceasing employment in ATU or legacy Institute.
- xii) Graduates should not be appointed as external examiners within 5 years of graduating from ATU or legacy institute. A member of the validation panel who approved a programme should not be appointed as external examiner until a period of 4 years has elapsed from the commencement of the specific programme. Currently registered students may not be appointed as external examiners unless in an unrelated discipline and only following agreement of the VP Academic Affairs and Registrar. Guest lecturers are not normally appointed as external examiners, though exceptions may be considered by the VP Academic Affairs and Registrar on a case by case basis.
- xiii) Reciprocal arrangements between a HEI and ATU within the same discipline are to be avoided.
- xiv) The term of appointment is 4 years. External examiners who have served a 4 year period cannot be considered for re-nomination until a minimum of 4 years has elapsed post completion of previous contract.
- xv) The minimum quantum of work for each external examiner is 12 modules or 60 ECTS. The maximum quantum of work for an external examiner is 36 modules or 180 ECTS. Typically, it is expected that one external examiner should be appointed on a Level 9

programme, or a Level 6 programme or half of a level 8 programme, or if appointed as a Module external examiner, to an equivalent workload.

- xvi) Only one external examiner should be appointed per module with the exception of a capstone /research /project module where the appointment of two external examiners would be beneficial.
- xvii) Where programmes contain common modules, the modules should be apportioned between the programme external examiners, as applicable.
- xviii) External examiners may be appointed across campuses to meet a specific discipline needs once the academic systems to manage and administer such appointments are in place.

The conditions and terms of contracts are set out in section 4.6 below.

#### **4.2.2 Identification of nominees**

The Head of Department may consult with a Head of School, consult externally or consult with the Programme Board to seek recommendations and advice for nominations to act as external examiner. The Head of Department or programme board member should consult the person proposed for nomination to seek their consent to be nominated, to determine their availability to act as an external examiner and request a CV. This is an informal consultation process only and should not imply any commitment on behalf of the university to make an appointment.

#### **4.2.3 Nomination Process**

The university uses a system called GURU for Examination Paper management and external examiner nomination, approval processing and contracts. A schematic diagram of the process flow for nomination and approval in GURU is outlined in Appendix 1. Where this is available all nominations must be through GURU and in the case where the system is not yet implemented at a particular college an equivalent process is used.

The nomination process commences when the Head of Department (or nominee) creates the nomination by entering some basic biographical details, the period of appointment, uploading the CV and identifying the programmes and modules to be assigned to the external examiner. The Head of Department (or nominee) confirms that the nominee meets the criteria for appointment and has the recommendation of the programme board. The external examiner then receives a notification through GURU to agree to the nomination (alternatively this step can be completed at later stage). The nomination is then electronically endorsed by the Head of Department once they are satisfied that the external examiner meets the criteria for appointment set out in this procedure.

The nomination is then received by the Quality Office who check the nomination is complete and return for editing / correction if required. The nomination is then moved to 'Administrative Endorsement' status and the nomination form and CV are forwarded for inclusion on the agenda of the Academic Standards and Policy Committee of Academic Council.

A parallel process is completed where GURU is not available, the Head of Department (or nominee) completes the **Form AQAE014\_001 External Examiner Nomination** and submits to the Quality Office for consideration by the committee.

#### 4.2.4 Nomination Approval

The Academic Standards and Policy Committee review the nomination information. They may request additional information from the Head of Department for clarity to aid their decision. Once satisfied that the persons nominated satisfy the criteria for appointment and whose association with a particular programme(s) is considered to enhance the academic integrity of the programme(s) the committee approve the nomination. This is recorded in the minutes of the meeting. Access to personal data e.g., CV of nominated external examiners shall be restricted to the minimum required for the nomination and approval process. The list of approved and non-approved nominations will be circulated to the Heads of Department after each meeting.

