



**Tipperary**  
**ETB**

Bord Oideachais & Oiliúna Thiobraid Árann  
Tipperary Education & Training Board

**Programme Approval and  
Management Policy**  
(for Further Education and Training)

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# Programme Approval and Management Policy

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## Definitions

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<b>Programme</b>	Refers to a process by which a learner acquires knowledge, skill and competence and includes a course of study, a course of instruction and an apprenticeship.
<b>Programme Manager</b>	Is the nominated person for the programme who is responsible for the quality assurance of the programme and has full working knowledge of its requirements.
<b>Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)</b>	An agency for quality and qualifications in Further Education and Training (FET) and Higher Education (HE) in Ireland. QQI are the validating agency for QQI programmes. Tipperary ETB's quality assurance is accountable to, and monitored by, QQI.
<b>Quality assurance (QA)</b>	Is the term used to describe the processes used to ensure that the learning environment reaches an acceptable level of quality. It is an ongoing process of evaluating the quality of an education system, institution or programme. This involves assessing, monitoring, maintaining and improving quality.

## Acronyms

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<b>ABP</b>	Area-based planning	<b>PAC</b>	Programme Approval Committee
<b>DSQ</b>	Development, Support and Quality Department	<b>SLT</b>	Senior Leadership Team
<b>ETB</b>	Education and Training Board	<b>SMT</b>	Senior Management Team
<b>FET</b>	Further Education and Training	<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>NFQ</b>	National Framework of Qualifications	<b>QQI</b>	Quality and Qualification Ireland

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## 1. Introduction

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Tipperary ETB is a recognised Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) programme-provider and is validated to run programmes from Level 1 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Tipperary ETB also runs programmes owned and managed by other providers and awarding bodies.

The basis for this policy comes from [QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines \(2016\)](#) which outlines providers' responsibilities for ensuring that there are appropriate mechanisms for the design, development, approval, monitoring and review of all programmes. This includes accredited and non-accredited programmes owned or co-owned by Tipperary ETB, as well as programmes owned by other providers.

The document describes how Tipperary ETB sets out to achieve quality assurance for managing programme approval to ensure consistency, transparency and good governance. This document should be read in conjunction with Tipperary ETB's [Programme Request and Approval Procedure](#) and should consider the ETB's area-based planning process.

It is important to note that QQI has a statutory role in external quality assurance and monitors and reports on a provider's implementation and effectiveness of QA policies and procedures, including those related to the management of programmes and their approval.

### 1.1 Purpose

Only programmes and modules that are approved or validated for use in Tipperary ETB can be used by Tipperary ETB centres. This policy describes Tipperary ETB's approach to the management of programmes to ensure robust decisions are made with regard to the approval of programme delivery and their locations. It:

- Describes the governance arrangements involved in programme requests for delivery, amendment or development
- Sets out the quality assured processes for the management of programme requests made
- Describes the quality and planning criteria to be used by those involved in preparing proposals and those making decisions
- Explains the roles and responsibilities of individuals, centres, teams and the Programme Approval Committee involved in programme requests and approvals.

### 1.2 Scope

The scope applies to all accredited and non-accredited programmes, and for all awarding bodies.

### 1.3 Responsibilities for Implementation

Responsibilities for this policy are as follows:

- Authorised **staff involved in preparing proposals** must be familiar with their specific roles and responsibilities outlined in the Terms of Reference section ([see section 3](#)).
- **FET Senior Managers** and the **Programme Approval Committee (PAC)** must be familiar with their specific roles and responsibilities outlined in the Terms of Reference ([see section 3](#)).
- The **FET QA Office** and the **Programme Development Office** provides a support and guidance service for those involved in the process of programme request and approval.  
The FET QA Office and the **Programme Development Office** also has a role in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this policy and ensuring its compliance with relevant standards and obligations.
- The **FET Senior Management Team (SMT)** are responsible for governance, management and oversight of programme approval work.
- The **ETB's Senior Leadership Team (SLT)** has executive responsibility for ensuring that decisions made with respect to programmes contribute to the strategic direction of the ETB and that any risks identified have been considered.

