

End-point Assessment: Market Insight Report Executive Summary



January 2019

DIGITAL APPRENTICESHIPS

END-POINT ASSESSMENT: MARKET INSIGHT REPORT

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.

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