

End-point Assessment: Market Insight Report



January 2019

DIGITAL APPRENTICESHIPS

END-POINT ASSESSMENT: MARKET INSIGHT REPORT

CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary	3
2. Introduction and Methodology	7
3. Overview of Digital Apprenticeships	9
4. Registered End-Point Assessment Organisations	11
5. The End-Point Assessment Market	14
6. Assessments Undertaken	16
7. The Assessment Model	22
8. The Assessment Plan in Practice	26
a) Assessors	26
b) The Gateway	27
c) The Summative Portfolio	28
d) The Synoptic Project	29
e) The Employer Reference	30
f) The Interview	31
g) Grading	32
h) Organising End-Point Assessments	34
i) Feedback	35
9. External Quality Assurance	36
Annex 1 List of Interviewees	
Annex 2 Interview Schedule	

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The External Quality Assurance service for digital apprenticeships will be live in January 2019. The purpose of this report is to advise the Digital Apprenticeship Quality Board of the current position of the end-point assessment services to help them identify risks and the priorities for the EQA service. It will also provide feedback to the IfA quality team on the readiness of registered end-point assessment organisations and the current delivery position for the EPA of digital apprenticeships.

The report will also help inform Trailblazer groups and the IfA on how the end-point assessment of digital apprenticeships is working in practice.

As at November 2018, there were

- 13 published digital standards
- over 12,000 starts on these standards
- 10 registered end-point assessment organisations
- over 800 end-point assessments completed
- nearly 500 apprentices in the end-point assessment process
- a further 1,500 apprentices in the pipeline for end-point assessment

This report is based on semi-structured interviews carried out in November 2018 with nine of the ten end-point assessment organisations on the ESFA Register of End-Point Assessment Organisations that cover one or more of the digital apprenticeships within the remit of the Digital Apprenticeship Quality Board EQA.

The findings are based on the experiences and perceptions of these nine EPAOs, all of whom are at different stages in the development and delivery of their end-point assessment services. Whilst this is a small sample, it covers **all** the three live EPAO organisations and **all but one** of the ten registered end-point assessment organisations for digital apprenticeships.

Key findings

All (n~9) of the EPAOs reported liking the model for end-point assessment.

All(n~9) of the live EPAOs report that the assessment model is working well – with all of the assessment tools operating well in practice.

Two EPAOs identified two areas where greater clarity is needed to ensure consistent interpretation of the Assessment Plan. These are the Employer Reference and the Synoptic Project.

All (n~9) of the EPAOs expressed concern about potential changes to the policy and funding of apprenticeships and, in particular, any changes in approach to end-point assessment.

A mixed market of EPAOs is developing across most digital standards in that there are a variety of different types of organisations offering end-point assessment.

There is some evidence that providers are shopping around between the larger end-point assessment organisations – and that employers are now starting to do the same.

The three live EPAOs report that most of the issues to date have been “teething problems”, with providers and employers not fully understanding the new approach. These issues are being overcome with experience. The support materials and events that EPAOs have delivered are helping providers get a better understanding of what is required.

All (n~9) of the EPAOs feel that the EQA service will add value if it targets the areas of highest risk – the assessors, the interview and the grading decision.

All (n~9) of the EPAOs also believe that the EQA service will add value if it focusses on how the end-point assessment organisations are managing and mitigating these risk areas – through their own IQA processes, rather than focus on duplicating these activities.

Those EPAOs who have already delivered end-point assessment (n~3) feel that the EQA service should focus initially on the comparability of the assessment decisions on the Infrastructure Technician standard.

All (n~9) of the EPAOs have welcomed these early discussions and having the opportunity to feedback their observations and experience. All report that they value this “market insight” work and the collaborative nature of our approach.

All (n~9) of the EPAOs welcomed this employer-led EQA approach, not just with its focus on compliance, consistency and comparability – as with all EQA models, but with its additional focus on occupational competence and continuous improvement.

Those EPAOs who also deliver EPA against other standards (n~5), all express concern about the different requirements from different EQA bodies.

Recommendations

NSAR (as EQA) should consider

- holding up-to-date objective information and direct links through to the relevant end-point assessment organisations to help employers and providers select their end-point assessment organisation.
- focusing on the grading decisions to explore
 - the differences between merits and distinctions, and the different types of merits being awarded

- the failure rates of standards where the sample is over 30 and the fail rate is over 10%
- establishing greater clarity on what the Employer Reference is for and how it should be used.
- establishing clear channels for reporting concerns about apprentices failing end-point assessment because they are on the wrong standard so that a proper investigation can be made and appropriate action taken
- targeting the IQA processes of end-point assessment organisations to ensure competence and consistency of assessors
- prioritising comparability work focusing on the three EPAOs delivering end-point assessment for the Infrastructure Technician apprenticeship.
- making assessor consistency a priority for EQA and this be targeted at assessing portfolios, the interviews and grading.
- accelerating their work to bring consistency wherever possible across the EQA bodies and the sharing of information between the ESFA and the IFA with EQA bodies to avoid EPAOs having to provide the same or similar information to different organisations.
- reviewing the processes that EPAOs have put in place to ensure the independence and appropriateness of the controlled environment and the invigilator.
- publishing the charges for EQA, now they are agreed, on the website to give easy access to any organisation considering developing EPA services.

NSAR should make sure the following recommendations find their way to the right audiences:

For the assessment plan process-

- Assessment Plans should include the rationale and purpose of each assessment method.
- Future Assessment Plans for digital apprenticeships should follow a similar assessment model, wherever appropriate to that standard, as the assessment model is working well in practice.
- Future Assessment Plans should map which KSBs are assessed by which method.
- Future Assessment Plans should clarify the balance between an interview structured around common questions and an interview

focused on gathering and validating evidence against the grading criteria.

- Future Assessment Plans should make clearer what is required in the project. NSAR to also seek a view as to whether or not any of the suggested changes to Project would be appropriate.
- Employer groups should continue to produce an Occupational Brief as a key tool for consistency – whether as a separate document or, ideally, within the body of the Assessment Plan so that it is easily available and within the mandated documents

For the Register of End-Point Assessment Organisation process -

- The Register of End Point Assessment Organisations should be made more user-friendly for employers and providers to use
- Information on the Register should be checked and updated on a regular basis
- There should be an alert system for EQA bodies to advise them when a new EPAO is registered against one of their standards
- EPAOs should receive information about their EQA body as soon as they are registered, with a recommendation that they contact them
- Organisations thinking of developing EPA for digital apprenticeships should be encouraged to get in touch with their EQA body to minimise “surprises” about costs or approach.

For providers and employers -

- New providers should be encouraged by all parties to engage early with their chosen EPAO to get an early understanding of what is required.
- Employers and providers should be encouraged to book early for end-point assessment, not only to help the forward planning of the EPAO, but also to get the benefits of the support and guidance provided by the EPAO to prepare their apprentice for EPA and to speed up the time between registering for the Gateway and completing the end-point assessment.

For the system stakeholders -

- The ESFA and the IFA should accelerate their efforts to share data about the take up of standards.