### 1.4 Other Relevant Policies, Procedures and Guidelines

The following internal documents support this policy:

- [Quality Policy](#)
- [Programme Request and Approval Procedure](#)
- Programme Development, Validation and Review (draft)
- Collaborative Provision and Partnerships Policy (draft)

## 2. Quality Assurance of Programme Development, Request, Approval and Delivery

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### 2.1. Planning

Tipperary ETB is committed to providing quality-assured learning experiences to learners in FET. This means that all programmes:

- Are **strategically planned** and aligned to the mission, vision and strategic priorities and goals and considers **external influences** such as skills, employer needs and labour market demands.

- Consider the **needs of learners**
  - Programmes delivered in Tipperary ETB **consider the learner cohort and relevancy** of the programme to the individual and learner group's needs.
  - Provide equitable and appropriate **access, transfer and progression** pathways.
- Are appropriately **resourced and funded**
  - Tipperary ETB commits to support centres' capacity for programme provision and the quality of programme delivery by planning, developing and maintaining the resources required.
- Delivered by **competent staff**
  - Tipperary ETB has regard for professional and regulatory standards. Training and professional development opportunities are available to all staff to ensure their professional competence and growth.
- Delivered in suitable **learning environments** that maximise learning
  - Tipperary ETB is committed to ensuring that learning takes place in suitable environments that are appropriate to the learning and programme requirements, for example, workplace, practical and virtual learning environments.
- Are **fit-for-purpose**, well managed, and maintained
  - Tipperary ETB considers any special requirements of programmes and awarding bodies. This includes procedures for programme review and amendment.

## 2.2 Oversight and Governance

Robust oversight and governance are achieved by considering the level of governance and authority needed for decision-making regarding programme approval and delivery.

Decisions can be made at 3 levels based on the level of risk associated with the request:

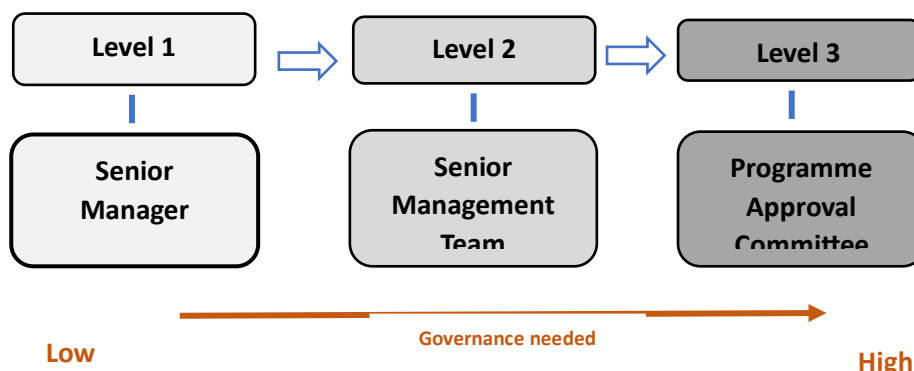


Figure 1: Decision levels for programme approvals

### 2.3 Management of Programme Requests, Approval and Delivery

The figure below illustrates the various requests and their approval pathways through the governance levels and the types of decisions that can be made for each request.



