

**MSLETB TRAINING CENTRE**  
**Policy on Assessment Development, Marking**  
**and Grading**



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



## Table of Contents

<b>About this Document.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. The Functions of Assessment.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Main Principles that Underpin ETB Training Centre Assessments.....</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1 Fairness.....	6
3.2 Consistency.....	6
3.3 Accuracy.....	6
3.3.1 Validity.....	6
3.3.2 Reliability.....	7
3.4 Practicality.....	7
3.5 Transparency.....	7
<b>4. The ETB Training Centre Approach to Assessment.....</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1 Criterion-referencing.....	8
4.2 Competence Based Assessment.....	8
<b>5. Assessment Techniques.....</b>	<b>8</b>
5.1 Coursework.....	8
5.1.1 Assignment.....	8
5.1.2 Project.....	9
5.1.3 Portfolio/Collection of Work.....	9
5.1.4 Learner Record.....	9
5.2 Skills Demonstration/Practical Tests.....	9
5.3 Theory Test.....	9
<b>6. Marking and Grading.....</b>	<b>11</b>
6.1 The ETB Training Centre Approach to Grading Assessment Results.....	11
6.2 ETB Training Centre Policy on Marking Assessment.....	11
<b>7. Assessment Evidence, Marking Sheets and Records.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>8. Endorsement of Assessment Techniques (Testing the Test).....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>9. Assessment Review.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Appendix 1: QQI/FETAC's System of Classifying Grades for Major Awards.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Glossary of Definitions.....</b>	<b>14</b>

## About this Document

Agreed by the ETB Training Centre, this document applies to **all** training and assessment activities within the ETB Training Centre. For practical reasons the content herein may be interpreted and communicated via other ETB Training Centre documents and procedures. Where there is any lack of clarity or a conflict of interpretation, the content of this document takes precedence. Requests for changes to this document should be made to the ETB Training Centre.

This document is one of a number of ETB Training Centre documents that has been prepared to meet the requirements of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. The documents listed below are related to the ETB Training Centre assessment:

Breaches of ETB Training Centre Assessment Procedures

Assessment Regulations

Learner Guide to Assessment

**Policy on Assessment Development, Marking and Grading**

National Assessment Procedures

# 1. Introduction

The ETB Training Centre, as a significant vocational education and training provider in Ireland, endeavours to enhance the skills and flexibility of the Irish workforce by developing and running programmes that are customer-focused, cost-effective, efficient, and quality assured. The ETB Training Centre recognises that relevant qualifications assist learners to gain employment and/or gain access or progression to further education and training, while giving assurance to employers that learners have attained the prescribed standards of competence that will be needed in the workplace.

To facilitate the ETB Training Centre learners to develop relevant skills and competencies through its training programmes, and to receive national recognition through an award, the ETB Training Centre ensures that its approach to assessment development, marking and grading is compatible with best practice for workplace competence focused assessment and the requirements of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999.<sup>1</sup>

The Act sets out that the Awards Councils are responsible for determining award standards for qualifications. These award standards are developed in consultation with relevant national stakeholders and are expressed in terms of skill, knowledge and competence statements. Providers, such as the ETB Training Centre, are responsible for ensuring that the programmes that they provide, organise or procure are capable of bringing learners to these nationally agreed award standards. To this end, the ETB Training Centre is specifically obliged to submit all its training programmes to the appropriate Awards Councils for validation.

The Act defines validation as *“the process by which an awarding body shall satisfy itself that a learner may attain knowledge, skill or competence for the purpose of an award made by the awarding body”*. The development of assessment is one part of the overall process of preparing a training programme for validation by an awarding body. As part of an application to have a programme validated, the Awards Councils require providers to set out assessment arrangements that adequately address the assessment requirements in the award standard.

The policy outlined in this document sets out the ETB Training Centre approach to fair and consistent assessment and explains how the ETB Training Centre addresses the requirements of Awards Councils to whose awards its programmes lead. It describes the principles that underpin the ETB Training Centre assessment, the particular emphasis on criterion-referencing and assessment of competence, the range of assessment techniques that the ETB Training Centre supports, and the approach used for marking and grading that ensures that the ETB Training Centre learners attain awards that are graded/classified in accordance with the Award Councils policies.

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter also referred to as “the Act”

## **2. The Functions of Assessment**

Assessment is the process that determines the extent to which an individual has reached a level of knowledge, skill and competence. It reflects achievement of the standards of the award to which a programme is intended to lead.

Assessment involves making a judgement, which is based on appropriate evidence of a learner's knowledge, skill or competence by comparison with a standard.

