

# QUALITY ASSURANCE HANDBOOK

2023 Edition – Part B

Section 6: Examination Boards & Award Classifications

2023

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## Exams and Awards

*External examining is a quality assurance mechanism employed by providers that supports public confidence in academic qualifications.*

[...]

*Public confidence rests on its belief that graduates have been objectively judged to have reached the standard that is certified by their qualification (award) in the context of the National Framework of Qualifications.*

QQI (2015)<sup>1</sup>

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This section of the *Quality Assurance Handbook* lays out the policies relating to confirmation of learners' final awards through Exam Boards. This includes monitoring by External Examiners, the running of Exam Boards, and regulations regarding award classifications.

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<sup>1</sup> QQI (2015) *Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining*, Section 1.1,

<https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Effective%20Practice%20Guidelines%20for%20External%20Examining%20Revised%20February%202015.pdf>

## 6.1 External Monitoring of Programmes Policy

<b>Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) Part B</b>	
	
<b>Document Name</b>	External Monitoring of Programmes Policy
<b>Policy Document Number</b>	026
<b>Version Reference</b>	v2.1
<b>Document Owner</b>	Exams Manager
<b>Roles with Aligned Responsibility</b>	Registrar, QA Officer, Heads of Department
<b>Applicability</b>	All programmes: NFQ L6–9, Study Abroad modules from NFQ programmes, Professional Programmes, Kaplan Professional Awards (English RFQ)
<b>Approved by</b>	Academic Board & QQI
<b>Approval date</b>	23/07/19, v2.1 02/03/2023
<b>Date Policy Becomes Active</b>	18/09/19
<b>Revision Cycle</b>	A minimum of every five years
<b>Revision History/ Amalgamation History</b>	N/A
<b>Additional Information</b>	Active date will be following approval by QQI
<b>References/ Supporting Documentation</b>	QQI (2015) <i>Effective Practice Guideline for External Examining, Revised 2015</i> . <sup>2</sup>

### 6.1.1 Policy Overview

This policy concerns the mechanism that provides independent monitoring of DBS learner assessment processes through External Examinership of modules and programmes.

External Examiner review and reporting are considered a vital element of peer judgement in monitoring the quality and standard of each programme.

This policy covers all external examining activity on frameworks aligned with the European Qualifications Framework (EFQ). In DBS, this predominantly relates to programmes accredited by Quality and Qualifications Ireland on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), but also applies to awards on the English Regulated Framework of Qualifications (RFQ) and may apply to other professional programmes on a case-by-case basis.

<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Effective%20Practice%20Guidelines%20for%20External%20Examining%20Revised%20February%202015.pdf>

### 6.1.2 Policy Statement

Monitoring by External Examiners is a requirement in assuring the quality and standard of each programme in DBS. External Examiners for QQI programmes are appointed by DBS under the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*.

The External Examiner is an independent expert and a member of the broader community of practice within the programme discipline. External Examiners should be individuals of high-standing with significant experience in their area, and are typically academics with experience of internal examining and assessment and an active research profile. Individuals with significant industry experience may be appointed where appropriate for a particular programme or module.

There is a requirement for a minimum of one independent External Examiner appointed to each accredited programme. Multiple External Examiners will be appointed on a programme where required to ensure a manageable workload is maintained, and also to provide sufficient coverage and expertise across modules. Typically, a major award will have more than one External Examiner assigned.

All candidates must be approved through the formal Academic Appointments Sub-Committee (AASC) mechanism (see below).

External Examiner tenure is for three years from the date of appointment.

The Register of External Examiners is maintained by the Quality Assurance Officer.

Criteria for appointment of External Examiners are set out in Section 6.1.4 below.

The College appreciates the desirability of gender balance when nominating teams of External Examiners.

The AASC is responsible for resolving conflicts of interest in the appointment of External Examiners.

Feedback from External Examiners should be treated as conditional unless there is additional information or considerations which the Extern may not be aware of which preclude interventions or changes. This should be communicated, respectfully, to Externs in response to feedback.

Notwithstanding this, where requirements or recommendations arising from External Examiner monitoring relate to institutional or sectoral level policy, it is recognised that the scope to make changes may be limited. Proposed policy changes must be escalated to the Registrar's Office for review.

### 6.1.3 Process for the Appointment of an External Examiner

The Quality Assurance Officer maintains the register of External Examiners and will issue reminders to programme teams when an appointment is due to expire.

Academic Directors, or their nominee within a programme team, are required to proactively identify proposed new External Examiners and initiate contact to establish their interest and availability in the first instance. Where the proposed candidate is in agreement, the nominating Academic Director completes the form '*Application for Appointment of New External Examiner*', which is accompanied by the candidate's Curriculum Vitae. This nomination is then reviewed by the Academic Appointments Sub-Committee (AASC) on behalf of the Academic Board. Conditions imposed by professional bodies, such as The Honourable Society of King's Inns, must also be met where required.

Candidates not approved by the AASC cannot be progressed to be appointed as External Examiners.