# Governance and Approval Pathways for Programme Requests

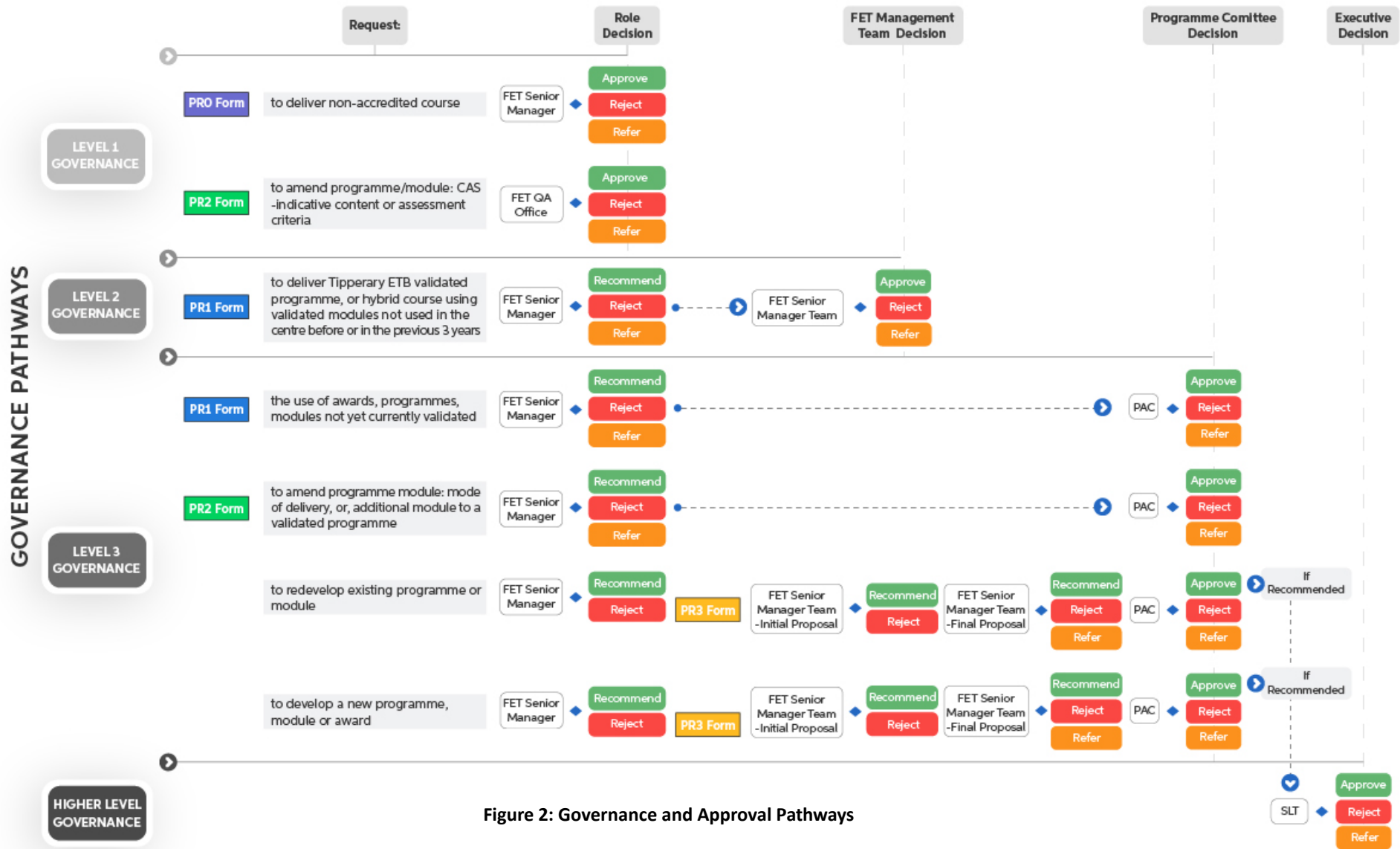


Figure 2: Governance and Approval Pathways

## 2.4 Other-Party Programme/Award Providers

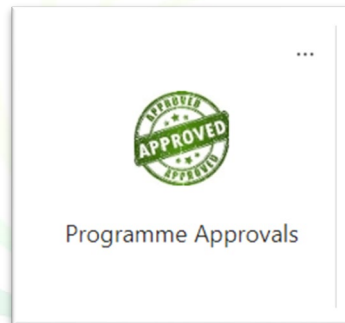
As well as being a provider of validated programmes in their own right, Tipperary ETB provides programmes in partnership with other providers and uses programmes of other awarding bodies. Specific requirements and arrangements for how other-party programmes or qualifications are quality assured and delivered are also subject to oversight and governance by Tipperary ETB's programme approval processes.

# 3. Terms of Reference for Governance of Programme Approval

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## 3.1 Administrative Arrangements

A dedicated MS Team called '*Programme Approvals*' is the internal electronic platform used to store all submitted programme request applications, decisions made and related records.



Access is given to the FET QA Office, the Programme Development Office, the FET SMT and the PAC members.

Programme requests are uploaded by a FET Senior Manager (or their designate) into this MS team space, a week in advance of the PAC meeting, to allow members to review material in advance.

Invitations to the PAC meeting are administered from the FET QA Office or the Programme Development Office and attendance is tracked.