CONTACT US

www.nsar.co.uk/eqa eqa@nsar.co.uk

2. Introduction and Methodology

The External Quality Assurance service for digital apprenticeships will be live in January 2019. The Digital Apprenticeship Quality Board felt that it would be useful to take a 'temperature check' of the current position with end-point assessment organisations and establish the immediate priorities for the external quality assurance service. This would allow the development of an informed start-up to the EQA service based on the priorities identified by the EPAOs. This led to a series of "market insight" visits, a workshop and this report.

The purpose of this report is -

- to advise the Digital Apprenticeship Quality Board of the current position of the end-point assessment services to help them identify risks and the priorities for the EQA service,
- to provide feedback to the IfA quality team on the "readiness" of registered end-point assessment organisations, and the current delivery position for the EPA of digital apprenticeships, and
- to inform the Trailblazer groups and the IfA on how the end-point assessment of digital apprenticeships are working in practice

It will also be useful

- for those involved in the development and review of digital standards and assessment plans – such as the IfA, the Digital Apprenticeship Board and the digital Trailblazer groups,
- for those involved in the delivery of digital apprenticeships, and
- for all stakeholders with an interest in the quality and impact of digital apprenticeships.

This report provides the first insight in to the end-point assessment organisations perceptions of what is happening on the ground, what lessons are being learnt and what this means for the further development and continuous improvement of end-point assessment of digital standards.

Methodology

This report is based on semi-structured interviews carried out in November 2018 with nine of the ten end-point assessment organisations on the ESFA Register of End-Point Assessment Organisations that offer one or more of the digital apprenticeships within the remit of the Digital Apprenticeship Quality Board EQA footprint. Each of the EPAOs was sent the interview schedule in advance. Notes of each of these discussions were then checked with each organisation for accuracy. A workshop, attended by six of the EPAOs, took place to discuss, validate and refine the findings and recommendations. This report was then sent out to all the end-point assessment organisations for comment and correction.

The findings are based on the experiences and perceptions of these nine EPAOs, all of whom are at different stages in the development and delivery of their end-

point assessment services. Whilst this is a small sample, it covers **all** the three live EPAO organisations and **all but one** of the ten registered end-point assessment organisations for digital apprenticeships.

The list of interviewees is attached as Annex A, as is the list of attendees at the workshop. The Interview Schedule is in Annex B

Our thanks is given to all of the people and organisations who contributed to this, and who have their time and their insight in to this process.

3. OVERVIEW OF DIGITAL APPRENTICESHIPS

Our EQA service covers 13 digital standards, at Levels 3 and 4, that were developed by the Digital Apprenticeship Steering Group, supported by the Tech Partnership. It will also cover the two other Level 3 standards currently in development. The 13 published standards are set out below.

Level 3 and 4 standards	Level	Date Published	Months live - to Nov 18	Typical Duration	Funding Band	New Funding Band
Cyber Intrusion Analyst	4	March 2016	45	24	£18k	n/a
Cyber Security Technologist	4	May 2016	42	24	£18k	n/a
Data Analyst	4	March 2016	45	24	£15k	n/a
Digital Marketer	3	March 2016	45	18	£12k	£11k
Infrastructure Technician	3	March 2016	45	12	£15k	£15k
IS Business Analyst	4	March 2017	33	18	£18k	n/a
IT Technical Salesperson	3	September 2016		12	£12k	n/a
Network Engineer	4	November 2014	60	24	£18k	£17k
Software Developer	4	November 2014	60	24	£18k	£18k
Software Development Technician	3	December 2016	35	18	£11k	n/a
Software Tester	4	April 2016	44	24	£18k	n/a
Unified Communications Trouble shooter	4	March 2016	45	24	£18	n/a
Unified Communications Technician	3	December 2016	35	24	£15k	n/a

It can be seen that the published standards have been developed and approved at different times since February 2014.

All of these standards have the same model for end-point assessment.

Starts on Digital Standards

The following table shows the starts on each of these standards.

Level 3 and 4 standards	Full year 14/15	Full year 15/16	Full year 16/17	Full Year 17/18	Cumulative by standard
Cyber Intrusion Analyst	0	0	10	10	20
Cyber Security Technologist	0	0	90	226	316
Data Analyst	0	10	50	756	816
Digital Marketer	0	0	340	2,605	2,945
Infrastructure Technician	0	120	1,440	2,853	4,413
IS Business Analyst	0	0	10	172	182
IT Technical Salesperson	0	0	30	317	347
Network Engineer	50	200	350	460	1,060
Software Developer	60	140	250	543	993
Software Development Technician	0	0	140	632	772
Software Tester	0	0	40	106	146
Unified Communications Troubleshooter	0	0	0	25	25
Unified Communications Technician	0	0	90	249	339
Total	110	470	2840	8,954	12,374

Source DfE (published November 2018)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships#apprenticeship-starts-and-achievements>

It can be seen that

- there are starts on all 13 of the standards.
- starts are growing significantly: nearly 9,000 of the 12,000 starts took place in the last academic year.
- Infrastructure Technician and Digital Marketer are generating significant numbers of starts.

4. REGISTERED END-POINT ASSESSMENT ORGANISATIONS

The following table shows the 11 EPAOs who are shown on the ESFA Register, by standard, as at November 2018.

	BCS	C & G	TCP	BIIAB	Ginger Nut Training	VQ Solutions	Essential Learning and Skills	Smart Awards	Brockenhurst College	Pearson	Training Qualifications UK
Software Developer	✓	✓									
Network Engineer	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Digital Marketer	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				✓	
Cyber Intrusion Analyst	✓		✓								
Cyber Security Technologist	✓										
Data Analyst	✓										
Infrastructure Technician	✓	✓	✓							✓	
IS Business Analyst	✓										
IT Technical Sales	✓		✓								✓
Software Development Technician	✓									✓	
Software Tester	✓										
Unified Communications Trouble Shooter	✓										
Unified Communications Technician	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓			
Status	<i>Live</i>	<i>Live</i>	<i>Live</i>	<i>Not yet ready</i>	<i>Ready</i>	<i>Not known</i>	<i>Ready</i>	<i>Ready</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>Not yet ready</i>	<i>Ready</i>

Key

Live = already delivering end-point assessments

Ready = everything in place and report that they could respond to an enquiry by booking an end-point assessment – but have not yet delivered any assessments

Not yet ready – not yet ready to offer an end-point assessment service

It can be seen that

- Only 10 of the 11 registered EPAOs are or will be delivering end-point assessments against these standards
- There is at least one EPAO registered against each standard
- Seven of the 13 standards have more than one EPAO registered against them
- One EPAO is offering EPAs against all 13 of the standards
- Three end-point assessment organisations are live and have delivered end-point assessment
- A further four could offer end-point assessments immediately
- A further two end-point assessment organisations will be live within the first quarter of next year
- Network Engineer, Digital Marketer, Infrastructure Technician and Unified Communications Technician have four or more EPAOs registered against them
- There is a mixed market of EPAOs:
 - Five of the EPAOs are Ofqual regulated, and another is working towards recognition by Ofqual
 - Two EPAOs are also training providers, offering digital apprenticeships – and in one case, the primary business is related to the occupation
 - Six EPAOs offer EPA services for other standards in other sectors
 - One EPAO is a professional body

At least five of the organisations have plans to register against additional digital standards.

