

## External Authentication National Panel

### Background

The purpose of the external authentication process is to provide independent authoritative confirmation of fair and consistent assessment of learners and to ensure that assessment results have been marked in a valid and reliable way. External authentication is undertaken through the assignment of an independent Authenticator by the provider<sup>i</sup>, i.e. the ETB. Consistent with QQI guidelines and requirements, ETBs currently assign Authenticators to their centres to provide independent authoritative confirmation of learner assessment.

The former FET Awards Council established a panel of External Authenticators across a wide range of learning domains. This panel transitioned to QQI on its establishment in 2012, and currently remains available to QQI quality assurance providers. The former agency FÁS, established its own sub-panel of External Authenticators, and implemented a national approach to briefing and training, including a mentoring/shadowing process for new External Authenticators. Though it remains available to providers, QQI does not recruit to, or provide training to, the legacy national panel.

ETBs assign External Authenticators from both the QQI national panel and from the former FÁS panel, which transitioned to the ETBs. Some ETBs have also established regional and local panels. Training of these new External Authenticators has been provided by the Further Education Support Service (FESS), on direct request from ETBs.

The ETB FET Directors recognised the importance of the External Authentication role and process in ensuring the validity and reliability of the assessment process within the overall, provider owned, assessment framework.

On behalf of the ETBI FET Directors' QA Strategy Group, a project was commissioned in November 2016, to research and review current approaches to external authentication within the sector. The project aimed to identify and recommend the necessary elements of a new ETB sectoral model and approach to external authentication, which would enhance consistency in the sector in quality assuring programme standards and learner achievement.

The methodology undertaken to complete this project was a combination of research on national and international practice, focus groups and key stakeholder discussions. A thorough review of all elements of the current external authentication process was undertaken, including the related QQI guidelines, the role of the External Authenticator (EA), the EA panel, current approaches to EA training and the EA process. This consultation paper was devised from and informed by this process.

After publication of the Paper further Sectoral consultation was completed and a detailed analysis was undertaken of the feedback received and the emerged consensus across the ETBs was a need to establish an ETB National panel of External Authenticators (EA's) supported by a team of advising/mentoring EAs/lead Externs.

*“Proposal 1 It is recommended that the ETB sector establishes an ETB national panel for the sector. The mechanism and resources for establishing, hosting, training and maintaining the panel would need to be determined, but some form of coordinated/centralised database to*

*host the panel should be established. Membership of the national panel would be for a fixed period, renewable on the completion of supplemental professional development training.*

*Proposal 2 It is recommended that a national team of Advising Externs be established within the panel to mentor, support and advise the External Authenticator in conducting the role.”<sup>ii</sup>*

A Focus Group was convened to look at framing a detailed proposal around a sectoral approach to the establishment of such an EA Panel for the ETB’s, which was then presented to the ETB FET Directors and ETB CE Forum for consideration and approval.

A Working Group has been formed with ETB, FESS, Directors of FET and ETBI representation to begin addressing the requirements around the establishment, co-ordination and maintenance of the Panel, payment rates, the defined Role/TOR’s of the panel, panel CPD/training requirements/training programme, National approach while focused towards building a community of practice.

Planned Briefing Sessions are to commence in February 2019 to begin the process of recruitment and Training.

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<sup>i</sup><https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Quality%20Assuring%20Assessment%20%20Guidelines%20for%20Providers%2C%20Revised%202013.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> ETBI External Authentication Sectoral Consultation document proposal 1 & 2