If approved by the AASC, a formal communication is issued by the Quality Assurance Officer confirming their appointment as an External Examiner for a particular programme/modules.

The External Examiners are supplied with an External Examiners' Induction Pack and invited to an induction process where details are provided of the relevant programmes (such as module descriptors, assessment criteria and assessment regulations, etc.). External Examiners will be notified of dates for terms, semesters and academic years, and the customary timing of External Examiner activities in the DBS context, as well as the terms and conditions of appointment. A formal contract of appointment is issued and completed by the candidate.

### 6.1.4 Criteria for the Appointment of an External Examiner

The following criteria are adopted by the Academic Board for consideration during the appointment of proposed External Examiners:

- Each External Examiner's academic qualifications should be appropriate in level and subject for examining the programme(s) to which they are appointed, i.e. the examiner should hold a qualification in the subject area (or a closely related area) at a level on the NFQ at least equal to the programme being examined.
- Each External Examiner's standing, expertise and experience should be such as to enable fulfilment of his/her responsibility in the maintenance of the academic standards of the programme(s) in the context of higher education both nationally and internationally.

- External Examiners should be drawn from academic life and where appropriate, from business, industry and professional practice. Standing, expertise and breadth of experience may be indicated by:
  - The present (or last, if retired) post and place of work.
  - The range and scope of experience across higher education/professions.
  - Their current and/or recent active involvement in research/scholarly/professional activities in their relevant field of study.

There must be an appropriate balance and expertise within the team of External Examiners. The proposed External Examiner should complement the existing external examining team in terms of expertise and examining experience. Where possible, a considered balance between academic and professional practitioners should be employed.

If the proposed examiner has no previous External Examiner experience at the appropriate level, their nomination can be supported by either:

- Other external examining experience
- Extensive internal examining experience
- Other relevant and recent experience likely to support the External Examiner role

However, consideration is given in those exceptional situations where the pool of potential External Examiners is especially limited. This is most likely where provision of the subject is particularly limited within the sector. Every effort is made to mentor proposed External Examiners without prior experience. Where possible, they would join an experienced team of External Examiners or, where there is only one Examiner, they should initially work alongside an experienced currently appointed External, on a related programme.

#### **6.1.4.1 Exclusions with Respect to External Examiner Appointments**

- External Examiners should not be appointed from a department in an institution where a DBS staff member is currently acting as an External Examiner; i.e. reciprocal external examining is not permitted, in order to preserve the independence of the External Examiner.
- External Examiners from a variety of institutions should be appointed, and multiple nominations from the same institution within a single discipline should be avoided. For any one programme, External Examiners should not be appointed consecutively from the same institution.
- External Examiners should not be over-extended in their external examining duties. As a norm, an External Examiner should not hold more than two concurrent external examining

appointments for taught programmes. This policy can only be waived in exceptional circumstances.

- Former members of DBS staff should not be appointed as External Examiners for at least three years from the end of their employment with DBS.
- Learners registered on a programme with the College are ineligible for appointment as DBS External Examiners.

It is the responsibility of the External Examiner to declare an interest if placed in a position of making a judgement about any learner with whom there has been direct contact, such as:

- As a sponsor, relative or friend.
- As a close professional colleague.
- Having been involved with the supervision of the learner on placement or professional training.

#### 6.1.5 Communication with External Examiners

Communication with External Examiners takes place in a number of contexts throughout each academic year. The principal points of contact with the External Examiners throughout the year are:

- Review of proposed examination papers and marking schemes (supplied to the External Examiner by the Examinations Office).
- Review of a sample of learners' continuous assessments and examination scripts, marks and examiners' reports (supplied to the External Examiner by the Examinations Office).
- Attendance and participation in Examination Boards (invitation to attend is conveyed to the External Examiner by the Examinations Office).
- Input into programme design, development and review, upon request of the Academic Director.
- Discussion regarding the generation of the end of year report.

Briefing sessions for External Examiners are held periodically. These sessions cover the relevant procedures and documentation and seek to ensure that there is a common understanding between DBS and the External Examiners of all requirements and responsibilities.

In addition to their role as external moderators of module assessments, External Examiners are seen as a most valuable resource for strengthening the College's academic development. It is DBS policy and practice to invite External Examiners to input into the design and development of new programmes, and input on the periodic review of existing programmes.



### 6.1.6 External Examiner's Report

The end of year report by each External Examiner is an important document in the broad context of academic quality management. Each External Examiner is asked to comment on a number of academic matters including:

- Academic standards
- Assessment processes and documentation
- Effectiveness of approaches to teaching and learning
- Operation of Examination Boards
- Distinctive strengths and innovative features
- Institutional issues

The External Examiner reports are reviewed by the Academic Dean in conjunction with the relevant examiners and the Exams Manager. Any issues raised by the External Examiner are carefully considered and acted upon as appropriate. Any cross-departmental issues are progressed through the Academic Dean and a summary of issues raised with good practice commended is presented at the appropriate sub-committee of the Academic Board.