All the EPAOs have had to make a business case internally to support the investment in new EPAO services – and this is proving difficult for everyone due to the uncertainty about numbers and forecasting.

The EPAOs have decided to become registered for different reasons.

In many cases EPAOs have decided to register against a particular standard (s) because of demand from their existing clients – whether training providers or large employers. In a few cases this is because an existing client does not want to use a different EPAO for their digital apprentices than the one they use for their other apprentices. In other cases, providers and employers are appointing EPAOs on a standard by standard basis.

In other cases, EPAOs have decided to develop an EPA service because of demand from new clients – who have been exploring options for EPA and have not felt that the current offer meets their needs.

In some cases, EPAOs have seen the opportunity to develop EPA services either as an extension to their current business or a new opportunity.

The difficulty in forecasting and the “late” registration for end-point assessment by employers and providers also causes difficulties for those EPAOs who are live.

Concerns have been expressed by all of the EPAOs about the costs and investment required to become ready to deliver EPAs, with then a significant lead in time for apprentices to complete their apprenticeships.

Their concerns are exacerbated because of the uncertainty of the policy context and the funding levels for apprenticeships. There are specific concerns relating to the changing rules on end-point assessment and the potential significant knock-on effects to the sustainability and viability of the end-point assessment service.

Readiness

One provider should not be on the Register having never applied to join.

Two organisations who were on the Register have since taken themselves off having decided not to offer end-point assessment for these standards.

Those who are not yet ready to deliver are on target to be live within the dates they provided to the ESFA, and all will be live within the next four months.

There are three providers who are ready but who have not yet been approached by any employers or providers to deliver end-point assessment. The three smaller EPAOs express a sense that the larger EPAOs have been able to monopolise the market and that providers and employers tend to contact “the big names”. In two such cases the EPAOs are not proactive in the EPAO market place mainly due to the costs and are dependent on employers and training providers using the Register to shop around. In the other case, the EPAO is reaching out directly to employers to generate a pipeline.

5. THE END POINT ASSESSMENT MARKET

Enquiries to end-point assessment organisations are coming mainly from independent training providers but there is a small and increasing number coming from colleges and from employers. Only one EPAO reported that all of its enquiries had come from employers.

The majority (n~5) of EPAOs report that providers and employers are shopping around between EPAOs, although not all EPAOs have had any such enquiries. Initial enquiries focus on the costs and then discussions move on to the quality of service and the additional support available. It would not appear that cost is the only factor in deciding on which EPAO to use.

In many cases, with the EPA service being new, providers and employers do not really know what to ask for when initially enquiring.

In contrast, in some cases EPAOs have been asked to enter in to formal tendering processes for the delivery of end-point assessment services.

Some of the smaller EPAOs (n~2) feel that employers and providers are tending to contact the larger organisations only. Such smaller EPAOs need a cohort of apprentices to make their offer viable. Larger organisations have existing networks and have field staff actively working with providers and employers to generate business.

One of the larger end-point assessment organisations reports that some providers who have already been working with them are now talking about shopping around but, at least so far, are not actioning this.

The majority of end-point assessment organisations (n~5) are developing significant guidance materials and support packages for their providers, employers and apprentices to support their journey through end-point assessment, to ensure all parties have a good understanding of what is required and to minimise the need for re-work. In some cases this also includes workshops and provider meetings. These activities would appear to be making an invaluable contribution to the system.

The Register

In discussing their current market, all (n~9) end-point assessment organisations expressed some concerns about the Register. The Register is the only mechanism whereby employers and providers can find out who is delivering end-point assessment and the EPAOs identified a number of areas where this could be made more effective.

All of the EPAOs expressed a level of frustration with the Register, citing examples such as

- the inaccuracies on the Register (whether phone numbers or contact details).
- the time lag in updating the Register
- the fact that it is a spread sheet when a database with a query function and search facilities would make it easier for employers and providers to search
- the fact that it provides very little information to help employers and providers to make an informed choice

All end-point assessment organisations felt that it was important for employers and providers to have an objective, and up to date, source of information about the different end-point assessment organisations.

Recommendation: the EQA body should consider whether it should also hold up to date objective information and with direct links through to the relevant end-point assessment organisations.

Interface between EPAOs and the EQA body

There have been two cases when an EPAO has been approached by another EQA body saying that they are responsible for the external quality assurance of digital apprenticeships. This has caused some confusion.

There does not appear to be a mechanism to introduce newly registered EPAO to the relevant EQA body or vice versa.

Recommendation: there should be an alert system for EQA bodies to advise them when a new EPAO is registered against one of their standards

Recommendation: EPAOs should receive information about their EQA body as soon as they are registered, with a recommendation that they contact them

6. ASSESSMENTS UNDERTAKEN

Number of assessments undertaken

The following end-point assessments have been taken against each standard.

	TOTAL ASSESSMENTS COMPLETED
Software Developer	69
Network Engineer	67
Digital Marketer	71
Cyber Intrusion Analyst	0
Cyber Security Technologist	1
Data Analyst	7
Infrastructure Technician	527
IS Business Analyst	0
IT Technical Sales	6
Software Development Technician	58
Software Tester	15
Unified Communications Trouble Shooter	0
Unified Communications Technician	40
TOTAL	861

It can be seen that **861** end point assessments have taken place.

EPAOs report that there are a further **491** apprentices in the gateway process and a further **1,513** apprentices in the pipeline.

Over 500 end-point assessments have taken place on the Infrastructure Technician standard, by three different end-point assessment organisation.

In addition, more than one end-point assessment organisation has undertaken assessments against the Network Engineer, Digital Marketer and Software Developer standards.

The time is therefore right to capture early learning and embark on the EQA service as the pipeline starts to increase significantly.

Recommendation: EQA work to focus on comparability of the Infrastructure Technician assessments. Further comparability work to focus on Network Engineer, Software Developer and Digital Marketer

Grade Results by Standard

It must be noted that for most standards we still only have very small samples. It is also important that, as yet, none of these grading decisions has been reviewed by the EQA service.

However, there is now a substantial sample of Infrastructure Technician assessments and it is interesting to see the emerging patterns, which will be useful to suggest areas of further investigation by the EQA service.

The following table shows the numbers that have been assessed against each standard and the grades awarded.

