



**Tipperary**  
**ETB**

Bord Oideachais & Oiliúna Thiobraid Árann  
Tipperary Education & Training Board

# **External Authentication Procedure**

Version 1.1

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## Tipperary ETB External Authentication Procedure

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<b>Summary of Amendments</b>	<p>Transfer of procedure content into new template that has additional fixed core headings as follows:</p> <p>1.3 Responsibilities for Implementation            1.4 Other Policies, procedures or guidelines            8. Internal Monitoring and Review (of this Procedure)            9. Evidence of Implementation (of this procedure)            10. Monitoring of Effectiveness (of this procedure)</p>
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## Definitions

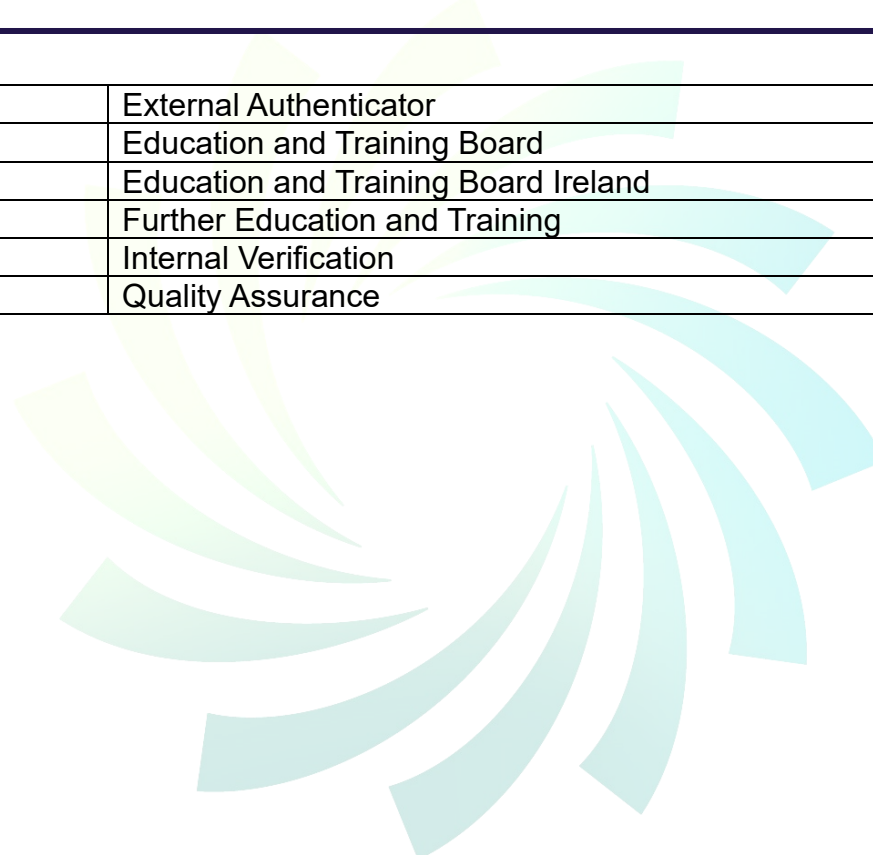
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<b>External Authentication</b>	<p>Provides independent authoritative confirmation of fair and consistent assessment of learners in accordance with national standards.</p> <p>External authentication is undertaken through assignment of an independent external authenticator by Tipperary ETB.</p>
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## Acronyms

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<b>EA</b>	External Authenticator
<b>ETB</b>	Education and Training Board
<b>ETBI</b>	Education and Training Board Ireland
<b>FET</b>	Further Education and Training
<b>IV</b>	Internal Verification
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance



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## 1. Introduction

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External authentication is a quality assurance mechanism employed by providers that supports public confidence in academic qualifications. The requirement for external authentication is set out in QQI's Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers, Revised 2013. External authentication happens following the internal verification process and before the Results Approval process.

### 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to set out how Tipperary ETB will implement the external authentication process to ensure the fair and consistent assessment of results in line with national standards.