A formal response to each External Examiner's report is prepared by the Academic Director and approved by the Academic Dean, within four weeks of receipt of the final report.

It is the responsibility of the Exams Manager to ensure that all External Examiner reports are received and duly responded to. Issues highlighted and appropriate actions are detailed in the relevant Board of Studies and Annual Reports. This information also feeds into the programme development and review process.

## 6.2 Examination Boards Policy

Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) Part B	
<b>Document Name</b>	Examination Boards Policy
<b>Policy Document Number</b>	028
<b>Version Reference</b>	v2.0
<b>Document Owner</b>	Exams Manager
<b>Roles with Aligned Responsibility</b>	Registrar, Assistant Registrar, QA Officer, Academic Dean, Heads of Department, Academic Directors
<b>Applicability</b>	All programmes: NFQ L6–9, Study Abroad modules from NFQ programmes, Professional Programmes, Kaplan Professional Awards (English RFQ
<b>Approved by</b>	Academic Board & QQI
<b>Approval date</b>	23/07/19
<b>Date Policy Becomes Active</b>	18/09/19
<b>Revision Cycle</b>	A minimum of every five years
<b>Revision History/ Amalgamation History</b>	N/A
<b>Additional Information</b>	Active date will be following approval by QQI
<b>References/ Supporting Documentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ENQA (2015) <i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area</i>, Section 1.3 'Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment'.<sup>3</sup></li> <li>QQI (2022) <i>Assessment and Standards, Revised 2022</i>, Part 2 'Foundations'.<sup>4</sup></li> <li>QQI (2015) <i>Effective Practice Guideline for External Examining, Revised 2015</i>.<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>

### 6.2.1 Policy Overview

The Board of Examiners (Examination Board) is responsible for the monitoring and moderation of the assessment process, for determining learner progression and for recommending the conferment of awards to the Academic Board. Examination Boards are one of the most important mechanisms in the academic governance of the College and this must be recognised and proceedings conducted stringently and in line with policy at all times.

This policy sets out practices by which the Board can safeguard the probity, consistency and the authority of decisions.

Academic staff members of the Board should raise any questions concerning programme assessment regulations at Programme Board or Boards of Studies meetings. It should be noted that Examination

<sup>3</sup> [https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG\\_2015.pdf](https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2022-09/assessment\\_and\\_standards-revised-2022.pdf](https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2022-09/assessment_and_standards-revised-2022.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Effective%20Practice%20Guidelines%20for%20External%20Examining%20Revised%20February%202015.pdf>

Boards make judgements/decisions based on existing regulations and are not themselves fora for discussion of regulations.

### 6.2.2 Policy Statement

The remit of Examination Boards is overseen by the Academic Board. The Examinations Office will make copies of the current programme assessment regulations available to all members of the Board and a link to all regulations should be maintained on the web page of the Examinations Office.

- Each Examination Board shall meet at set times in order to fulfil its obligations under the scheme of assessment defined in the Approved Programme Schedule and Module Documentation.
- An Examination Board is associated with each stage of a programme or applicable examination cycle or at any other juncture as required by a programme structure to allow timely review of learner's grades and facilitate progression.
- DBS operates a two-phase Examination Board structure comprised of Internal and External Examination Boards, whereby the Internal Board is a formal meeting attended by all relevant internal staff and the External Board is a formal meeting attended by internal staff and External Examiners.
- Academic staff members who teach and assess a module or modules on programmes, the marks of which are before a Board, are termed Internal Examiners and are ex officio members of the corresponding Board.
- External Examiners, as approved by the Academic Board, are members of Examination Boards.
- An Examination Board makes recommendations to the Academic Board for the ratification of the results for each stage of a programme, including the final award classification.
- Where an outcome for a student cannot be determined in an Examination Board, follow up is required via a Chair's Action for ratification at the next scheduled Examination Board.
- Marks cannot be confirmed outside of the Examination Board process.
- Provisional marks may be released to students prior to confirmation via Examination Boards and in keeping with requirements for timely feedback to learners, but learners must be clearly advised that grades are subject to approval and ratification.
- Where marks are not available in a timely manner or Board Reports are incomplete, the Chair of the Examinations Board is required to postpone the review of an individual module or, in extreme cases, an entire Examination Board. Where this occurs, this must be reported to the relevant External Examiner(s), Academic Board and Senior Leadership Team.

All Internal Examiners are required to:

- Ensure marks for which they are responsible are complete, moderated and entered into the system via Moodle in a timely manner in adherence with deadlines in advance to Examinations Boards.
- Attend any internal review meeting convened for the purpose of internal review of examination activity and to check documentation.
- Attend the relevant Examination Board at which the results of candidates are formally decided.
- Explain and defend their marking as required and contribute to the decision-making of the Examinations Board through informed discussion.

### 6.2.3 Composition of Examination Boards

An Examination Board shall be established by the Examinations Office for each programme for which DBS has responsibility for the examination of learners. The composition of the Examination Board shall be in accordance with the requirements of the awarding body and DBS procedures. Current regulations of validating bodies shall be used in conjunction with these procedures where appropriate.