Following approval of the nomination the Quality office complete the processes in GURU, set up the external examiner account creation and send the contract for electronic approval. Once the external examiner electronically accepts the contract in GURU the appointment process is complete.

A parallel process is completed where GURU is not available, the Quality Office sends a contract for acceptance to the external examiner and notifies the Head of Department when the signed copy is returned. Once the external examiner returns the signed contract the appointment process is complete. Administrative and finance information may be requested from the external examiner using the HR Commencement Form as required by HR and Finance.

#### 4.2.5 Timelines

The external examiner shall be appointed from the date of signing of the contract. The term of appointment commences on the 1<sup>st</sup> October and ends on the 30<sup>th</sup> September of the contracted period. Approval of external examiners by the Academic Standards and Policy

Committee shall take place throughout the year but no later than the last committee meeting of a given academic year for appointment for the following academic year.

#### 4.2.6 Duties of External Examiners on Taught Programmes

External Examiners should approach their responsibility with a view to ensuring that each students' performance is properly assessed regarding the award classification and that comparability of standards between third level institutions is achieved and maintained as far as possible. The external examiner shall be provided with the Approved Programme Specification and /or module descriptor(s) relevant to their appointment. External examiners may be appointed as a programme external examiner (preferred), or module/subject external examiner as determined by the needs of the university.

The duties of the external examiner are to:

- i. Review the drafts of all examination papers, marking schemes /sample solutions before the examination papers are printed and copied.
- ii. Review the drafts of coursework assessments (CA) briefs, marking schemes/ sample solutions before the CA are delivered. In modules with 100% CA at least one element should be reviewed. In all other modules, any individual CA component with a significant weighting of for example  $\geq 30\%$  should be reviewed.
- iii. To make such suggestions regarding deletions, additions and amendments as appropriate to draft examination papers and coursework assessments.
- iv. To communicate these suggestions to the internal Examiners within ten (10) working days following receipt of draft examination papers or coursework assessment through GURU or other means.
- v. Review a representative sample of scripts and assessment material to agree final student marks. The sample should include sufficient material to enable the external examiner to form a judgement on the reliability and consistency of marking and on all levels of classification. It should include borderline cases, fail grades and in particular examination material which has an impact on a student's final award and classification. e.g. projects, dissertations and practical work.
- vi. Review the class performance and agree marks for individual students by signing the grade summary documentation provided. The agreement of marks can be done in person or by remote communication.
- vii. External Examiners should focus primarily on the award year(s) of programmes.
- viii. Communicate with internal examiners and other external examiners where relevant to agree a consensus opinion on final grades.
- ix. The external examiner has the authority to recommend remarking of scripts where there is evidence the marking scheme was not adhered to. They have the authority



to meet with students on an assigned module (if desired) or to review the final exhibition of students work where this is a feature of the discipline. This should be arranged in consultation with the programme board and/or the Head of Department in good time to allow practical arrangements to be made.

- x. Propose changes to the marks awarded. If these proposals are challenged by the internal examiner/s then the final decision is taken by consensus of the Examination Board.
- xi. Attend at least one Examination Board meeting per year, as scheduled by the Academic calendar, this can be facilitated online and is normally at the main end of stage Examination Board Meeting. External examiners have the authority to give oral feedback on the process and their observations regarding the examinations and assessments at this meeting. The attendance of the examiner will be noted on the broadsheet of results, this indicates that the external examiner participated in the Examination Board as a member of the Board and conveys no further status on the significance of individual learner results.
- xii. An External Examiner may visit the ATU campus a maximum of once per academic year for the purposes of assessing the standard of the programme and /or the standard of the student performance. This visit will normally take place at the time of determination of final results, prior to, or in conjunction with the main end of stage Examination Board Meeting. For external examiners based outside the island of Ireland one visit per four year contract is allowed. For external examiners assigned modules across multiple campus locations, the visit will be rotated to attend one campus each year (see fees and payment section for additional detail).
- xiii. Carry out a re-marking of examination or assessment material if requested by the university to fulfil the requirements of the Examination Review procedure.
- xiv. Submit report(s) in the prescribed format after the summer examination board but no later than 31st July each year for each programme(s) or set of module(s)/ subject(s) reviewed.
- xv. Ensure the confidentiality of Examination Board Meetings, and all information and documentation pertaining to programmes of ATU