### 1.2 Scope

This procedure applies to further education and training programmes leading to QQI awards with the exception of apprenticeships, Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) and Quarrying Skills Certification Scheme (QSCS). For external authentication/verification of non-QQI awards offered by Tipperary ETB, refer to the relevant awarding body's procedure.

### 1.3 Responsibilities for Implementation

Responsibilities for this procedure are as follows:

- The **Programme Coordinator/Centre manager** manages and implements the EA process for their centre. Programme Coordinator/Centre manager are responsible for communicating EA feedback to all assessors and reviewing the EA's findings and recommendations for any changes or improvements needed.
- All **assessors** must be familiar with the EA recommendations for their modules and take measures to implement relevant improvements.
- The **FET QA office** will be responsible for supporting centres to implement an effective EA process. The QA Office will also be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the overall effectiveness of the procedure and ensuring it's compliance with standards. The review schedule is shown on the table on page 2.
- The **External Authenticator** is responsible for implementing relevant elements of this procedure that are applicable to them.
- The **Results Approval Panel** are responsible for making any recommendations that will improve the external authentication process.

### 1.4 Other Relevant Policies, Procedures or Guidelines

- Internal verification procedure
- Results Approval procedure

## 2. Selection and Assignment of External Authenticators

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- 2.1 Only External Authenticators (EAs) that have been registered on the National EA Directory, known as DirExA, can work as an EA in Tipperary ETB.

Access to the National EA Directory is granted to QA staff following the written request from Tipperary ETB's Director of FET to ETBI.

- 2.2 The following criteria must be applied when identifying a suitable EA. The EA must:

- be independent of the ETB to which they are assigned,
- have the subject-matter expertise for each component they will be authenticating,
- not be appointed to the same centre for the same award for more than 3 consecutive assessment periods,
- have experience of programme delivery and/or assessment and/or work in the industry/field.

## 3. Planning for External Authentication

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- 3.1 The scheduling of external authentication will be as per centre/programme requirements.

- 3.2 Centres should be aware of Tipperary ETB's planned certification periods which are published on [Tipperary ETB's QA SharePoint](#) space.

- 3.3 Centres should confirm arrangements as follows with the EA prior to authentication:

- that the EA can confirm expertise within the appropriate award area/field of learning (eg EA confirms list of modules sent by the centre as part of securing EA services)
- that the EA can confirm IT/ICT skills needed
- that the EA can produce the EA report within the recommended timeline of 2 working days
- that the EA can conduct multi-centre authentications, where appropriate
- the major/component awards and the approximate number of portfolios to be authenticated
- the contact details for the staff co-ordinating the external authentication process in each centre (where multi-centre visits) and the dates and times that centres can facilitate external authentication

- agree sufficient time required to complete the authentication. In estimating time required, staff should consider the following:
  - o total number of portfolios
  - o the NFQ level
  - o variety and number of awards to be authenticated
  - o the format of evidence
  - o the number of assessment techniques
  - o issues identified by previous processes
  - o the experience of the EA.

- 3.4 If centres have any special requests from the EA, additional time will need to be allowed.
- 3.5 Any conflicts of interest that might question the integrity of the assessment process must be declared by the EA.
- 3.6 Ensure that each major award is presented to the external authentication process every year.
- 3.7 Within each major award, ensure that each component within the award is presented for external authentication within a 2-year cycle.

## 4. Preparation for External Authentication

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### Final arrangements to EA

- 4.1 Staff should confirm final detail of the authentication process with the EA to include the following:
- the final numbers of learner portfolios to be authenticated
  - a list of the major/component awards
  - details of centre(s) of authentication eg address, eircode, QBS Centre Code etc
  - name and phone number of centre designate(s). Provide detail for all centres for multi-centre authentications
  - if authenticating learner evidence from more than one centre, details on how and where learner evidence will be made available
  - receipt of Tipperary ETB's Internal Verification (IV) and EA Sampling Strategy and EA Report template
  - receipt of EA service documentation ie EA Contract, Guidelines for External Authenticators and EA Report template