Assessment of the ETB Training Centre learners may take place in a range of settings including: classrooms, training workshops, the workplace, or in a community or on-the-job setting.

The ETB Training Centre assessments are expected to fulfill the following functions:

### ***1. Learning:***

- a. Provides feedback to learners
- b. Motivates learners
- c. Builds on previous achievements
- d. Establishes learner achievement levels on completion of a training programme
- e. Provides feedback to the ETB Training Centre on the learning outcomes of training

### ***2. Quality Assurance:***

- a. Helps monitor programme effectiveness over time
- b. Provides data indicating that the programme is achieving the required national standards
- c. Demonstrates compliance with awarding body requirements

### ***3. Certification:***

- a. Outlines achievements on completion of a training programme
- b. Grades a learner's level of performance
- c. Facilitates learner progression within the workplace or further education and training

### 3. Main Principles that Underpin the ETB Training Centre Assessment

#### 3.1 Fairness

The ETB Training Centre ensures that its procedures for the assessment of learners are fair. In this context, the organisation strives to ensure that both assessment personnel and learners consider the assessment arrangements to be appropriate to the standards set out in the programme's training objectives/learning outcomes. Throughout the programme, the learner should be given adequate opportunities and resources to prepare. This implies an open system whereby prior to the assessment event, learners are, in general terms, made aware of the expected performance criteria and assessment conditions and receive timely, constructive and appropriate feedback on their performance following assessment.

Fairness in assessment provides equity of opportunity for the ETB Training Centre learners in line with Equality Legislation<sup>2</sup> and is unbiased, impartial and inclusive.

To help ensure fairness, it is the ETB Training Centre policy that learners should be made aware of:

- The ETB Training Centre publication "Learner Guide to Assessment"
- The ETB Training Centre assessment appeal procedure

#### 3.2 Consistency

A fair assessment requires consistency in terms of assessment procedures, including marking and grading. Consistency does not mean that learning outcomes must always be assessed in the same way.

#### 3.3 Accuracy

Although a variety of assessment techniques can be used to measure attainment, the ETB Training Centre endeavours to ensure that any measurement carried out is accurate. To be accurate, measurements must be *valid* and *reliable*.

##### 3.3.1 Validity

Any assessment system is valid to the extent that it can accurately measure what it claims to measure:

1. Does the assessment measure the training programme's intended objectives/ learning outcomes i.e. skills, knowledge and competence?
2. Is the assessment technique used fit for/appropriate to the purpose (e.g. a practical assessment should be used to assess practical skills)

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<sup>2</sup> Equality Act 2004, Equal Status Act 2000

In order to ensure the validity of the assessment it is therefore the ETB Training Centre policy to:

1. Clearly define what is being assessed
2. Select appropriate techniques and methods to measure learner attainment

### **3.3.2 Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency of measurement of the assessment system. Reliable assessment will produce similar results in similar conditions. The question that arises is whether the assessment will produce the same results in similar, but not identical conditions. If there is a reasonable comparison in the cases selected, then the test is deemed to be reliable.

A reliable assessment produces consistent assessment decisions. To be reliable an assessment must:

1. Be based on valid assessment techniques
2. Ensure evidence is generated under consistently-applied conditions of assessment
3. Produce reasonably consistent decisions across the range of assessors applying the assessment in different situations and contexts and with different groups of learners

In order to strengthen the reliability of assessment it is the ETB Training Centre policy that:

1. Assessment is undertaken against appropriate criteria
2. Assessors know and apply procedures consistently
3. Assessment practices are subjected to both internal and external verification as per the ETB Training Centre Transition Quality Assurance procedures

### **3.4 Practicality**

Practical considerations for the ETB Training Centre include the ratio of assessment time to training time, ease of use, and administrative efficiency. The ETB Training Centre also examines the cost/benefit ratio of assessment and by extension the amount of resources that can be reasonably applied for the purposes of assessment.

### **3.5 Transparency**

Transparent assessment policies and guidelines exist within the ETB Training Centre to ensure clarity and understanding. These include clear and unambiguous definitions and requirements with regard to fairness, accuracy and reliability.

## **4. The ETB Training Centre Approach to Assessment**

### **4.1 Criterion-referencing**

In common with the learning outcomes approach adopted as part of the National Framework of Qualifications, the ETB Training Centre assessment is standards-based and criterion-referenced; that is to say it is undertaken against pre-determined standards of occupational performance that relate to the learning outcomes included in a stakeholder-agreed award standard and a validated programme.