#### **4.2.7 Modification of Contracts**

The Head of Department has the discretion to add or delete modules from the list of approved modules for an external examiner or to change the relative mix of modules between external examiners on a programme within the period of the contract, subject to the agreement of the external examiner, and subject to staying within the criteria for nomination above. The changes may be made directly in GURU. This could include, for example, addition of a special purpose award. The addition of, for example, a separate

major award to a contract would require re-approval of the Academic Standards and Policy committee of Academic Council.

Any contracts that were issued by the legacy institutions prior to the implementation of an ATU procedure will remain in place under the same payment terms and conditions for the duration of the contract. The existing contract may be extended by completion of **AQAE014\_002 External Examiner Contract Extension Form** subject to meeting the criteria outlined above.

A parallel process is completed where GURU is not available, the existing contract may be extended or changes made to the modules or programmes by completion of **AQAE014\_002 External Examiner Contract Extension Form** subject to meeting the criteria outlined above. The completed form should be submitted to the Quality office for approval by the Academic Standards and Policy Committee.

#### 4.2.8 Training

Following appointment, the Quality Office shall ensure that the external examiner receives induction training and documentation to enable them to understand the examination and assessment processes. This is completed in the first semester of each academic year and includes but is not limited to:

- Quality assurance policies and procedures
- Academic and administrative structures and procedures
- Assessment and examination procedures and regulations
- Examination and award structures
- Applicable timelines for completion of duties

From time to time, ATU 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.

The faculty / department shall ensure that the external examiner receives information required to fulfil their duties such as:

- Approved programme schedule documentation
- Programme handbook
- List of key contacts on the programme
- Programme assessment strategy and any specific procedures in relation to the specific professional regulations or accreditation of the programme.
- Communicate changes to the programme following modifications or programmatic review

#### 4.2.9 External Examiner Report

Following the assessment/examinations, the external examiner should provide a report to the university by latest 31<sup>st</sup> July each year in a standard format provided by ATU.

The external examiner should provide a separate written report for each programme (or set of embedded programmes) that they are assigned. One report should be provided for each set of discipline related modules, if assigned on a subject basis. Each report should cover the work completed in both semesters.

A standard report template is provided in GURU and allows the report to provide details in the following areas:

- Summary of the dates of the review period and programme name(s).
- Details of dates, visits, meetings, interviews carried out.
- Participation in the assessment process.
- Programme outcomes, marking and structure.
- Positive features deserving of wider attention.
- Previous recommendations (if applicable).
- Recommendation for improvement.

The external examiner may, in addition, submit a written report to the Registrar/Head of Faculty on other matters as they deem appropriate, and may request that such matters be investigated by the university.

Once an external examiner report has been submitted in GURU an automatic notification is sent to the Head of Department and the Quality Office. Once reviewed the Head of Department can circulate the report to the Programme Chair (or nominee) within GURU. The report shall be scheduled for discussion and action at a Programme Board meeting.

Following discussion, the agreed response and actions arising from the report will be entered into GURU by the Programme Chair (or nominee) for return to the external examiner through GURU. The formal report and other informal feedback from the external examiner will also form part of the overall annual monitoring of each programme.

A parallel process is completed where GURU is not available, the Quality Office provides a template report form **AQAE014\_003 External Examiner Report – Taught Programmes**. The external examiner returns the completed form to the Quality Office for onward communication to the Head of Department. The feedback to the external examiner is returned by the department.

The external examiner is provided with a timely, considered response to their comments and recommendations, including information on any actions taken. This may include the

programme board response as detailed above or other actions arising from the report from the appropriate level e.g. Department, Faculty, Quality Office or Academic Council.