- receipt of EA payroll documentation

### Documentation to prepare

4.2 Centres should collate the following documentation:

- Assessment Plan
- Copy of module descriptor used
- Copy of all assessment instruments ie assessment briefs and marking schemes/sheets, exam papers
- Copy of sample/outline solutions
- Results Sheets: Authentication Reports by Learner Group by Minor Award Results Sheets or F12 Course Summary Assessment Sheet and Results Approval Form(s)
- Completed IV Reports
- Learners' portfolios with learner/assessor marking sheets

4.3 The above documentation is typically made available on the day of the authentication visit. (In the case where authentication must take place remotely or electronically, some documentation may be sent to the EA in advance). Check with the FET QA Office, in this case.

4.4 If the EA requires any further documentation in addition to the above, this must be requested by the EA in advance of the visit.

### Facilities and Equipment

4.5 Provide a space for the EA that offers good workspace, privacy and quietness.

4.6 Provide equipment to moderate assessment evidence that is produced in a multi-media format. Ensure to provide details of logins and passwords to networks, where appropriate.

4.7 For multi-centre visits, EAs will be met by a designated person from each centre.

4.8 Provide contact details of assessors to EA in the event of a query (this is particularly important if the EA is recommending a grade change).

## **5. Carrying out External Authentication**

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### Opening Meeting

5.1 The centre should confirm arrangements for the visit to include:

- designated contact



- contact information for assessors
  - where documentation/evidence can be found eg moodle, SharePoint, hard drive, hard copy, other formats, various rooms/site locations; information of any protocols of cross-referencing of information-location
  - details of exit meeting
  - relevant paperwork eg sign-in sheet, EA Contract
  - location of, and, access to facilities eg toilets, canteen
  - other local information eg health and safety
- 5.2 Highlight key requirements and expectations of the authentication process by reviewing, the Tipperary ETB's Guidelines for External Authenticators document with the EA.
- 5.3 Seek clarity on Tipperary ETB's/the centre's processes, practices or documentation.

### Moderating Results

The EA should:

- 5.4 Review the IV reports.
- 5.5 Moderate learner results in line with the programme descriptor and national standards. For training only: also in line with Assessment Instrument Specifications (AIS).
- 5.6 Sample a range of learner evidence in line with Tipperary ETB's Sampling Strategy (see 4.3).
- 5.7 Adhere to the process for dealing with issues arising during moderation (see 4.4).
- 5.8 Sign all results sheets (QBS/RCCRS) relating to modules moderated.
- 5.9 Provide verbal feedback of findings at the exit meeting.
- 5.10 Provide written feedback using the Tipperary ETB EA Report template.

Written commentary should:

- correspond to that received verbally in the exit meeting
  - include grade change recommended and rationales
  - include areas for improvement
  - identify any issues identified that threaten the integrity of assessment
- 5.11 Adhere to GDPR and report retention requirements as outlined in the Guidelines for External Authenticators document, section 7

### Sampling Strategy

The EA should:

- 5.12 Adhere to Tipperary ETB's IV and EA Sampling Strategy to determine the correct sample size (Also, see Appendix 1).
- 5.13 Select portfolios from each component and each assessor.
- 5.14 Indicate the portfolios that were selected in the EA sample. The Sampling Strategy document details how to do this.

### Dealing with Borderline Grades and Grade Changes

- 5.15 **Borderline Grades:** Where a learner has achieved a mark that is borderline between grades the EA should:
  - consult with the assessor first to discuss the actions taken by the assessor on awarding the grade that is borderline ie do not automatically upgrade or downgrade.
- 5.16 **Grade Changes:** Where the EA's decision is to recommend grade changes:
  - the EA report must include a rationale for the grade change and not just the assertion that the grade needs to be changed.
  - EA should clearly mark the results sheet to highlight the recommended change eg \* or highlighter pen.