### **4.2 Competence Based Assessment**

In addition to being criterion-referenced, some the ETB Training Centre assessments are also competence based<sup>3</sup>, because they involve certain assessment items that are designated as “essential” in order to achieve a pass grade. Assessment items are designated as “essential” only if identified as such in the related award standard and in the programme and assessment specifications prior to assessment development. The “essential” items can relate to areas such as health and safety or other critical legislative or industry standards.

## **5. Assessment Techniques**

It is the ETB Training Centre policy to use appropriate assessment techniques. Sometimes these are already specified in the award standard by the Awards Council. It is the ETB Training Centre policy to ensure that all learning outcomes are assessed as required by the awarding body’s policy. Assessments should include assessment techniques in sufficient number and mix to test the achievement of programme learning outcomes. The following assessment techniques may be used in the ETB Training Centre programmes:

### **5.1 Coursework**

Coursework assessments can have both summative and formative functions. They are useful to assess problem-solving skills and creativity, both of which are difficult to address adequately in a formal examination. Coursework can include essays, assignments, projects, portfolios etc.

#### **5.1.1 Assignment**

An assignment is an exercise carried out in response to a brief with specific guidelines as to what should be included. An assignment is usually of short duration but may be carried out over a specified period of time. Assignments may take the form of a practical activity e.g. a practical assignment or a research activity/evaluation following investigation of a particular topic e.g. a written assignment.

#### **5.1.2 Project**

A project is a response to a brief and is usually carried out over a period of time specified as part of the brief. Projects may involve research, may require investigation of a topic, issue or problem, or may involve a process such as a design task, a performance or practical activity or production of an artifact or event.

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<sup>3</sup> See “Competence Bases Awards” in the Glossary of Definitions for a more detailed explanation



### **5.1.3 Portfolio/Collection of Work**

A portfolio or collection of work is a collection and/or selection of pieces of work produced by the learner over a period of time that demonstrates achievement of a range of learning outcomes. Guidelines and instructions are devised for the learner. Using these, the learner compiles a collection of their own work. The collection may be self-generated or may be generated in response to a particular brief or tasks/activities devised by the assessor.

### **5.1.4 Learner Record**

A learner record is the learner's self-reported and self-reflective record in which he/she describes specific learning experiences, activities, responses and skills acquired. The record may take a number of forms: it can be a structured logbook, a (reflective) diary, a selective record of events or experiences over a period of time, a learning journal, a lab notebook or a sketchbook. For example, a lab notebook could record specific tasks or activities carried out and the analytical results obtained by the learner.

## **5.2 Skills Demonstration/Practical Tests**

A skills demonstration is used to assess a wide range of practical based learning outcomes including practical skills and knowledge, such as laboratory skills, interpersonal skills or oral language skills. The demonstration of skill including process skills related to practical achievement is assessed by means of practical test. It is essential to use practical tests where key objectives state that the learner must demonstrate practical achievement in defined tasks.

Practical assessments are generally used where a set period of time is allocated to the learner to demonstrate practical knowledge, skills or competence.

Sufficient learner evidence must be made available from the skills demonstration for internal and external verification. In the case of a practical task-based demonstration this may include a range of the following:

- product/outcome of the tasks where applicable e.g. computer print out
- photographic or video evidence of learner completing the task
- learner account of task
- completed assessment sheets/checklists

A skills demonstration may take place in the workplace i.e. in a live environment, or in a simulated environment. In some specific cases the demonstration must take place in a real/live environment.

## **5.3 Theory Test**

A theory test provides a means of assessing a learner's ability to recall and apply knowledge, skills and understanding within a set period of time and under clearly specified conditions. Theory tests are a form of assessment which normally require a fixed timeframe and a sight unseen question paper and range of questions. The assessment instrument for theory tests is the test paper i.e. questions or tasks devised for the learner. The theory test may involve assessing listening and interpretation skills (aural testing), or may involve assessment through verbal questioning (one-to-one or in a group), or written responses.

Assessment instruments used in the ETB Training Centre for the testing of theory can include:

- **Short answer questions:** these require a response of limited length and may take a number of forms. Some short answer questions may seek specific words or phrases in the response. Short answer questions are generally easy to construct and with the assistance of model answers are relatively easy to mark.
- **Multiple choice tests/questions:** these may be used to test factual knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, problem solving and evaluation. As multiple choice questions are not open-ended, they are not useful in assessing communication skills such as the ability to organise and express information and to write fluently and quickly. Although multiple choice questions provide objectivity and reliability as regards marking, assurance of their reliability is an important factor in their design.
- **Structured questions:** these are divided into a number of related parts and generally require the learner to demonstrate more in-depth knowledge and understanding of a topic. Structured questions are useful for seeking evidence of cognitive skills such as ability to discuss, compare, analyse, evaluate, translate or solve an issue, problem or topic. However, structured questions can be difficult to mark reliably.
- **Essay type questions:**<sup>4</sup> like structured questions, these require the learner to demonstrate an in-depth knowledge and understanding of a topic. Essay type questions usually focus on one particular area of knowledge and are useful for seeking evidence of cognitive skills such as the ability to discuss, compare, analyse, evaluate, translate or solve an issue, problem or topic. Essay questions can be difficult to mark reliably.