The response to the external examiner report should be completed by the 01<sup>st</sup> December annually.

### **4.3 Termination of contract**

If there is any breach by the external examiner of any of the terms and conditions of either contract or if at any time, in the opinion of the university, the external examiner shall fail to provide a satisfactory service, the ATU may terminate the agreement by giving the external examiner one month's notice in writing to that effect. Should it be necessary to terminate the contract, the Head of Department or Head of Faculty shall recommend termination of the contract to the Assistant Registrar with responsibility for external examiners, detailing the reasons for the proposed termination. The Assistant Registrar shall notify in writing an external examiner whose contract is being terminated and inform the Academic Standards and Policy Committee of Academic Council. Once notice has been given the ATU may pass the duties to another external examiner.

In other circumstances the agreement may be terminated with a minimum of three (3) months written notice for external examiners assigned to taught programmes. Such notice can be given by either party.

### **4.4 Communication and sharing of examination material**

All communications and examination material between ATU staff and external examiners should be stored securely and in compliance with data protection laws and regulations. Access to personnel information regarding the external examiners will be restricted to authorised personnel only.

Draft or final examination papers, model answers or solutions should ideally only be viewed and not downloaded or printed. If downloaded, they should not be left on any electronic device and should be deleted as soon as possible.

Examination material (including but not limited to exam papers, briefs, scripts, student grade summaries) may be viewed in person, sent by registered mail or shared by secure electronic means. Secure electronic means includes for example the use of HEAnet file sender, access to Moodle or Blackboard, use of Sharepoint, One drive or as recommended by IT Services from time to time. Examination material should not be shared by email.

External Examiners shall treat all material and documents pertaining to programmes at ATU and the communication of information to and from the university confidentially. Any possible breaches of confidentiality or exam material security should be reported immediately to an ATU staff member.

All documentation in the examination process is accessible under the Freedom of Information Acts. Accordingly, we recommend that, following the completion of examination duties, the examiner shall destroy / delete or return all correspondence, documentation or copies of examination materials associated with the examination in their possession.

#### **4.5 Fees and payments**

The payment of fees and any travel expenses is conditional on the submission of a full report.

In the case of external examiners based on the island of Ireland, the costs of one visit per academic year is covered by the Quality Office. Any additional visits at the invitation of the department, are at the discretion of the department who must also cover the costs of travel and subsistence claims for such visits. Following Revenue advice, External Examiners are treated as employees of the university and therefore fee payments are chargeable to tax under what is known as Schedule E, and subject to deductions (i.e. tax, PRSI and the Health Contribution as appropriate) at source under the PAYE system.

For external examiners based outside the island of Ireland one visit per four-year contract (taught programmes) for will be covered by the Quality Office. Additional visits may be covered with advance permission of the VP of Academic Affairs and Registrar.

For external examiners assigned modules across multiple campus locations, the visit should be rotated to attend a different campus each year. The Quality Office will cover the cost of one visit per year in total.

Where the university requests an external examiner to make more than one visit in any academic year this does not affect the annual fee.

Travel and subsistence rates are paid in accordance with the rates set by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and in place at the time of travel.

Any contracts that were issued by the legacy institutions prior to the Academic year 2023-2024 will remain in place under the same payment terms and conditions for the duration of the contract.