### Dealing with Issues Arising

- 5.17 **Missing Evidence:** EAs should abide by the proviso that "no evidence = no marks". The EA should, however, confirm with the assessor/centre designate that the evidence is/is not available before implementation.
- 5.18 **Other or significant irregularities or serious issues:** should be highlighted to the Programme Co-ordinator and clearly documented in the EA Report as an issue or area for improvement. Results should not be recommended for approval if the integrity of the assessment process is thought to have been undermined.
- 5.19 The EA or centre may contact Tipperary ETB's FET, if required. Contact details are available on Tipperary ETB's Quality **QA Office for support** Assurance section of the website here: Quality Assurance - Tipperary Education & Training Board (etb.ie).

### Exit Meeting

The centre designate should:

- 5.20 Discuss the findings of the authentication, including any grade changes.

- 5.21 Ensure that the EA payment documentation and the IV reports and Results Sheets are signed by the EA.

### The EA Report

The EA should:

- 5.22 Submit the draft EA Report to the Programme Coordinator for confirmation of factual accuracy within the agreed deadline.
- 5.23 The EA Report should be written with sufficient detail and with constructive, clear and specific feedback:
- to enable centres and assessors to fully understand and implement the changes recommended, and,
  - to enable the Tipperary ETB Results Approval Panel to identify any issues in relation to results and make recommendations for corrective action.

## **6. Concluding the External Authentication**

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The centre designate should:

- 6.1 Review the EA report for completion, accuracy and clarity.
- Return to the EA for amendment, if needed. The amended report must be available on time for the Results Approval Panel meeting.
- 6.2 Submit an electronic copy of the final EA Report to the Tipperary ETB FET QA Office.
- 6.3 Review findings of the EA report and present, (along with any other certification reports required), to the Results Approval Panel.

## **7. Payment of External Authenticators**

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### Remuneration

- 7.1 Remuneration (and travel & subsistence) will be paid to the EA in line with the Department of Education's recommended rates.
- 7.2 If an EA is required for any part of a working day, they are entitled to claim the daily rate. Travel time is regarded as being outside of direct work hours.
- 7.3 Report writing is included as part of the daily rate.

## Payment Process

For EAs assigned directly by Tipperary ETB:

- 7.4 EAs are required to be registered on revenue's My Account system.
- 7.5 All EAs will be registered as employees on the payroll system for payment purposes.
- 7.6 For EAs registering with Tipperary ETB for the first time as EA, they must complete starter documentation, which is available on Tipperary ETB's Quality Assurance section of the website.
- 7.7 The FET Centre will supply the EA with all documentation needed on initial contact and during the authentication visit.
- 7.8 Payment documentation and claims are submitted by the FET Centre to Tipperary ETB's payroll department for processing. Payments will be made via EFT at the next payrun.
- 7.9 Incomplete or inaccurate starter, payment and claim documentation may delay payments to the EA.
- 7.10 The specific protocols for implementation of the payment process is found in the Guidelines for External Authenticators.

For EAs assigned by 2nd Providers:

- 7.11 EAs are required be registered on revenue's My Account system.
- 7.12 It is the responsibility of the 2nd provider centre to ensure tax compliance in relation to payments made. EAs should be paid through the 2nd providers' payroll. EAs will be advised of any documentation and processes for payments.

## **8. Internal Monitoring and Review of this Procedure**

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The QA Office will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the overall effectiveness of the procedure and ensuring it's compliance with standards. Feedback from centres and EAs will be considered. The review schedule is shown on the table on page 2.

## **9. Evidence of Implementation of this Procedure**

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Tipperary ETB monitors the implementation of this external authentication procedure.

Evidence to confirm implementation may include, for example:

- EA planning meetings and EA schedules
- Communications and correspondences between EA and centre/QA staff
- Meetings between centres and EA – opening and closing, and, where issues are detected by EA

- Application of the EA sampling strategy
- Grade change rationales provided and recommendations and improvements given
- Completed EA reports
- Feedback report from FET QA office to EAs

## 10. Monitoring of Effectiveness of this Procedure

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The following can be considered when evaluating the effective implementation of this procedure:

- Reviewing and assessing feedback from internal staff eg tutors, EAs, coordinators, QA staff
- Reviewing and assessing feedback from EAs
- Analysis of centre course reviews reports/findings
- Analysis of the annual quality assurance review of EA reports
- Assessing communication and feedback mechanisms to EAs