Software Developer

	Assessed	Fail	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Total	69	4	33	7	25
%	100%	6%	48%	10%	36%

Network Engineer

	Assessed	Fail	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Total	67	3	36	2	26
%	100%	4%	54%	3%	39%

Digital Marketer

	Assessed	Fail	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Total	71	4	38	5	24
%	100%	6%	53%	7%	34%

Cyber Security Technologist

	Assessed	Fail	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Total	1	0	0	0	1
%	100%				100%

Data Analyst

	Assessed	Fail	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Total	7	2	4	0	1
%		29%	57%	0%	14%

Infrastructure Technician

	Assessed	Fail	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Total	527	43	329	28	127
%	100%	8%	63%	5%	24%

IT Technical Sales

	Assessed	Fail	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Total	6	2	3	0	1
%	100%	33%	50%	0%	17%

Software Development Technician

	Assessed	Fail	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Total	58	6	39	4	9
%	100%	10%	68%	7%	15%

Software Tester

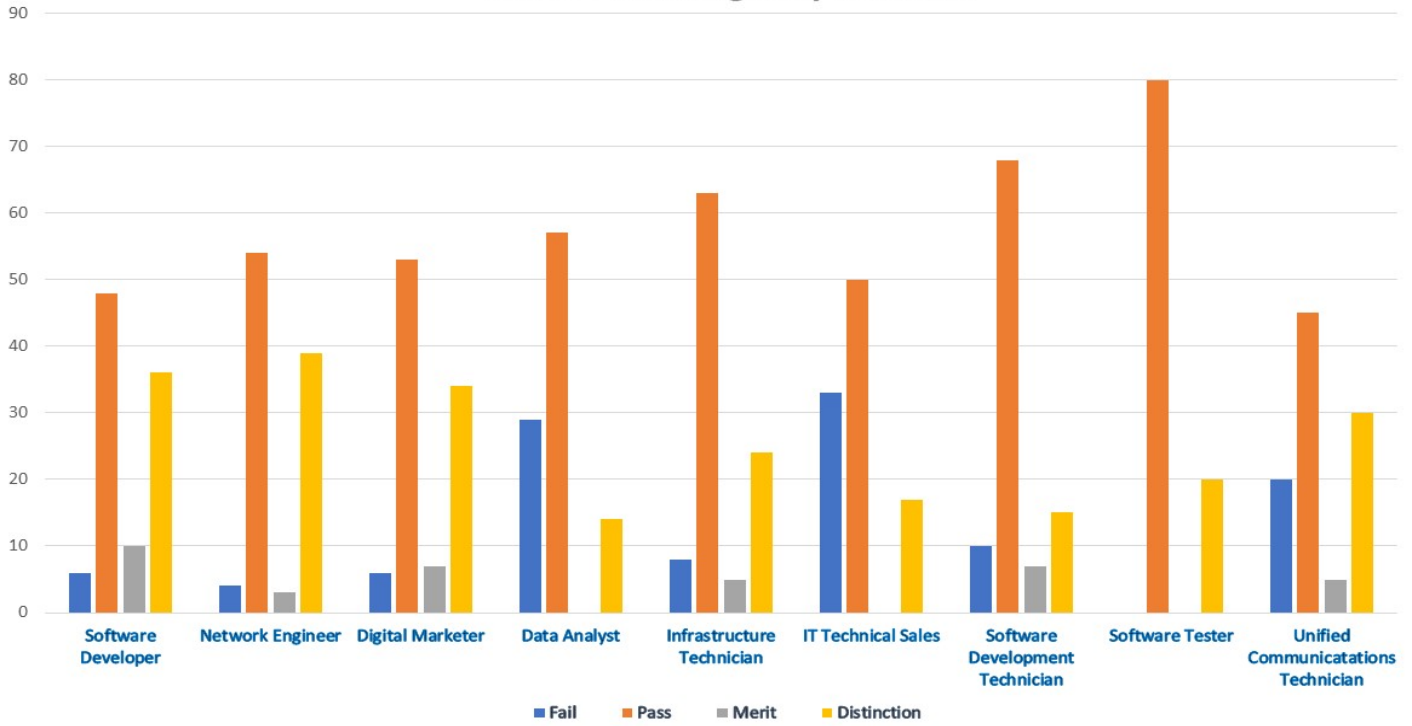
	Assessed	Fail	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Total	15	0	12	0	3
%	100%	0%	80%	0%	20%

Unified Communications Technician

	Assessed	Fail	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Total	40	8	18	2	12
%	100%	20%	45%	5%	30%

These are illustrated in the following graph.

Grade Percentages by Standard



It can be seen that, on the whole

- About 50% – 65% pass
- About 20% - 40% achieve a grade higher than a pass
- Of those who achieve a grade higher than a pass, the majority are achieving a distinction rather than a merit
- Fail rates are higher than 10% on Unified Communications Technician, IT Technical Sales, and Data Analyst - but the sample sizes for each of these is very low

The only standard with more than 100 end-point assessments - Infrastructure Technician, with 527 EPAs, shows that

- 8% fail
- 63% pass
- 5% merit
- 24% distinction

The majority of those who fail do so because of lack of evidence at the end-point assessment. In the majority of these cases the apprentices re-sit and can then present the required evidence. The two EPAOs who have had fails report that this is often because the provider has not understood what is required and, once this is understood, they can support their apprentice in presenting the right evidence (but see below).

Recommendation: The EQA service should focus on these grading decisions to explore

- The differences between merits and distinctions, and the different types of merits being awarded
- The failure rates of standards where the sample is over 30 and the fail rate is over 10%

Both of the EPAOs who have had “fails” report that the other reason for a fail is because the apprentice has been on the wrong standard for their role and so are just unable to provide evidence against the standard. Other EPAOs (n~3), who have not yet delivered but who are engaging with employers and providers, also report instances of this. A number of reasons were reported as to why this happens, including

- A misunderstanding about how the standards work, and that evidence has to be provided against all the KSBs.

- The standard that the employer wants not being available, so they select the next best fit.
- Providers and/or employers just wanting apprentices, even if the standard is not right
- The organisation only offering a limited number of apprenticeships, so the manager has to select the “best fit”

Two end-point assessment organisations report that they have terminated contracts when they have been concerned about the approach being taken by the employer and/or provider.

Two others report that they advise the IfA and/or the ESFA when such incidents occur.

Other end-point assessment organisations suggest that this is an issue for Ofsted.