The number and composition of individual Examination Boards varies depending on the nature of the academic programme(s) presented for each Board. The generic *ex officio* composition for an Examination Board for taught academic programmes is:

- Chair as appointed by the Registrar's Office
- Academic Dean or nominee
- Academic Director for each programme presented at the Board
- External Examiners relevant to the programmes (as approved by the Academic Board)
- Internal examiners contributing marks to the Board
- Placement Coordinators (where appropriate)
- Secretary to the Board

The Chair and Secretary of each Board is appointed by the Registrar's Office. The quorum for a Board normally consists of the Chair, the Academic Dean, the Secretary, at least one External Examiner and a sufficient number of Internal Examiners to competently deliberate on the assessment. All present must sign the attendance sheet, which is generated by the Examinations Team. No learner may be a member of a Board nor can they attend examiners' meetings. An exception will also arise where a

member of academic staff or an approved External Examiner is registered as a learner on another unrelated programme, within the College, and that unrelated programme is not for consideration at that Board meeting.

The Chair is tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that at least one member of academic staff representing every module on the programme is present at an Examination Board, such that the interests of all learners are properly addressed. At meetings to determine learner progression on the programme only, at least one External Examiner is normally required to be present. At meetings to determine or recommend academic awards, all External Examiners appointed to the relevant programmes are normally required to be present.

## 6.2.4 Conduct of Examination Boards

### 6.2.4.1 Preparatory Discipline Area Boards

Examination Boards can conduct their business effectively if all the necessary information is clearly presented. To ensure preparedness, the convening of an Internal Grade Review Board is the responsibility of each academic discipline area under the Academic Directors. The pre-meeting involves the majority of internal examiners. Its aim is to:

- Ensure that the marks to be presented to the Examination Board are complete and accurate.
- Formulate recommendations to the Examination Board and to identify particular areas where the advice of externals is needed.
- Identify any further information needed by the Examination Board e.g. evidence of PMCs, or outcomes of Academic Impropriety, including invigilators reports.
- Collate reports of supervised work experience (where appropriate).

The Internal Grade Review Board cannot compel an assessor to review their assessment findings or change a mark. Minutes are recorded at the meeting but are not presented to the Examination Board. The results of the meeting ensures complete and accurate information for presentation to the Examination Board.

### 6.2.4.2 Remit of Internal and External Examination Boards

The remit of Internal and External Examination Boards is the review and approval of learner grades in line with approved policy and assuring adherence to all quality assurance processes. As above, where marks are not available in a timely manner or Board Reports are incomplete, the Chair of the Examinations Board is required to postpone the review of an individual module or, in extreme cases, an entire Examination Board. Where this occurs, this must be reported to the relevant External

Examiner(s), Academic Board and Senior Leadership Team. This is considered a serious matter and the Extraordinary Exam Board Policy should be invoked.

The following procedures should therefore be observed:

- The Chair of the Examination Board should give a short verbal overview of the key regulations at the commencement of each Board meeting and ensure members of the Board are aware of any changes or updates to the regulations.
- Marks will then be presented to the Examination Board using the DBS Exam Board Reports (Broadsheets<sup>6</sup>).
- It is a requirement that all grades and learner information is complete and presented to both Internal and External Examination Boards. It is expected that the Internal Examination Board will reflect discussion around learner profiles and provide an opportunity to address any issues. Following due diligence at the Internal Examination Board, it is expected that no new issues arise at the External Examination Board, unless raised by an External Examiner.
- In exceptional circumstances, it may be deemed necessary to make global changes to marks. This may be achieved in consultation with the Exams Manager, the Registrar, and with the specific approval of the External Examiner(s) and of the Examination Board. In such circumstances, it is necessary to present both the original and the 'normalised' marks to the Examination Board.
- Claims of failure or under-performance due to personal mitigating circumstances (PMCs) should normally only be considered if the procedures for dealing with PMCs have been applied.

The Internal Module Board is the responsibility of the School and is usually chaired by the Academic Dean. The pre-meeting involves the majority of internal examiners. Its aim is to:

#### 6.2.4.3 Exam Board Process

- The responsibility of an Examination Board is to review the marks presented to the Board and make recommendations as to the overall result for each candidate.
- The proceedings and deliberations of the Examination Boards are strictly confidential.
- The External Examiners are appointed in accordance with this policy.

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<sup>6</sup> *QQI Assessment and Standards, Revised 2022*, defines Broadsheets as 'a formatted Microsoft Excel spreadsheet produced by QQI for each programme to facilitate the recording of results by the provider'. In fact DBS generates its own Broadsheets. They are referred to internally as Exam Board Reports.