External Examiner fees for contracts commencing in the academic year for 2023 - 2024 for taught programmes are as follows:

### Annual External Examiner fee for taught programmes

External examiner for Undergraduate Programmes / Modules	€125
External Examiners for Postgraduate Programmes / Modules (minimum of 30 ECTS)	€250
Payment per module irrespective of ECTS	€25

## 5. Associated Documents Generated by this Procedure

AQAE014\_001 External Examiner Nomination Form

AQAE014\_002 External Examiners Contract Extension Form

AQAE014\_003 External Examiner Report Taught Programme

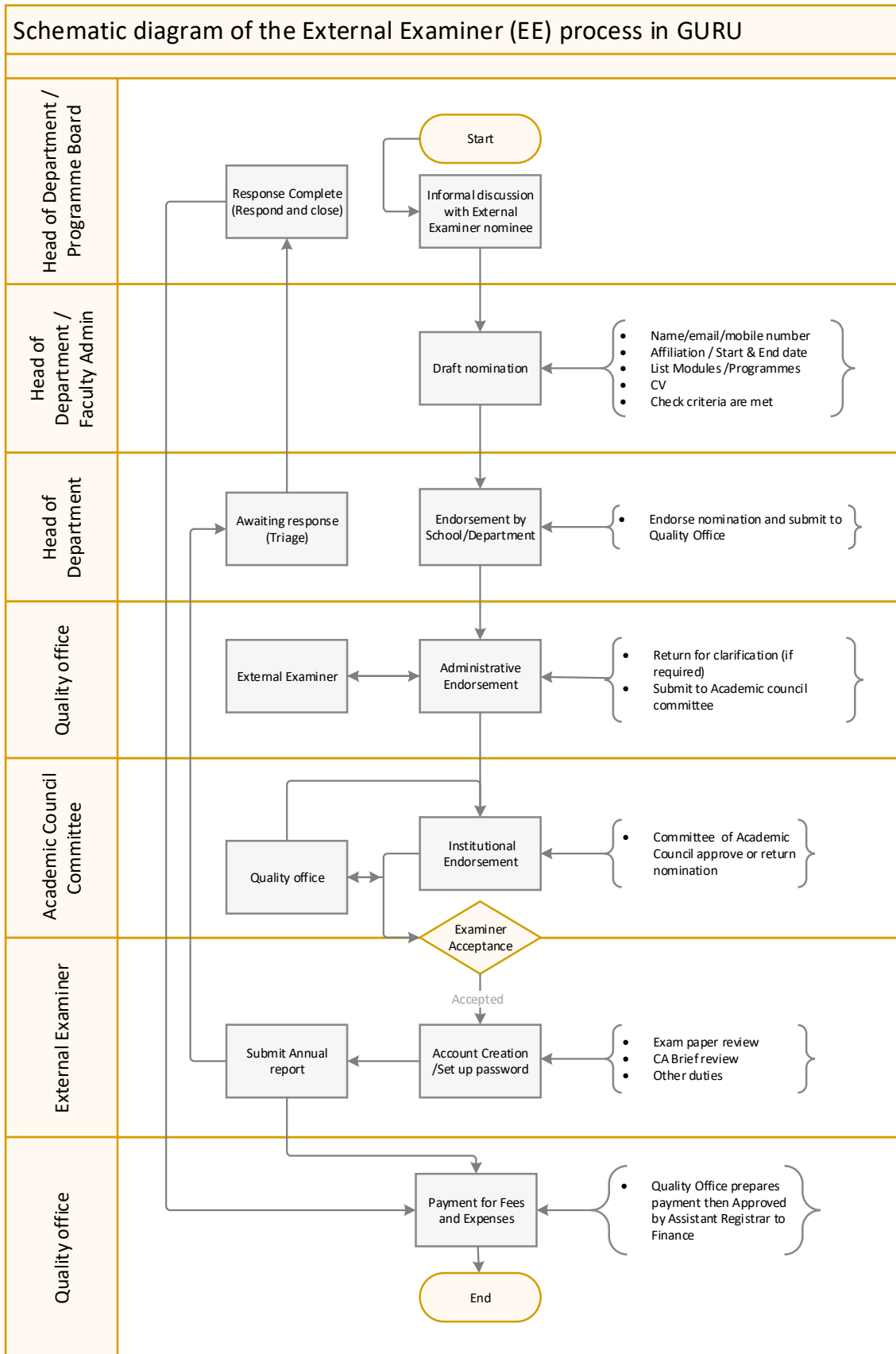
## 6. Measurement of Effectiveness of this Procedure

External examiner reports are securely retained in accordance with the ATU Records Retention policy.