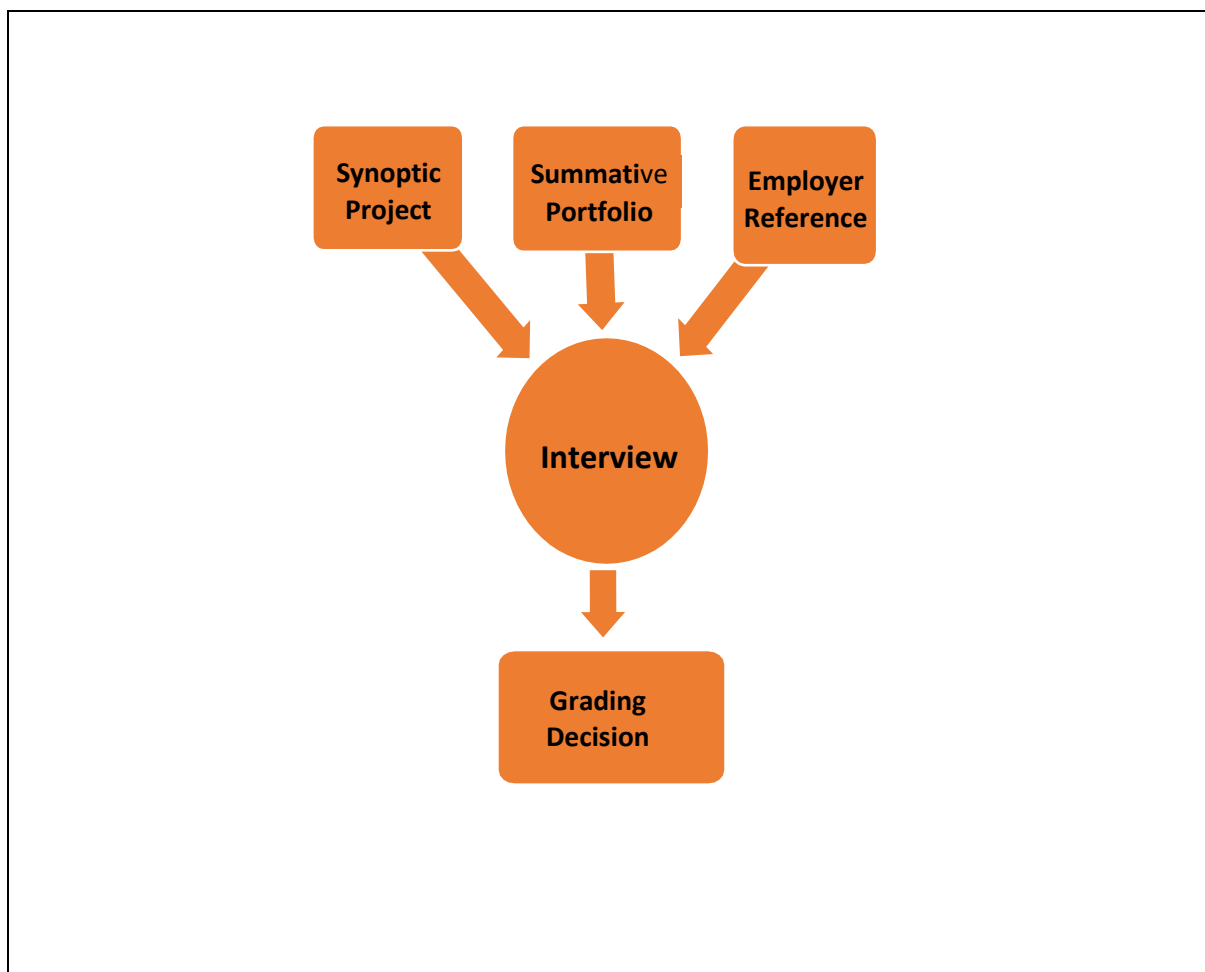
All end-point assessment organisations express concern about these situations and would like to see more clarity as to how this can be addressed and/or identified earlier - as not only has the apprentice been put in a situation where they can only fail, but the potential reputational damage to digital apprenticeships is significant.

Recommendation: there should be clarity as to who to report such concerns to so that a proper investigation can be made and appropriate action taken

Recommendation: consideration should be given as to how such issues could be picked up much earlier

7. THE ASSESSMENT MODEL

The Trailblazer employers elected to use the same assessment model for each of the 13 standards. The assessment model requires evidence to be gathered from three sources, before this evidence is then explored and validated and additional evidence gathered through a structured interview. It is only after this that the grading decision is made. This is summarised in following illustration from the Assessment Plans.



The Assessment Plans say:

“The interview enables the outputs from the project and the portfolio to be explored in more detail – in terms of what was produced and how it was produced, and to address the questions previously identified and to validate, test and amend initial assessment conclusions.

Each of the four elements contributes something different to the end-point assessment, as summarised below.

Summative Portfolio

Provides evidence against the totality of the standard, based on the application of knowledge, competence and behaviours to real work projects in the work environment.

This is key to ensure the validity of the final assessment decision,

Employer Reference

Provides the employers perspective on how the apprentice has performed in the workplace and how they have applied the knowledge, competencies and behaviours in work projects.

Synoptic Project

Provides evidence against a selected set of knowledge, competencies and behaviours against a pre-defined project undertaken in a controlled environment.

This is key to ensure consistency and comparability, increasing the accuracy of the assessment decision.

Interview

Provides an opportunity for further evidence to be gathered and/or evidence to be explored in more detail against any of the knowledge, competences or behaviours.

This increases the accuracy and validity of the assessment decision.

Independent assessors grade apprentices, using all the information gained in the end point assessment, against the criteria for pass, merit and distinction.”

All of the participating EPAOs(n=9) valued having a similar model for end-point assessment across all the digital standards. This was because it made it easier to understand, implement and embed across their organisations and made it easier for any apprentices should they change standards, who work alongside other digital apprentices, or who progress from one standard to another.

The overall assessment model is seen to be good by all the EPAOs (n=9) in that

“it comprehensively challenges the apprentice”

“it allows them to showcase their skills in a number of ways”

“each assessment tool adds something different”

“has allowed the EPAO to prove the assessment model is fair, valid and consistent”

None of the EPAOs (n=9) believe that major changes are needed to the approach and none would like to see substantial changes to the plan. The culture in all three of the EPAOs who have already delivered would appear to be very much driven by continuous improvement and each is actively reviewing and refining their approach on the basis of experience.

Some of the EPAOs (n~4) are aware that the assessment model does not comply with the latest IFA policy and that changes to end-point assessment may be required. In discussion, all of the EPAOs (n=6) expressed concern about changes being required to the assessment model when their experience is that it is working.

One EPAO reported that providers have questioned them as to whether all the different assessment methods are really needed.

The majority of EPAOs (n~7) have found the Assessment Plans easy to understand and all have used the Occupational Brief to develop their assessment tools.

One EPAO suggested that the Assessment Plan should map which KSBs are assessed by which assessment tool, as is the case in later Assessment Plans. Others suggested where greater clarity would be helpful in the Assessment Plans (see later).

The Occupational Briefs were seen to be very important in clarifying exactly what was required in terms of sufficiency and were being actively used in training assessors, grading, moderation and standardisation.

Key finding: all the EPAOs feel that the assessment model is working well in practice and only minor recommendations were made as to how it could be improved (see later).

Recommendation: Assessment Plans should include the rationale and purpose of each assessment method

Recommendation: employer groups should continue to produce an Occupational Brief as a key tool for consistency – whether as a separate document or, ideally, within the body of the Assessment Plan so that it is easily available and within the mandated documents.

Recommendation: future Assessment Plans for digital apprenticeships should follow a similar assessment model, wherever appropriate to that standard, as the assessment model is working well in practice.

Recommendation: future Assessment Plans should map which KSBs are assessed by which method

8. THE ASSESSMENT PLAN IN PRACTICE

a) Assessors

The Assessment Plans state “It will be the responsibility of the Assessment Organisations to ensure that those undertaking end point assessments have the necessary skills and industry knowledge to make reliable judgements. They will be required to recruit and train people, whether as employees or sub-contractors, with the right mix of skills and experience to undertake the independent end-point assessment against this standard.

Registered assessors must be competent in the occupation they are assessing, in terms of

- Up to date, relevant, in-depth and broad experience of working in this occupation
- Relevant industry expertise equivalent to or higher than the level of the apprenticeship standard being assessed and/or relevant professional recognition at a level equivalent to or higher than the registration level of the apprenticeship standard being assessed
- The possession of practical and up to date knowledge of the application of current working practices, infrastructure, tools and technologies appropriate to this occupation and of relevance to the sector/size of business in which they will be carrying out assessments

In addition, independent assessors must have completed an induction to demonstrate working knowledge of the apprenticeship standard and the assessment process. They must be fully trained and approved for use of each of the assessment tools and be trained in the consistent application of the grading criteria. They must attend standardisation meetings to ensure and maintain consistency of assessment decisions.”