- The Quality Assurance Officer, following consultation with the Exams Manager, provides the timings of Examination Boards to academic faculty.
- The Examination's Office staff make all arrangements for the accommodation of the Board with the DBS Facilities Department.
- The Examination Board should agree the marks for each module for each learner, including the breakdown of examination and continuous assessment, and have due regard to award classifications in considering the overall result for a learner. In discharging this responsibility, the Examination Board may exercise discretion in marginal cases by minor modification of borderline module grades, i.e. a 39, 49, 59 and 69 or for overarching award classifications within 1% of a classification boundary.
- Individual learner marks should not normally be changed without consulting the Examiner(s) who awarded the original mark. It follows that the Board does not normally change a mark without the relevant Internal Examiner being present. However, if a relevant Internal Examiner's other obligations prevent him/her from attending the Board, he/she may be consulted in advance about the potential for moderating the mark. Pre-meetings are a useful vehicle for such consultation.
- Changes to marks by an Examination Board otherwise should only be permitted if:
  - A clerical or administrative error in transmission of marks has occurred.
  - A late change to a mark is recommended by an External Examiner.
- In both instances the change should be submitted with explanation to the Examination Board. The resulting adjustment of marks should be made before the results are otherwise considered by the Board.
- To confirm the result/award being made by the Examination Board, the Chair reads out the decision that the Board has adopted immediately after and in respect of each individual case. The Secretary may also be required to read back to the Board the recorded decision.
- A copy of the Board attendance sheets is signed by the Chair of the Examination Board, the Internal Examiner(s) and, when present, by the External Examiner(s). This serves as evidence that all members of the Board were in agreement with any and all decision(s) taken.
- Where the Examination Board is unable to reach a consensus with regard to a learner's mark, progression or award, the Chair of the Board, with the agreement of the External Examiners, may wish to decide the result. If any member of the Board wishes to dissent from the decision of the Board, it should be recorded in the minutes.
- The minutes of the Examination Board Meeting should be concise. Discussion relating to individual learners should be recorded only in 'borderline' cases. PMCs should be recorded

but detailed information on individual learner circumstances should never be included. Any discussion relating to individuals clearly passing, failing or being referred should not be recorded. The results list should be regarded as the primary record of the meeting. Any general comments made by the External Examiner(s) about the examinations should be recorded, but the External Examiner's written report should be regarded as the definitive document.


- In order to ensure that the recorded decisions of the Board are unambiguous, the minutes should follow the terminology conventions set out by the relevant awarding body.
- An attendance sheet is provided by the Examinations Office to record attendances/apologies at an Examination Board Meeting.

### 6.2.5 Actions Following the Examination Board

- In addition to maintaining formal records, consisting of minutes of Examination Boards and the results lists, the Examinations Team arranges for any agreed changes of marks arising from the External Examinations Board to be input into the Student Information System. These final marks or grades are available to the individual learner, as a transcript and upon request.
- The overall module grades or award classifications are not be released to a third party except on the written request of a learner (e.g. applying for exemption from further professional examinations or seeking to enter another educational establishment).
- Results are released online on a specified date, which is decided and notified by the Examinations Office.
  - **Provisional continuous assessment marks may be released to students prior to confirmation via Examination Boards and in keeping with requirements for timely feedback to learners, but learners must be clearly advised that grades are subject to approval and ratification.**
- The Examinations Office files the original results list, signed by the Chair, as the official record in the Examinations Team archive.
- Transcripts of Award Stage results are sent to learners by post usually within seven days of the release of results on the DBS website.
- Following the meeting of the Examination Board, the Examinations Office/Programme Coordinator produces minutes of the meeting for review and agreement by the Chair of the Examination Board. The master is filed as the official record in the Examinations Office.



## 6.3 Progression and Classification of Awards

<b>Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) Part B</b> 	
<b>Document Name</b>	Progression and Classification of Awards Policy
<b>Policy Document Number</b>	045
<b>Version Reference</b>	V2.1
<b>Document Owner</b>	Exams Manager
<b>Roles with Aligned Responsibility</b>	Registrar, Assistant Registrar, QA Officer, Exams Officers, Academic Dean, Heads of Department, Academic Directors
<b>Applicability</b>	All programmes: NFQ L6–9, Study Abroad modules from NFQ programmes, Professional Programmes, Kaplan Professional Awards (English RFQ
<b>Approved by</b>	Academic Board & QQI
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<b>Additional Information</b>	Active date will be following approval by QQI
<b>References/ Supporting Documentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ENQA (2015) <i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area</i>, Section 1.3 'Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment'.<sup>7</sup></li> <li>• QQI (2022) <i>Assessment and Standards, Revised 2022</i>, Part 2 'Foundations'.<sup>8</sup></li> <li>• QQI (2015) <i>Effective Practice Guideline for External Examining, Revised 2015</i>.<sup>9</sup></li> </ul>

### 6.3.1 Policy Overview

This policy sets out the mechanisms by which learners progress through their programmes of study to achievement of their final award.

### 6.3.2 Policy Statement

Learners must complete all modules on a programme in accordance with the validated programme schedule and timeframe approved for full time or part time as applicable.

The validated programme timeframe for a Level 8 honours degree is normally 3 years full-time or 4 years part-time. Some honours degree programmes are delivered over 4 years full-time.