## Appendix A: Tipperary ETB's Sampling Strategy for Internal Verification and External Authentication

- Assessment portfolios for ALL minor awards will be internally verified per annum
- Assessment portfolios for ALL minor awards will be externally authenticated over a two-year period (*applicable for FE programmes*). New assessors must submit portfolios for authentication in the first year of a 2-year cycle
- All major awards will be internally verified and externally authenticated per annum
- The sampling strategy for Tipperary ETB will be applied by the internal verifier and the external authenticator

### PART 1: Sampling Numbers

The following table outlines the number of assessment portfolios to be sampled, per minor award, for both the internal verification and external authentication processes:

**Note:** for training programmes, 50% of assessment portfolios must be internally verified

Number of assessment portfolios for a minor	Number of assessment portfolios to be sampled		
	IV (FE only)	IV (Training only)	EA (FET)
<=12	4	50%	Up to 6
13 → 50	8	50%	8
51 → 100	10	50%	10
101 → 200	14	50%	14
201 → 300	17	50%	17
300 → 400	20	50%	20

- If there are 12 or less portfolios presented, **up to 6** portfolios will be externally authenticated to allow for the cut-off points between the grades to be established as follows:
  - The **lowest Pass** and the **highest Unsuccessful**
  - The **lowest Distinction** and the **highest Merit**
  - The **lowest Merit** and the **highest Pass**
- For 13 or more portfolios, the remaining number of assessment portfolios will be randomly chosen, across all the grade bands, until the sample quota outlined in the above table is reached.

**Example: 12 portfolios are presented for authentication. EA to select as follows:**

Grade	No. Portfolios at grade	Selection process:	Total to be externally authenticated = 4
D	x 8	Choose lowest distinction = 1	
M	X 1	Choose the only merit = 1	
P	X 3	Choose lowest and highest pass = 2	

## PART 2: Combining Portfolios for Sampling Purposes

### Scenario 1

Where one assessor is delivering the same module to more than one learner group; for the purposes of EA sampling, all the learner portfolios for these groups may be combined.

### Scenario 2

Where more than one assessor is delivering the same module in one or more locations, the assessment portfolios from which the EA sample may be taken may be a combination of assessment portfolios across the number of assessors and/or location(s).

In this case, the assessment portfolios will be clearly identified per assessor and per location, so the external authenticator can ensure the sample chosen includes assessment portfolios from each location and each assessor.

### **Note:**

- Where portfolios are combined for internal verification purposes, they should remain combined for the purpose of external authentication sampling
- Where portfolios have *not* been combined for IV sampling, they can still be combined for EA sampling purposes

*Examples of combining portfolios for internal verification and external authentication*

**Tipperary ETB Assessor Alice who is tutoring Communications in 2 locations:**

Tipperary ETB Centre	Location A	Location B	Location B
Module	Communications	Communications	Communications
Assessor	Alice	Alice	Bob
Total Portfolios	14	11	13
Total for IV/EA purposes	25		13

**Tipperary ETB Centre C who has a tutor delivering Communications to 2 different groups:**

Assessor	Alice	Alice	Bob
Module	Communications	Communication s	Communications
Learner Group	Childcare	Business	Healthcare
Total Portfolios	14	11	13
Total for IV/EA purposes	25		13

**PART 3: Highlighting the Sample**

**For Further Education Programmes**

*Internal Verification:*

1. indicate (eg tick, highlight) the relevant learners on the Authentication Report by Learner Group by Minor Award Results Sheet(s)

*External Authentication:*

1. record all authenticated portfolios in the blank columns on the Authentication Report by Learner Group by Minor Award Results Sheet, and
2. highlight any mark/grade changes eg with an \* or a highlighter pen

**For Training Programmes**

*Internal Verification:*

1. indicate (eg tick, highlight) the relevant learners on the Summary Marking Sheet(s).

*External Authentication:*

1. record all authenticated portfolios (✓) on the F12 Course Summary Assessment Sheet and Results Approval Forms