The key challenge and risk in the assessment model is the need for occupationally competent assessors to ensure the occupational validity of the assessment decision and given their key role in the holistic assessment and grading of the apprentice.

Some of the EPAOs (n~3) who have yet to start delivering assessments express concern about finding appropriate assessors. However, none of those who are already delivering assessments (n~3) report that they have had any difficulty in finding assessors.

The majority of EPAOs (n~7) are recruiting the majority of their assessors as part-time sub-contractors. Most also have Lead Assessors.

There are different models for recruiting assessors

- one EPAO is upskilling their existing assessors,
- one is recruiting people with existing assessment skills and experience,
- one is recruiting those at the education industry interface, and
- one is recruiting from industry

The EPAO who is exclusively recruiting from industry has had a very positive response, not just in attracting high numbers of applicants but in securing positive and passionate assessors who “want to put something back”. In this case, the EPAO also reports that the assessors are really enjoying their role in assessing apprentices.

Most of the EPAOs (n~6) share concerns about the small number of female assessors, but recognise that this is not surprising given the make-up of the industry.

In the majority of cases (n~6) the initial recruitment and selection of assessors is seen to be critical. The two EPAOs who are delivering assessments report that they have a number of selection stages to test, not just the occupational competence, but also the softer skills required to interview an apprentice.

Moreover, they also report a detailed induction and training regime for all new assessors, followed by close scrutiny of all of their assessments until they are judged to be fully capable of undertaking assessments.

Two end-point assessment organisations who have yet to deliver any assessments expressed concern about potential inconsistency between assessors. Those (n~3) that are already delivering end-point assessment emphasize that this risk is managed through robust internal quality assurance processes, including initial training, and on-going moderation and standardisation. They report that their independent moderation re-assessments are producing the same final grade.

Recommendation: an early focus of EQA should be the IQA processes of end-point assessment organisations to ensure competence and consistency of assessors and assessment decisions.

b) The Gateway

The three live EPAOs report that it has taken time to establish the respective responsibilities between providers and the EPAO in checking the data required

for the gateway. This has taken time but is getting easier as providers understand what is required.

The gateway check also has to gather all the information that will be required for certification – and one EPAO queried whether the ESFA really needed all this information.

Two of the three live EPAOs report that a small number of providers have been confused and/or misunderstood the requirements for on-programme qualifications.

These EPAOs also report that guiding providers through the gateway process has taken longer than anticipated.

Two of the live EPAOs report that they have had more difficulties than expected in procuring a suitable system to help them manage the gateway and end-point assessment service, and in both these cases they are still relying on manual systems.

All three live EPAOs report that there has been no churn between the Gateway and completing end-point assessment.

c) The Summative Portfolio

The Assessment Plans say “The evidence contained in the portfolio will comprise a small number of complete and/or discrete pieces of work which, together, cover the totality of the Standard. It will showcase their very best work, enabling them to demonstrate how they have applied their knowledge and understanding in a real-work environment to achieve real-work objectives.”

The three live EPAOs report that the summative portfolio is a useful method in providing evidence of the application of knowledge, skills and behaviours in the workplace. They report that it is a very useful, if not “invaluable”, assessment tool. One EPAOs reports that they see the portfolio as key to the validity of the assessment decision.

All the three live EPAOs report that Assessors use the portfolio to inform the interview.

Most of the EPAOs (n~5) report that there have been initial difficulties with some providers in understanding what is and what is not required in a Summative Portfolio. Some providers have presented portfolios with far too much evidence or the wrong sort of evidence

some providers think this is the same as an old NVQ portfolio, with evidence of learning presented against each specific outcome, rather than evidence from a small number of projects which demonstrate the application of a range of competencies.

some providers are anxious about portfolios not containing enough evidence and so add in a lot of information, just in case

Live EPAOs are providing support and guidance, including exemplars, as to what a portfolio should contain. Over time, this is becoming less of an issue as providers understand the purpose of and the requirements for portfolios.

Recommendation: new providers should be encouraged by all parties to engage early with their chosen EPAO to get an understanding of what is required in the Portfolio.

d) The Synoptic Project

The Assessment Plans say “The synoptic project presents evidence from a business-related project testing the application of a selection of the knowledge, skills and behaviours defined in the standard. Each project will specify which selection of knowledge, skills and behaviours it is designed to test. The project does not need to cover every competence, but must cover a broad breadth of the competence outcomes, including

The project is designed to assess apprentices in a consistent way, irrespective of their particular workplace and their particular role within their company, and must therefore be completed outside of day-to-day work pressures.

All three of the live EPAOs report that the Projects have been working well in practice and are seen as a valuable assessment method. They report that the project adds “another dimension” to the assessment and is seen to be valuable in illustrating how the apprentice approaches their work.

Two EPAOs have had initial difficulty developing the Projects and report that the development of these has taken considerable time and resource.

One EPAO reports is a lack of clarity in the assessment plan, citing phrases such as “a bank of..” and “a range of..”

One EPAO questioned whether the projects really did need to take five days to achieve their objective. In discussion, all EPAOs (n~6) agreed that we should review whether or not the same assessment outcomes could be achieved with a smaller project, given the costs of projects.

Recommendation: Provide more guidance in the Assessment Plan as to what is required in the project.

Recommendation: provide feedback to the Trailblazer employers and seek a view as to whether or not any of the suggested changes to this model would be appropriate

e) The Employer Reference

The Assessment Plans say “The employer will provide a reference setting out their views of the quality of the apprentices work.

The Assessment Organisation will provide guidance and a simple template seeking employers’ comments against the grading minimum standards, criteria and dimensions, as set out in the Occupational Brief.

The employer will not be asked to grade or provide a rating, as they do not have the comparative experience or evidence.”

All (n~9) of the EPAOs see the Employer Reference as a valuable way of engaging employers in end-point assessment and as a way of evidencing and validating work behaviours – not least as this is often the only source of evidence for work-based behaviours.

However, all but one of the EPAOs (n~8) report that it is currently unclear as to the purpose and role of the Reference, indeed one described the requirements as “wishy washy” and another felt the Reference duplicated the statement from the employer that the apprentice is ready for the gateway.

One EPAOs has developed a detailed proforma for the employer Reference, and the other EPAOs have questioned whether this length and breadth is necessary or helpful. Concerns were expressed by others that a long proforma would risk the danger of replicating evidence from elsewhere, would increase the likelihood of generic text being used and would detract from the core purpose of the reference.

All of the three live EPAOs report that there is variable quality of reports from different employers, and they are taking different actions to address this – whether producing more guidance, exploring different ways to gather the input or simplifying the proforma.

In discussion it was clear that there are mixed views of what the Employer Reference is for – and should be for. And therefore what, and how much, it should contain. In discussion, all EPAOs (n~6) agreed that it would be useful to clarify this.

Recommendation: an early priority for EQA should be to develop greater clarity on what the Employer Reference is for and how it should be used.