<sup>7</sup> [https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG\\_2015.pdf](https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2022-09/assessment\\_and\\_standards-revised-2022.pdf](https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2022-09/assessment_and_standards-revised-2022.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>

<https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Effective%20Practice%20Guidelines%20for%20External%20Examining%20Revised%20February%202015.pdf>

The validated timeframe for a taught Master's degree is normally 1 year full-time and 2 years part-time.

The programme timeframes for all DBS programmes leading to a QQI award are communicated to potential learners in advance of their application and again at the outset of their studies.

DBS recognises that circumstances may arise that prevent a learner from completing in the specified timeframe. Such circumstances include, for example, assessment failure and repeat assessment requirements, PMCs preventing completion of assessments, or circumstances warranting deferral. In each of these situations there are time-limited arrangements in place to assist a learner in satisfying their responsibilities and the course requirements.

Maximum programme durations are calculated on the basis of the normal programme duration (full-time or part-time) plus the maximum number of permitted deferrals. As a guide this means that:

- The maximum duration allowed for a 180 ECTS undergraduate honours degree is 8 years.
- The maximum duration allowed for a 240 ECTS undergraduate honours degree is 10 years.
- The maximum duration allowed for a 60 ECTS Higher Diploma degree is 5 years.
- The maximum duration allowed for a 90 ECTS Masters degree is 5 years.

However, in all cases, to ensure coherence and integrity of the final award, learners will be expected to make reasonable progress over the course of their award. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis but as a guide it would be considered that a learner achieving less than 15 ECTS in an academic year is not considered to be making sufficient progress to ensure the academic viability of the award.

Where a learner, based on ECTS or modules completed, is deemed to be at risk of falling outside the maximum programme duration or the coherence of the programme of studies is in jeopardy, this will be referred to the Registrar's Office for review.

Where a learner is unable to complete a programme within the fixed time period set for deferrals or repeat opportunities, the learner will be withdrawn from the programme, and a transcript of results for all successfully completed modules will be issued.

Where a learner who has previously been withdrawn wishes to return to DBS to complete their programme of study they are required to apply through the standard admissions process and seek exemptions for successfully completed modules that are still valid for the programme they wish to undertake. Exemptions will only be granted in accordance with the DBS exemptions policy.

Where a learner has been withdrawn as a result of failure within the maximum permitted assessment opportunities, they will not normally be permitted to return to the programme or a programme of equivalent or higher NFQ level.

### 6.3.3 Undergraduate Programmes

#### **Progression**

A pass in a module is a positive statement of achievement, and a demonstration that the minimum intended learning outcomes have been met. A learner cannot repeat a module that has already been passed. Likewise, no individual component that has been passed can be retaken for the purpose of improving the overall performance in the module.

To progress from Stage 1 to Stage 2, or Stage 2 to Stage 3, (or in the cases where this applies, Stage 3 to Stage 4) the learner is normally required to pass all mandatory modules, and the prescribed number of elective modules as outlined in the Approved Programme Schedule for the preceding stage.

The minimum mark required to pass a module is 40%. The mark for a module is the total, or average of, marks awarded for the individual assessment components. No individual component needs to be passed unless it is prescribed in the Approved Programme Schedule as a special regulation such as the requirement for a professional body.

#### **Pass by Compensation**

At undergraduate level, a learner who fails to achieve a pass mark in a module may be awarded a Pass by Compensation, provided that a Pass by Compensation is not precluded in the Approved Programme Schedule and that:

- The mark falls within the 35–39% band for that module.
- The learner has attained marks in excess of 40% in at least one other subject equivalent to double the deficiency in the subject which is being compensated.
- All modules at the stage are passed as first attempts.
- No module at the stage has been failed outright (<35%).

Pass by Compensation can be applied to a maximum of one third of the stage, 20 credits of a 60-credit stage or 10 credits of a 30-credit stage, and then only where a learner has taken all modules at that stage.

When Pass by Compensation has been awarded, the numeric result obtained will remain on the transcript and Diploma Supplement for award calculations, but the transcript and Diploma Supplement will indicate a 'Pass by Compensation'.

Where all of the modules in a stage are not taken at one sitting, the learner may be counselled to resit the failed module or component of that module.

A learner is exempt from further examination in each module in which a pass has been awarded.

Notwithstanding, a learner who with the agreement of the Examination Board, is to resit a full year of study, other than the final year, may do so for the actual marks attained provided that at the outset s/he agrees formally to relinquish his/her previous marks in full.

Where a learner fails a module they have the option to:

- Resit the failed component(s); or
- Substitute an alternative module, where the failed module is an elective on the programme.

### **Resit**

The Examination Board will allow a maximum of three resit opportunities to recover a failed module, subject to the validated regulations of the programme.

Failure to avail of an assessment opportunity is considered an attempt for the purpose of entitlement to resists.

The nature of the reassessment, either examination or continuous assessment (CA), or both, should be agreed at the Examination Board.