## 3.2 Criteria to be used in decision-making

The following criteria must be used when evaluating programme requests:

- Consistency with strategic goals and targets eg labour market needs, educational pathways, active inclusion etc
- Considers conflicts and complements to Tipperary ETB's FET provision
- Risk management – operational, reputational, legal, financial etc
- Budgetary considerations
- Area-based planning (ABP) criteria and management plans
- Responding to previously unidentified requests for upskilling from employers which were not considered at ABP process.
- Support for the introduction of the programme/module/course from employers, professional, regulatory or statutory bodies
- Physical and infrastructural requirements of the programme
- Programme requirements including special validation and/or assessment conditions
- Staff capacity of each centre. This includes the centres' capacity to deliver the programme and the totality of capacity to run its current suite of programmes
- The capacity of the centre to provide appropriate learning environments to include learning supports and work placement requirements
- Relevant programme specifics eg local title, duration, modifications meet standards; delivery modes or methodologies etc
- Validation status – validated or not, active or not, last certification dates etc.
- 20% rule for changes to programmes leading to QQI CAS awards
- Any other relevant criteria or checks.

### 3.3 Roles Involved in the Programme Request and Approval Process

The roles involved in the programme request and approval process are:

- The Programme Proposer
- A FET Senior Manager
- The FET SMT
- The Programme Manager
- The FET QA Office and Programme Development Office
- The Programme Approval Committee.

#### 3.3.1 The Role of the Programme Proposer

Roles and responsibilities

The Programme Proposer is the person (eg programme coordinator or centre manager) who submits a formal request for delivery, amendment or review and development of a programme, module or course.

The role and responsibilities of the Programme Proposer is to:

- Conduct research to ensure a valid request is proposed. Refer to the [Programme Request and Approval Procedure](#) for criteria and more detail.
- Liaise with internal and/or external staff or bodies during the research and preparation phase, where appropriate.
- Complete the application form fully and accurately and include all supporting documentation
- Submit the request within the relevant timeframes using the relevant request forms.
- Prepare and deliver an oral presentation to the PAC, if required, to justify the proposal and provide clarifications.
- Receive the outcomes of the PAC and adhere to any conditions of approval prior to programme commencement.
- Deliver the programme in line with the special or validation conditions of the programme.
- Address professional development needs of programme staff as appropriate.
- Monitor and review programme delivery.
- Report on any changes in capacity to provide the validated programme to the relevant FET Senior Manager.

### 3.3.2 The Role of the Programme Manager

#### Role and responsibilities

The Programme Manager is the nominated person who is responsible for the quality assurance arrangements of the programme. The use of the title ‘Programme Manager’, in the context of this document, comes from the requirement of new QQI Non-CAS programmes to assign responsibility to a named person. The Programme Manager, in this context, therefore, does not refer to the centre’s or programme’s operational coordinator or manager. However, for some non-QQI programmes (eg City and Guilds) it is acknowledged that their QA procedures specify the requirement for assignment of responsibility of QA arrangements akin to this description of the Programme Manager.

The role and responsibilities of the programme manager are:

- To have a comprehensive knowledge of the programme, its requirements including the quality assurance arrangements.

- To support and advise Programme Proposers who are interested in preparing submissions to access the programme, and, to provide any ongoing support as needed.
- To liaise with the FET senior managers, the FET QA Office, the Programme Development Office and relevant external bodies such as QQI, Solas, other ETBs and others about the programme, where required.

### 3.3.3 The Role of the FET Senior Manager

#### Role and responsibilities

The FET Senior Manager has responsibility for a specific area of operational oversight of FET provision (eg part or full-time, by geographic location etc.). There are a number of FET senior managers. Each centre or programme reports directly into one of the FET senior managers.

The role and responsibilities of the FET Senior Manager is to:

- Make a decision for each request received using the criteria ([section 3.2](#)) to inform decision-making.
- Seek any support or guidance from the FET Development, Support Quality Department, FET SMT, or others, as appropriate.
- Progress the request to the FET SMT or PAC, if applicable.
- Decisions made by the FET Senior Manager will be recorded and stored centrally following the documented [administrative arrangements](#).

#### Decision-making

Decisions are made by way of authority and expertise associated with the respective role as a senior manager.