Recommendation: future assessment plans should make this clearer

f) The Interview

The Assessment Plan says "The interview is a structured discussion between the apprentice and their independent assessor, focusing on the summative portfolio and the synoptic project, with reference to the employer reference as appropriate. It covers both what the apprentice has done in terms of the standard of their work, and also how they have done it. This enables the end-point assessment to include the full range of technical knowledge and competencies as well as the underpinning skills, attitudes and behaviours.

The purpose of the interview is to:

clarify any questions the independent assessor has from their assessment of the portfolio and project;
 explore any comments raised in the employers reference;
 confirm and validate judgements about the quality of work;
 explore aspects of the work, including how it was carried out, in more detail;
 provide further evidence for the independent assessor to make a holistic decision about the grade to be awarded. "

All EPAOs report that the interview is a very effective assessment method in allowing apprentices to "highlight their skills" and to "bring all the evidence together". It enables the assessors to draw out additional information and enables the apprentice to elaborate on the evidence they have already presented.

The three live EPAOs report that the interview enables the assessor to confirm that it is the apprentices work and identify areas where they may have had help.

The live EPAOs also report that the interview allows the assessor to determine the validity and weight to be given to different evidence sources when there are discrepancies (for example when an apprentice has produced a great portfolio and a weak project or vice versa)

In all cases, interviews are undertaken remotely, unless there is a clear reason not to. This also enables the interview to be recorded – which is useful for the assessor when taking the grading decision and is also useful when discussing a grade decision with the lead assessor or moderator. One end-point assessment organisation expressed concern about remote interviews but understood that this was the only method that made the interview cost-effective.

All three live EPAOs stressed the importance of assessors putting apprentices at ease – but none of the EPAOs reported that apprentices struggled with the interview process once it was underway.

Several EPAO (n~2) reported that there is some tension between the interview being structured around the need to validate evidence presented in the portfolio and the project and with having to have set questions. In discussion all (n~6) the EPAOs felt that there should be some "base questions" from which assessors

could then probe and explore as necessary to gather the evidence they needed against the grading descriptors.

As discussed earlier, the biggest issue has arisen when it has become clear at the interview that the apprentice has been doing the wrong apprenticeship and their job role does not fit with the standard. This has happened particularly but not exclusively with the Infrastructure Technician Standard (and EPAOs advise that it has also been reported on other non-digital standards).

There are some concerns, from two of the EPAOs who have yet to deliver, that there could be too much subjectivity in the interview. However, the three who have delivered end-point assessments see this as an area of risk that they manage tightly through their IQA processes.

Recommendation: clarify the balance between an interview structured around common questions and an interview focused on gathering and validating evidence against the grading criteria

Recommendation: An early focus for EQA should be on the IQA processes for ensuring the consistency and comparability of interviews.

g) Grading

The Assessment Plan says "Grading takes place at the end of the apprenticeship, following the end point assessment.

The output is a single grade: pass, merit or distinction, for the entire apprenticeship.

Grading is done by the independent assessor, based on a holistic view of the apprentice's work and as evidenced through each of the methods of end point assessment.

There are three sets of criteria on which the assessment and grading is made. The three criteria are

The What: what the apprentice has shown they can do,

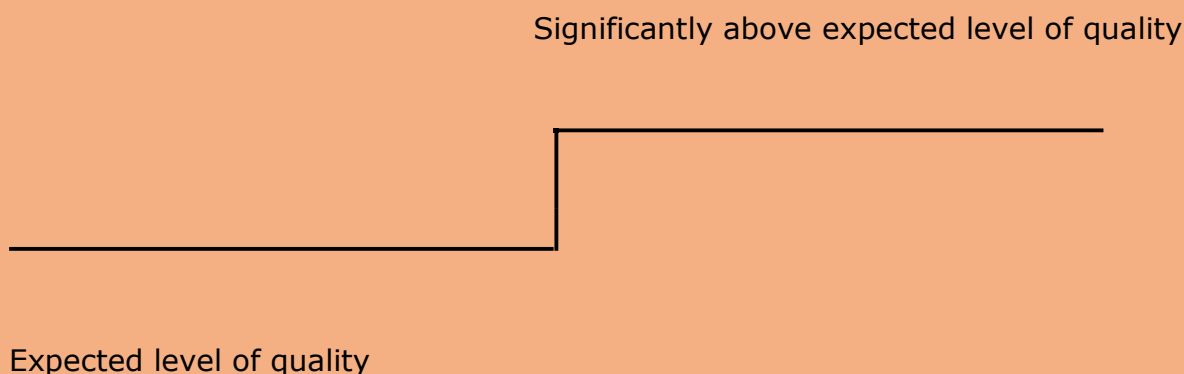
The How: the way in which the work has been done

The With Whom: The personal and interpersonal qualities the apprentice has brought to all their work relationships

Each of these three criteria has minimum (expected) requirements, which must be satisfied for a pass.

Each of these criteria has a number of dimensions which should be considered to determine if the apprentice is significantly above the minimum (expected) level of quality

That is, for each of the three criteria there are two levels: the expected level (as defined in the minimum requirements) and a level that is significantly above this



The minimum requirements for a pass and the dimensions to be considered for a merit or a distinction are defined in the Occupational Brief, available from the Tech Partnership.

The three live EPAOs are undertaking moderation and standardisation meetings with assessors on grading and also have systems in place for assessors to seek guidance from a lead assessor when they are at a grade boundary or are unsure.

Two EPAOs, who are not yet delivering, initially expressed concern that grading decisions will be difficult as individual elements of the assessment are not scored separately, which is what they are used to in other end-point assessments models. One of these two had changed their view by the time of the workshop – and could now see the value of this more “holistic” approach to grading.

The three live EPAOs reported that they really value the holistic approach to the grading, feeling that it enables all the evidence to be reviewed and brought together to give a complete picture of the apprentice.

One of the EPAOs was concerned about having had to make grading decisions without an EQA service being in place, as they had no comparators.

To date, the three live EPAOs report that there have been very few challenges to grading decisions and employers, training providers and apprentices have generally been satisfied with the grade awarded – suggesting a level of validity.

Recommendation: An early focus of the EQA service should be the comparability of the assessment decisions across those organisations who have already delivered end-point assessments. Infrastructure Technician should be the initial focus for this.

Recommendation: An early focus for the EQA service for all EPAOs should be the IQA processes for ensuring consistency and comparability of grading decisions between their assessors.

h) Organising end-point assessment

The majority of EPAOs (n~6) report that the biggest challenge in managing and organising end-point assessment services is the lack of data in the system making it very difficult to forecast and plan.

Moreover, the three live EPAOs report that many providers have only been booking EPA towards the end of the programme, and then expect a quick turnaround. This causes logistical problems for EPAOs, particularly in terms of booking assessors. It also means that there can be delays between the gateway process and the end-point assessment.

The majority of EPAOs (n~5) are now encouraging providers to register early – not only to support their forward planning but also to enable the providers to benefit from the support materials and in helping their apprentices prepare for EPA.

All three of the live EPAOs report that the logistics of organising end-point assessment (booking assessors, venues, setting up the arrangements) has taken longer than originally assumed.

One EPAO reports that there is some reluctance from employers and providers to contract too early for EPA, in case apprentices drop out. Moreover, in this case, the guidance documents for providers and employers is only released once the contract has been signed.