Where both the examination and any applicable individual CA elements are failed, all failed elements should be offered to the learner for reassessment. A learner has the right to choose not resit all components and attempt to pass the module using a combination of re-assessment and original attempts to achieve a pass mark. However, they are considered to have been offered a repeat opportunity for all components.

The mark/grades for any components passed will be carried forward for the purposes of calculating the overall mark/grade for a module where the learner failed to meet the minimum standard at the initial attempt. Where a combination of passed components and failed components result in an overall pass for the module, the failed components will also be carried forward. Those components that have been passed cannot be repeated and a learner is only required to pass a module overall, unless explicitly stated otherwise in programme documentation.

Where the assessment was an unseen assessment (e.g. a written examination) the resit paper/assessment should not be the same as the original.

Any failed examination must be attempted at the next scheduled repeat sitting for that examination, except where the learner has an approved deferral.

The resit mark for the module will be presented to the Board of Examiners as a second or subsequent attempt.

A capped module mark of 40% will be applied to any module in which a repeat attempt was undertaken. The capped mark applies to the module as a whole, rather than the specific component repeated.

### **Retake**

In some instances, a retake of the module may be more appropriate, for example if the performance was very poor across all assessments or where significant practical work was involved. A requirement to retake is at the discretion of the Examination Board.

A capped module mark of 40% will be applied to any module in which a repeat attempt was undertaken.

Should a module be retaken with attendance, no marks from the previous attempt are carried forward.

The retake mark for the module will be presented to the Board of Examiners as a second or subsequent attempt.

### **Substitute**

Where a learner has failed an elective module, they will be required to resit the module and if they fail to pass at the resit opportunity, they have the option of two further resit attempts or to substitute the resit for another elective on the programme.

The selection of an alternative elective will depend on it being offered on the programme and the candidate having satisfied any pre-requisites.

The substitute module must be taken in its entirety.

The marks for the substituted module will be recorded as a first attempt but will be treated as a retake attempt for the purpose of award calculation.

Deferral of examinations can only be considered if professional or medical documentation is presented to the relevant Programme Coordinator within ten working days of the commencement

of the examination in question, and accepted by the Exams Manager. For the policy on Personal Mitigating Circumstances (PMC), see Part B Section 4.3 of the QAH.

#### 6.3.4 Postgraduate Programmes

A learner must complete all modules in accordance with the validated programme schedule and approved timeline for completion, except where deferrals have been approved based upon personal mitigating circumstances (PMC) which prevent this.

Higher Diploma and Postgraduate Diploma programmes are considered to be award stage only programmes.

Taught Master's Programmes normally consist of two stages, the taught component and a dissertation or research capstone, both of which contribute to the final award.

##### **Progression**

A pass in a module is a positive statement of achievement, and a demonstration that the minimum intended learning outcomes have been met.

To progress from the taught stage of a Master's programme to the dissertation stage a candidate is required to pass all mandatory modules and the prescribed number of elective modules as outlined in the Approved Programme Schedule. This applies to some but not all Masters programmes. This requirement or any variations are set out in the programme Special Regulations attached to the Approved Programme Schedule in the Programme Document.

The minimum mark required to pass a module is 40%.

The mark for a module is the total, or average of, marks awarded for the individual assessment components.

No individual component needs to be passed, unless explicitly stated in programme documentation and is prescribed in the Approved Programme Schedule.

##### **Pass by Compensation**

Pass by Compensation applies on Higher Diploma programmes in accordance with the QQI sectoral Protocol 4.4.1, except where explicitly stated otherwise in programme documentation.

Pass by Compensation **is not permitted** on Postgraduate Diplomas and Masters Programmes unless the practice of compensation is explicitly stated in programme documentation.

### 6.3.5 Award Calculations

The award class of the degree is calculated on the credit-weighted mean value of the grades that contribute to the award. DBS applies a percentage grading system. Learners are enrolled for the target award but may be awarded an associated minor, special purpose or alternative exit award, where available, when assessment opportunities have been exhausted or the Examination Board makes a recommendation in this regard.

Exit awards are only available where validated and where the learner has satisfied the specified requirements of that award.

Learners who join programmes with advanced standing are not eligible for an exit award on the grounds of accumulation of credits from Recognition for Prior Learning (RPL).

Full details on the National Framework of Qualifications is available at <https://www.qqi.ie/what-we-do/the-qualifications-system/national-framework-of-qualifications>

Except where explicitly stated otherwise in programme documentation award classifications are calculated as follows:

#### **Higher Certificate (NFQ level 6)**

The award classification will be calculated using a credit weighted average of the eligible module (%) marks at the first attempt. This will be calculated as 100% of the Award Stage.

#### **Ordinary Bachelor Degree (NFQ level 7) and Honours Bachelor Degree (NFQ level 8)**

The award classification will be calculated using a credit weighted average of the eligible module (%) marks at the first attempt. This will be calculated in the majority of cases as follows:

Award Stage modules 80% weighting

Penultimate Stage\* 20% weighting

\*The weighted mean of the penultimate stage modules should be taken from the best modules worth 50 ECTS or 80% of the stage, i.e. one or two modules, up to a total of 10 ECTS are not included in the calculation of the stage average.