Refer to [Figure 2](#) for request and decision types.

#### Accountability and Reporting

Decisions recommended by the FET Senior Manager are progressed to the FET SMT meetings or to the PAC.

#### Operating Standards

The FET Senior Manager must exercise externality and independence from their respective operational role.

### 3.3.4 The Role of the FET SMT

#### Role and responsibilities

The FET SMT is the group of FET senior managers who have functions regarding quality-assurance, strategic planning, development, and operational implementation. The FET SMT includes the FET Director.

Their role is to:

- Make a decision for each request received using the criteria ([section 3.2](#)) to inform decision-making.

Some types of programme requests do not need to travel to the PAC as governance can be achieved by the decisions of FET SMT as a group. Some of these requests, however, may later reach the PAC for further governance and consideration, if needed.

#### Decision-making

Decisions of the FET SMT are attached to the team (group), not the individual FET Senior Manager.

Decision-making is by consensus but where consensus cannot be reached the FET Director takes the final decision.

(Refer to [Figure 2](#) for request types considered by the FET SMT and the types of decisions that can be made for each request).

#### Accountability and Reporting

The decisions of the FET SMT are progressed to the PAC or approved at the FET SMT meetings.

#### Operating Standards

The decisions of the FET SMT must be guided by Tipperary ETB's quality assurance processes, procedures and policies.

### 3.3.5 The Role of the Programme Approval Committee (PAC)

#### Role and responsibilities

The PAC is the formal committee that considers various programme requests. The PAC is a formal part of Tipperary ETB's quality assurance governance structures and carries out the role and functions of the programme approval process as delegated to it by the executive.

The role and responsibilities of the PAC are to:

- Review and evaluate programme proposals it receives and make a decision for each request received using the criteria ([section 3.2](#)).
- To make decisions that considers the academic<sup>1</sup> and relevant corporate<sup>2</sup> perspectives.
- Inform the Programme Proposers and other relevant individuals of programme approval outcomes.

## Membership

### **Appointment**

- Appointment of members of the PAC will be made by the FET Director, in consultation with other members of the FET SMT.
- Members will have significant experience of FET, programme delivery and quality assurance so they are competent to:
  - Review and evaluate programme requests
  - Provide both academic and corporate balance to decision-making
- Membership must ensure sufficient authority from FET senior management.
- Fixed members include membership from the FET SMT and the FET QA Office for continuity and consistency of practice. The Chair role is fixed to the FET Director or QA FET Senior Manager as designate.

### **Duration**

- Membership for rotating members is for a duration of two calendar years.

### **External membership**

- When necessary, an external member will attend the meetings to bring additional perspectives eg an employer or a subject-matter expert from education, industry, programme design or quality assurance.

## Decision-making

Decisions of the PAC are attached to the committee and made by consensus. Where consensus cannot be reached the Chair takes the final decision.

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<sup>1</sup> Academic matters relate to quality assurance, academic standards and integrity of the provider

<sup>2</sup> Relevant corporate matters relate to financial matters such as costs or resourcing; reputational or legal risks etc for the provider in relation to programme approval activity

The majority of the decisions made by the PAC are ultimate. However, some programme requests may require further governance by the executives (SLT) so the decision by the PAC in this case will be 'Recommend for approval'. Typically, these types of requests will be related to new programme development or where significant risk has been identified and further insight or advice is needed.

(Refer to [Figure 2](#) for request types considered by the PAC and the types of decisions that can be made for each request).

### **Quorum**

The quorum will be seven formed from the following:

- Chair – FET Director, or designated to the FET Senior Manager with responsibility for QA
- Minimum of two members of the FET SMT
- Minimum of one member of the FET QA Office
- Three members from operations.

Additional members can be added to the quorum as appropriate.

### **Accountability and Reporting**

Decisions of the PAC will be reported to the QA Governance Group for noting. In some cases, recommendations will be presented to the SLT for final approval.

### **Meetings**

#### **Frequency**

Meetings of the PAC are held every two months. Only in exceptional circumstances will emergency PAC meetings be held. Exceptional circumstances relate to external factors, for example, in response to new programme development directives. Emergency PAC meetings are called by the Chair.

#### **Location**

Meetings can be held online or in person and durations may vary according to the types and number of requests for consideration.