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<sup>4</sup> These can often also form part of a coursework assessment

## **6. Marking and Grading**

### **6.1 The ETB Training Centre Approach to Grading Assessment Results**

For programmes leading to awards at levels 1 to 3, the ETB Training Centre learners are graded as follows:

- When a learner has not achieved the minimum standards in an assessment, the grade is recorded as 'Referred'
- A 'Successful' grade is awarded to a learner who has achieved all required learning outcomes

For the ETB Training Centre programmes leading to further education and training awards at levels 4 to 6, the following grading approach applies:

- When a learner has not achieved the minimum standards in an assessment, the grade is recorded as 'Referred'
- A 'Pass' is awarded to a learner who has attained the minimum standard. To be awarded a pass grade, a learner must have achieved a mark of between 50-64%
- A 'Merit' is awarded to a learner who has exceeded the minimum requirements. To be awarded a merit grade, a learner must have achieved a mark of between 65-79%
- A 'Distinction' is awarded to a learner who has substantially exceeded the minimum requirements. For a learner to be awarded a distinction he/she must have achieved a mark of 80% or over.

ETB Training Centre programmes leading to higher education and training awards at levels 6 to 10 must adhere to the grading approach outlined by QQI/HETAC.

The system of grading major awards is in accordance with Awards Councils policies (see Appendix 1: QQI/FETAC's System of Grading Major Awards).

### **6.2 ETB Training Centre Policy on Marking Assessment**

It is the ETB Training Centre policy that a fair, transparent and reliable marking system is devised for each assessment, which identifies assessment criteria and allocates marks to each criterion.

The acceptable evidence expected in a learner's response is indicated in a model answer or checklist that shows expected performance against each assessment criterion.

With the exception of assessments leading to awards at Levels 1 to 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications, and assessments leading to competence based awards (as per 4.2 above), all the ETB Training Centre results for assessments are expressed in marks of 100.

For reasons of arithmetical convenience, but mainly to assist discrimination between pass, merit and distinction performance, the total assessment marks allocated to a test are set at

100 or multiples of 100. Individual test weightings are determined in accordance with the weightings assigned in the assessment specification of the award standard, or as set out by the appropriate Awards Council's assessment policy.

Assessment criteria are marked in a way that is appropriate to the assessment technique i.e. one mark or multiple marks may be applied to an assessment criterion as required.

Assessment criteria are allocated marks that reflect their relative difficulty, and partial marks may be awarded for partial answers.

## **7. Assessment Evidence, Marking Sheets and Records**

Clear marking schemes and records are a necessary part of an assessment system in the ETB Training Centre, as they help to ensure that the assessment is fair, reliable, and transparent. Assessment records include the assessor's marking sheets, summary assessment sheets, assessment attendance records etc.

It is the ETB Training Centre policy that assessment evidence will be authentic i.e. created by the learner during the assessment event, relevant to the assessment criteria and sufficient to satisfy the requirements of assessment criteria.

Marking sheets are devised for the purpose of capturing, grading and approving results.

Retention of records and evidence complies with the administrative requirements of the ETB Training Centre and with legal and Award Councils requirements. These requirements are reflected in assessment regulations.

## **8. Endorsement of Assessment Techniques (Testing the Test)**

It is the ETB Training Centre policy that an essential part of the assessment design process is verifying that tests work as intended (testing the test). This is in order to ensure that any design flaws are eliminated prior to the test being used in a live assessment environment.

## **9. Assessment Review**

The ETB Training Centre is committed to ongoing assessment review as part of its Quality Assurance policy. Processes must be put in place to ensure that assessments are fit for purpose, and that they continue to adhere to the Principles of Assessment (see Section 3) and remain capable of determining the relevant standards of knowledge, skill and competence. This is particularly relevant where programme design or delivery may alter over a period of time.