If exemptions exceed 10 ECTS at the penultimate stage, then the award is to be calculated at 100% of the Award Stage.

Where a learner is being classified on the basis of the modules taken at the Award Stage only, as in the cases of direct entrants to the final year, then the award classification is based on 100% of the Award Stage.

For award purposes, a candidate must satisfy all of the examination and other requirements set for the programme.

The learner must complete their award within the registration period for that award.

### **Special Purpose Awards (varying NFQ level)**

Special purpose awards which have at least 60 ECTS and are comparable to a major award (at the same NFQ level), will be classified in the same manner as the relevant major award. Special purpose awards which have a volume of less than 60 ECTS shall be unclassified i.e. Pass/Fail.

### **6.3.6 Degree Classification Thresholds (Programmes Leading to a QQI Award)**

Refer to Quality Assurance Handbook Appendix B.6.3 for the tables, taken from *QQI Assessment and Standards, Revised 2022*, describing the classifications available for major awards (made by QQI or by recognised institutions under delegated authority) in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). They also specify the required boundary values for grade point average (GPA) and percentage point average (PPA). DBS applies the PPA grading model only.

The threshold should be interpreted by the Examination Board in general, rather than in absolute, terms. The Board may make an award at a grade above the threshold specified in the table in cases where the Board feels that the learner's circumstances merit such action.

Learners may be considered by the Board for an award higher than that indicated by their mark, where:

- The final award grade is within 1% of the higher classification boundary.
- Where at least 50% of the credit-weighted modules are in the higher-class bracket (preponderance).
- Other evidence of extenuating circumstances is considered, at the discretion of the Examination Board, to be appropriate.

Where an award classification recommended by an Examination Board is higher than that indicated by a credit weighted average of the eligible module (%), then the award classification should be recorded to reflect the recommended award i.e. a 69.89 should be manually identified as a First-Class Honours or Distinction (as appropriate). The numeric grade of the credit weighted average should not be altered. In no circumstance should an individual module mark be amended for the purpose of allowing a learner to achieve a higher award classification.

Should it be established that a learner's failure to submit work, or poor performance in the assessment process was due to illness or personal mitigating circumstances (which were brought to



the attention of the College, and accepted for the purpose of PMC approval) the Examination Board may exercise discretion in a manner appropriate to the individual case.

### 6.3.7 Other Awards

#### **Aegrotat Awards**

Where there is insufficient evidence to determine the recommendation of an award, but the Examination Board is nevertheless satisfied that the learner would have qualified for the award for which s/he was a registered had it not been for illness or other valid cause, an Aegrotat award may be recommended.

Aegrotat awards do not carry a classification.

An Aegrotat award does not necessarily entitle the holder to registration with a professional body, or to exemption from the requirements of any professional qualification which might otherwise be associated with the programme.

Aegrotat awards are not available to learners registered for the following awards: Postgraduate Diploma, Higher Diploma, Masters programme and, all research awards.

The award of an Aegrotat removes the right of any further assessment opportunity for the registered final award. The learner must have signified that s/he is willing to accept the award under this condition.

#### **Posthumous Awards**

Where the normal conditions of any award of the College have been met, or where the College is satisfied based on learning completed to date, that the learner, now deceased, would have otherwise met the conditions of the award, a request for a posthumous award may be made to QQI.

A posthumous award may be accepted on the learner's behalf by a parent, partner or other nominated individual(s) as identified by the next of kin or immediate family member.

The opportunity should normally be offered for acceptance of a posthumous award to take place as part of the conferring ceremony of the class which the learner was a part of. Alternatively, the family may wish for the award to be issued directly to them via the post or for collection.

### 6.3.8 European Diploma Supplement

Learners are entitled to receive a Diploma Supplement, upon successful completion of their studies. The Diploma Supplement facilitates the academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates, etc.).

This Diploma Supplement follows the model developed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. The purpose of the supplement is to provide sufficient independent data to improve the international 'transparency' and fair academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates, etc.).

The Diploma Supplement provides additional information regarding the learner's award which is not available on QQI parchments such as the skills and competencies acquired, and entry requirements, and access opportunities related to the next level of education. The Diploma Supplement is designed to provide a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualification to which this supplement is appended. It should be free from any value judgements, equivalence statements or suggestions about recognition. Information in all eight sections should be provided. Where information is not provided, an explanation should be given as to the reason why.

## 6.4 The Academic Board and the Confirmation of Grades

The final responsibility for confirming all grades, progression and associated award classifications rests with the DBS Academic Board.

All grades and progression decisions for non-graduating learners and graduating learners are ultimately ratified at a meeting of the Academic Board.

Whilst Examination Boards approve individual grades and outcomes, the Academic Board is the final authorising committee taking a global view of grades and classifications.

The Academic Board will approve grades for the academic year in its September Board.

AS per AQR 2024

[END OF PART B SECTION 6]

AS per AQR 2024