#### **Duration**

Between 30 minutes and 4 hours – depending on the volume and complexity of the requests to PAC.



### **Notes and minutes**

A staff member from the FET QA Office or Programme Development Office (who is not involved in the PAC decisions) records the decisions and any follow-up actions.

### Operating Standards

- Attendance requirement: the minimum quorum must be met.
- Participate actively in meetings through open and critical discussion and probing.
- The PAC operates independently of the centre, staff or programme making the application. Members of the panel conduct their work as a committee as distinct from being representative of the operational role they hold.
- The PAC considers the screening report of the FET QA Office or Programme Development Office in its decision-making process. Screening reports are available in advance and stored in the [administration space](#).
- Oral presentations from the Programme Proposer or programme development team may be presented to enhance information to the PAC.
- The PAC may call in additional expertise to assist in the evaluation. External members must sign a confidentiality agreement.
- The PAC may request further evidence from the proposer, if needed.
- Conflicts of interest are managed through diversity of, and sufficient membership. If a conflict becomes apparent, this is managed by the Chair eg non-participation in decision-making for that request.
- The decisions of the PAC must be guided by Tipperary ETB's quality assurance processes, procedures and policies. Decisions made must ensure that both the academic and corporate<sup>3</sup> interests of the organisation are balanced.
- Decisions of the PAC will be recorded. Further recommendations or conditions of approval may be given. If the proposal has been rejected, reasons are given.
- The Chair will sign off on PAC meeting decisions.
- The decisions of the PAC will be notified to the Programme Proposer within **three working days** by the FET QA Office or Programme Development Office.

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<sup>3</sup> Academic matters relate to quality assurance, academic standards and integrity of the provider. Relevant corporate matters relate to financial matters such as costs or resourcing; reputational or legal risks etc for the provider in relation to programme approval activity

### 3.3.6 The Role of the FET QA Office and Programme Development Office

#### Role and responsibilities

The FET QA Office and Programme Development Office provides an advisory and support service to individuals, departments and panels involved in the programme request and approval process.

The role and responsibilities include:

- Schedule the PAC meetings and communicate meeting dates and details.
- Monitor acceptances in advance of the meeting to ensure the quorum.
- Manage the dedicated Programme Approval MS Team space.
- Support proposers and the FET Senior Manager(s) with the QA processes in the research and preparation of a submission.
- Conduct a QA screening exercise on submitted applications to verify that correct QA processes have been completed prior to the PAC meeting and submit the screening report to the PAC Chair. (Note the screening will consist of QA process checks and technical programme checks – depending on the programme request-type). For newly developed programmes - liaise with the Programme Manager about the quality assurance matters of that programme, where required.
- Notify, as directed by the PAC, the Programme Proposers of the outcomes of the meeting.
- Process validation and approval applications to the awarding body or coordinating (first) provider, following approval.
- Follow-up on any further actions as advised by the PAC.

## 4. Internal Monitoring and Review

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A fundamental requirement of Tipperary ETB's quality assurance involves the monitoring and review of its quality assurance policies to ensure they remain relevant and current.

The FET QA Office and Programme Development Office, directed and supported by the QA Governance Group, will be responsible for the systematic review process and will also be informed by stakeholder feedback. Formal recommendations for amendments to the policy will be made to the SLT (executives).

The review schedule is shown on the table on page 2.

## 5. Evidence of Implementation of this Policy

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The procedure for programme requests and approval along with the terms of reference will guide and inform how this policy is translated into practice.

Evidence to confirm implementation may include, for example:

- Schedule of meetings, records and communication of decisions, new certificates of validation, delivery of new programmes.

## 6. Monitoring the Effectiveness of this Policy

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The following criteria should be considered when evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of this policy:

- Criteria set for decision-making
- Application and evaluation of the criteria effectiveness
- effectiveness of location and levels of governance for decisions reached
- Membership and operational standards
- Roles and responsibilities assigned
- Administrative and reporting arrangements
- Communication processes between stakeholders
- Staff support and development mechanisms eg professional development
- Feedback from individuals, centres, FET Senior Manager, FET Senior Management Team, PAC, including support and development needs
- The number and type of appeals made on decisions of the programme approval process.