Employers and providers have been providing venues for the apprentice to undertake end-point assessment and have provided staff to manage the controlled environment. This has been provided free of charge. One EPAO offers a differential charge in cases where the employer or provider request that they invigilate the controlled environment.

The IfA have expressed concern that the training providers or the employers are usually the people who provide the controlled environment and the invigilator.

All the EPAO (n~6) expressed concern if this were to change, given the significant impact on cost, flexibility and logistics. Two of the live EPAOs gave clear examples as to how they ensure that providers/employers are clear about their roles in and the requirements for the controlled environment and invigilation, including checking these arrangements at audit and having sanctions in place.

Recommendation: the ESFA and the IFA should accelerate their efforts to share data about the take up of standards.

Recommendation: employers and providers should be encouraged to book early for end-point assessment, not only to help the forward planning of the EPAO, but also to get the benefits of the support and guidance provided by the EPAO to prepare their apprentice for EPA and to speed up the time between registering for the Gateway and completing the end-point assessment.

Recommendation: the EQA service should review the processes that EPAOs have put in place to ensure the independence and appropriateness of the controlled environment and the invigilator.

i) Feedback

Each of the three live EPAOs had mechanisms in place to provide periodic feedback to providers/employers on general patterns or trends of assessment decisions.

There are very different models for providing individual feedback to employers, providers and apprentices.

Some EPAOs only provide feedback on why the grading decision was made when it has been a fail – due to the cost of providing feedback in all cases.

Other providers feed back to the employer, provider and apprentice in all cases, and are looking to improve the quality of the feedback process.

In discussion all EPAOs (n~6) felt that there should not be a minimum requirement for feedback, given that it was part of their offer, but all agreed that all EPAOs should make it clear what feedback should be expected.

Recommendation: All EPAOs to manage expectations about feedback on assessment decisions.

9. EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (EQA)

All of the EPAOs (n~9) see the value in EQA, particularly in confirming and ensuing comparability.

One EPAO expressed regret that the EQA service was not in place before they started to develop their assessment tools and deliver assessment. However, two of the others, who are delivering, have liaised with each other and worked with the Tech Partnership to try and mitigate the risks of differences in interpretation.

Three of the EPAOs report that they have concerns about what they are hearing about what others are offering. They hope that the EQA service will help to ensure that all EPAOs are offering services in line with the requirements.

As with any EQA service, the key things that they EPAOs say that they expect are

- A clear set of rules and criteria – what is an expectation and what is a requirement?

- Realistic time-lines and advance notice of planned activities

- Clear and timely communications

- Mechanisms for EPAOs to come together to review practice

- A recognition that they are subject to a multiplicity of audit activities and to show consideration of this and plan accordingly

Most of those delivering EPAs across different occupational areas (n~4) have expressed frustration with the quantity of paperwork required by some EQA bodies as well as the different paperwork and different requirements from different EQA bodies. It is generally recognised that this will improve over time as some of the EQA bodies seek to collaborate and streamline their requirements wherever appropriate.

A few EPAOs (n~3) expressed concern that there is a charge for the employer-led model but not for the Ofqual model.

Recommendation: the priority for EQA for those three organisations who are delivering should be a standardisation meeting on Infrastructure Technician to ensure comparability.

Recommendation: the priority for EQA for all EPAOs should be the key areas of IQA in relation to consistency – in relation to assessing portfolios, the interviews and grading

Recommendation: work should be accelerated to bring consistency wherever possible across the EQA bodies and the sharing of information between the ESFA and the IFA with EQA bodies to avoid EPAOs having to provide the same or similar information to different organisations should be prioritised.

Recommendation: organisations thinking of developing EPA for digital apprenticeships should be encouraged to get in touch with their EQA body to minimise “surprises” about costs or approach.

Recommendation: the charges for EQA, now they are agreed, should be published on the website to give easy access to any organisation considering developing EPA services.

Annex 1

Interviewees

EPAO	Name	Job Role
BIIAB	Oliver Taylor	
	Vijay Chudasama	
	Zac Cheek	
	Sally Power	
City and Guilds	David Wackett	Industry Manager
	Amanda Seagroatt	
	Bill Twigg	
	David Short	Head of Compliance
Ginger Nut Training	Phil Warnock	
Pearson	Atif Khan	Sector Manager for IT and Computing
Smart Awards	Lesley Barr	
The Colleges Partnership	Natalie Tresize	Contract Manager, the Royal Signals
	Hilary Yuille	Director of Performance and Standards
Essential Learning and Skills	David Matthews	
TQUK	Kelle McQuade	Head of End Point Assessment Organisation
BCS	Annette Allmark	Head of Apprenticeships
	Rachel Levermoor	Head of Compliance
	Grace	Quality Manager
	Sharon	
	Emma	EPA Team Manager

Attendees at the Workshop

Annette Allmark
Amrit Bajjon
Zac Cheek
Ellen Duggan
Atif Khan
Kelle McQuade
Amanda Seagroatt
Oliver Taylor
Ken Lamb

BCS
Smart Awards
BIIAB
Pearson
Pearson
TQUK
City and Guilds
BIIAB
City and Guilds

Annex 2

EQA: End Point Assessment Market Insight Visits

This paper sets out proposals for an initial Market Insight Report to each of the registered end-point assessment organisations

Objectives

To gain an understanding about how the end-point assessment market is working

To identify issues and risks to inform the EQA process

To identify readiness of new end-point assessment organisations

Process

We will hold discussions with each end-point assessment organisation to gather soft intelligence about the current state of play, and seek input from provider and employer forums as to their perspectives of how end-point assessment is working

The discussions will take place during October and November.

Output

The output will be a report summarising the current state of play, with recommendations for the EQA process. Individual organisations will not be referenced. The report will be available to all end-point assessment organisations, the IfA, the employer board and the Digital Apprenticeship Board.

The report will be produced in early December.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Where are you with EPA delivery?		If not already actively delivering move to Section 1	
		If already delivering, move to Section 2	
Standard registered to deliver	Not yet ready	Ready but not yet active	Already delivering

Section 1

Are you where you expected to be? If not, why not?	
What assumptions have not materialised?	
What implementation issues have you faced?	
What are your future plans?	
Any other comments?	

Section 2

How many EPAs have you undertaken? (against each standard)	
How many through the gateway?	
How many Fails? Passes? Merits? Distinctions?	
How many in the pipeline?	
What is working well/less well?	
What is your current market?	
How have you recruited assessors – how has this worked?	
How is the summative portfolio working?	
How is the synoptic project working?	
How is the employer reference working?	
How is the interview working?	
How is the assessment decision and grading working?	
What concerns do you have with the assessment model?	
What concerns do you have with the standard?	
What needs to change? Happen?	
What concerns do you have with your approach to end-point assessment?	
What are your concerns about the approach of other end-point assessment organisations?	
What do you see as the risks to end-point assessment?	
What are you looking for from the EQA service?	
How will do you expect the the EQA service to add value to you?	
How do you think we should measure EQA success?	
Where are you needing more clarity?	

How is your relationship with employers?	
How is your relationship with providers?	
How are apprentices coping with end-point assessment?	
What are your future plans?	

By way of recap, what are the three most important points you want to get across about the assessment plans and standards?	
Any other comments?	