## Appendix 1: QQI/FETAC's System of Classifying Grades for Major Awards

**Grade Multipliers: Distinction = 3, Merit = 2, Pass = 1**

<b>MODULE</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>CREDIT</b>
Module 1	Sculpture	15
Module 2	Ceramics	15
Module 3	Printmaking	15
Module 4	Communications	15
Module 5	Teamworking	15
Module 6	Personal Effectiveness	15
Module 7	Numeracy	15
Module 8	Computer Literacy	15

Total Credits available for all Minor Awards = 120

<b>Learner Results</b>			
<b>MODULE</b>	<b>RESULT</b>	<b>GRADE</b>	<b>WEIGHTED CREDITS</b>
Module 1	95%	Distinction	$15 \times 3 = 45$
Module 2	80%	Distinction	$15 \times 3 = 45$
Module 3	84%	Distinction	$15 \times 3 = 45$
Module 4	70%	Merit	$15 \times 2 = 30$
Module 5	70%	Merit	$15 \times 2 = 30$
Module 6	72%	Merit	$15 \times 2 = 30$
Module 7	70%	Merit	$15 \times 2 = 30$
Module 8	71%	Merit	$15 \times 2 = 30$

Total Weighted Credits 285

Weighted Average =  $285 \div 120 = 2.38$

Rounded to Whole Number = 2 = MERIT

Learner Grade for Major Award in ART = MERIT

## Appendix 2: Glossary of Definitions

**Assessment:** the process whereby learner performance in a range of areas is established to ensure that the knowledge/skill/competence is demonstrated to meet the requirements of the National Awards Standards for the award.

- **Assessment Technique:** a method of assessing learner evidence for a particular range of learning outcomes, which can take the format of an assignment, theory test, skills demonstration, project, portfolio, learner record, coursework etc.
- **Assessment Instrument:** the specific test that is devised based on the specified assessment technique, such as the test paper being used in a short answer test, or the brief for a portfolio.

**Award:** that which is conferred, granted or given by an Awards Council and which records that a learner has acquired a programme's standard of knowledge, skill or competence.

**Awards Council:** a national body that has the power to give a learner a qualification (award). The awards councils are currently QQI/FETAC and QQI/HETAC.

**Competence:** the practical application of knowledge or skill in a specific situation or context.

### **Competence Based Awards<sup>5</sup>:**

Some awards, because of the critical nature of their learning outcomes, may be considered 'competence based' and, in such cases, it is not appropriate to apply a percentage marking scheme to determine levels of learner performance.

For QQI/FETAC's competence based awards involving specific legislative requirements, health and safety requirements or other critical industry standards regarding levels of competences, the assessment grading criteria specified by the Standards Development Group in the Award Specification will specify the minimum standard of achievement required by the learner. The ETB Training Centre assessments will reflect these grading criteria.

In a competence based assessment devised for such an award, specific performance criteria will clearly outline the competence to be demonstrated by the learner to achieve the minimum performance required for a Pass. A learner who fails an "essential" item will be deemed to have failed the assessment.

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<sup>5</sup> See Implementation of QQI/FETAC's Grading Policy – Draft 2008

In addition to establishing the minimum performance required for Pass, additional assessment criteria will outline the level of performance required to achieve the grades of Merit or Distinction.

**QQI/FETAC:** QQI/FETAC (Quality and Qualification Ireland / the Further Education and Training Awards Council) is the national awarding body for further education and training in Ireland. QQI/FETAC's functions include: making and promoting awards at Levels 1 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualification, validating programmes, monitoring and ensuring the quality of programmes and determining standards.

**QQI/HETAC:** QQI/HETAC (Quality and Qualifications Ireland / the Higher Education and Training Awards Council) is the national awarding body for higher education and training in Ireland. QQI/HETAC's functions include: making awards at Levels 6 to 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications, validating programmes, monitoring and evaluating the quality of programmes and determining standards.

**Knowledge:** the cognitive representation of ideas, events or happenings.

**Learner:** a person who is acquiring, or who has acquired knowledge, skills or competence as per the learning outcomes of a particular programme.

**Learning Outcomes:** Learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, to understand and/or be able to do following successful completion of a period of learning.

**National Framework of Qualifications:** the single structure mechanism for recognising all education and training in Ireland. The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a system of ten levels. A 'fan diagram' helps to illustrate the levels on the NFQ and each level is based on nationally agreed standards of knowledge, skill and competence i.e. what an individual is expected to know, understand and be able to do following successful completion of a process of learning.

**Programme:** the process by which learners may acquire knowledge, skill or competence. It includes courses of study or instruction, apprenticeships, training and employment.

**Skill:** the goal-directed performance of a task, underpinned by know-how of the procedural knowledge required.

**Standards:** Standards identify the knowledge, skill and competence that must be attained to achieve an award.

**Validation:** the process by which an awarding body shall satisfy itself that a learner may attain knowledge, skill or competence for the purpose of an award made by the awarding body.