## 7. Revision History

Revision No	Description of Change	Approval Date
000	New ATU Procedure. Approved by Academic Standards and Policy committee of Academic council	28/11/2023
001	Addition of additional information for EE on confidentiality and security in handling examination material. Approved Academic Standards and Policy Committee.	10/04/2024

**Appendix 1 Schematic diagram of External Examiner (EE) process in GURU**



**Appendix 2 Sample External Examiner Contract Taught Programmes.****Contract for the provision of an external examiner service to the Atlantic Technological University.**

Atlantic Technological University [Donegal/Sligo/Galway Mayo] wishes to enter into an agreement for use of your services as an external examiner for the university's academic programmes.

You have been approved by the university to act as external examiner on the attached list of programmes / Modules.

[ Attach list of modules and programmes]

1. The term of your appointment is for a maximum of four years [Insert start and end dates]
2. This is not a contract of employment – rather it is a contract of services. You will be paid in accordance with the schedule of fees set out below. In addition you will be eligible to claim for travel and subsistence expenses incurred while providing the service using the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform rates applicable from time to time. Public transport should be used where possible.
3. Fees and expenses are paid annually, after the annual report has been received. The external examiner Report should be submitted by latest 31<sup>st</sup> July each year.
4. Fees will be paid once per academic year in November.
5. Travel and Subsistence claims should be submitted as soon as possible after travel but no later than the end of September of each academic year to ensure payment. Please note that the final decision as to what constitutes a legitimate expense rests with the VP of Finance for the university.
6. External Examiners resident in Ireland may visit the university once in each academic year, however responsibilities may be discharged remotely.
7. External Examiners resident abroad may visit the university once in the duration of the contract. Additional visits may be allowed subject to advance permission of the VP Academic Affairs and Registrar. Responsibilities may be discharged remotely.
8. Module lists may be subject to small changes in the assigned modules and/or programmes during the duration of the contract.
9. The external examiner shall at all times, during the operation of their contract, observe and comply in all respects with the requirements for external examiners as determined by ATU's Academic Council Policies and Procedures in place from time to time. ATU may at any time establish or modify rules and regulations for the operation of this contract.
10. The external examiner shall operate under this contract in a manner consistent with the policies of ATU and good practice.
11. Outline duties of an external examiner are provided in the ATU Procedure for External Examination document which will be provided to you and further details will be advised to



you in due course by the department to which you are appointed. External Examiners may also be consulted about relevant matters in respect of Examination Procedures.

12. External Examiners must inform the Assistant Registrar in ATU of any potential conflict of interest that might arise during their term of appointment. A conflict of interest may include but is not limited to: family connection with any examination candidate; financial dealings with any examination candidate or their families.
13. It is the responsibility of the external examiner to ensure that all returns are made to Revenue at the required time. All external Examiners must supply their PPSN/Tax Reference Number and administrative details to ensure payment.
14. 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 ATU, the external examiner fails to provide a satisfactory service, ATU may terminate the agreement by giving the examiner one month's notice in writing to that effect. Once notice has been given, the University may allocate the duties to another external examiner.
15. In other circumstances, the agreement may be terminated with a minimum of three months' notice in writing by either party.
16. Documentation associated with the examination process is accessible under Freedom of Information regulations. We would recommend that on completion of an examination session you should return to the appropriate Head of Faculty in the university all correspondence and documentation associated with the examinations that is in your possession.

I understand and agree to the above conditions and agree to undertake the duties of external examiner in ATU.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Address for  
correspondence: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile No. \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return a signed copy of this contract to:

[Insert name and address of relevant person]

Schedule of Fee's:

[Insert current schedule of fees]

Schedule of Travel and Subsistence

[Insert current Department of Finance Motor and Subsistence Rates]