

External Quality Assurance Service for Rail Apprenticeships:

An Overview of Our Approach



March 2019

CONTENTS

Foreword	2
The Rail Apprenticeship Quality Board	3
Background	5
Our Approach to External Quality Assurance	6
Our '3C' Framework for External Quality Assurance	10
Glossary of Terms	13
Contact Information	13

FOREWORD

The Institute for Apprenticeships has recognised the NSAR Limited as external quality assurance provider for five published rail apprenticeship standards. NSAR will implement an employer-led model for external quality assurance directed by the Rail Apprenticeship Quality Board.

The rail apprenticeship standards are:

- Rail Engineering Operative, Level 2
- Rail Engineering Technician, Level 3
- Rail Engineering Advanced Technician, Level 4
- Rail & Rail Systems Engineer, Level 5
- Train Driver, Level 3

This document sets out our overall approach to external quality assurance (EQA) and is designed for end-point assessment organisations and others with an interest in the delivery of external quality assurance. It will also be of interest to employers, training providers and other stakeholders with an interest in the quality of rail apprenticeships.

THE RAIL APPRENTICESHIP QUALITY BOARD

The government guidance document, *The Future of Apprenticeships in England*, December 2015, gave the opportunity for employers to continue their input into apprenticeship development by allowing employer-led models for external quality assurance (EQA) to arise. Rail employers were keen to embrace this opportunity, seeing employer-led EQA as a way to safeguard standards and to ensure the quality and relevance of rail apprenticeships.

The Rail Apprenticeship Quality Board is the group of employers, supported by the NSAR, directing the delivery of external quality assurance of rail apprenticeship standards.

The Board is made up of employers, from a range of sectors and backgrounds, with a real interest and commitment to the quality and impact of rail apprenticeships. The Board meets every three months to review reports containing performance data and the results of EQA audits and activities and to agree recommendations. They are responsible for the effective and efficient delivery of the External Quality Assurance Service. They report findings to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Information and provide feedback to Trailblazer employers, and others, to support the continuous improvement of the Standards and the Assessment Plans.

OUR APPROACH TO EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

NSAR: RAIL

The role of EQA

Independent end-point assessment of apprenticeships is a key feature of the apprenticeship reforms. Under these new arrangements individual employers and training providers select a registered End-Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO) to undertake their end-point assessment.

Only End-Point Assessment Organisations on the Education and Skills Funding Agency's (ESFA) Register of End-Point Assessment Organisations can offer these assessment services. These EPAOs have been approved to undertake end-point assessment (EPA) against a specific apprenticeship Standard and in accordance with the specific Assessment Plan.

For the apprentice, employer and other stakeholders, it is critical that end-point assessment is consistent and comparable. This means that regardless of which EPAO is selected and regardless of which individual assessor conducts the assessment, employers and apprentices can be confident that the assessment decision will be the same and will be valid.

The EQA role is to reassure employers and apprentices that the end-point assessment market place is functioning as intended and that they can have confidence in the quality and validity of the end-point assessment service they select.

The overall aim of our EQA service is to safeguard the end-point assessment market place for employers and apprentices by ensuring the validity, consistency and comparability across the different end-point assessment providers.

The Benefits of EQA

The Rail Apprenticeship Quality Board views effective external quality assurance (EQA) as a key part of the rail apprenticeship ecosystem, giving the following significant returns:

- providing confirmation that the end-point assessment complies with the employers' intentions for end-point assessment as set out in the assessment plans
- ensuring consistency and comparability of assessments across end-point assessment organisations and over time

- protecting of the integrity of the apprenticeship by ensuring that variations in end-point assessments are within defensible and have no impact on consistency or comparability.
- reassuring employers and other stakeholders that the market places for end-point assessment functions properly and in a way that returns value to the apprentice, the employer and Treasury.
- allowing employers and providers to select end-point assessment services with confidence
- helping create a sustainable group of end-point assessment organisations – offering choice in a properly functioning market place
- collecting intelligence on how standards and assessment plans are being implemented to drive continuous improvement

For the organisations delivering end-point assessment, the employer-led EQA service will provide the following benefits

- confirmation that their end-point assessment practice is compliant with the assessment plan
- reassurance that there is consistency between their practice and the practice of others
- reduction in time and cost by bringing greater clarity, consistency in interpretation and a shared understanding of requirements
- reduced risk and increased confidence that the assessor, the assessment tools, and the assessment decisions fully meet the requirements as defined by the employers
- participation in a growing market that has credibility with employers
- all assessment decisions are occupationally valid and reflect the needs of the industry
- supporting EPAO work to produce robust, high quality end-point assessments, and
- conducting EQA in as transparent and efficient way as possible, keeping costs down to a defensible minimum level needed to deliver a robust EQA service

Our approach to EQA

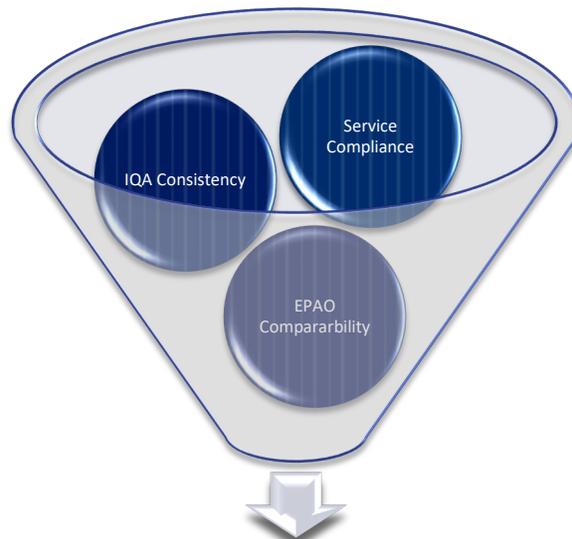
We strive to be a critical friend and trusted partner in our work with EPAOs. We do this by offering the appropriate balance of support, challenge, confidentiality, understanding and insight.

We focus our approach on the areas of highest risk to the validity of end-point assessment. We are particularly interested in each end-point assessment organisation's own internal quality assurance (IQA) processes to manage these high-risk areas to ensure high quality assessment. For example

- where assessment tools and decisions require standardisation training and moderation, we will examine how an EPAO's internal quality assurance process reviews these to ensure there is consistency across assessors.
- with the importance of the occupational competence of assessors in ensuring the validity of the assessment decisions, we will examine how EPAOs maintain the occupational and assessment capabilities of their end-point assessors.

By focusing on such critical and challenging aspects of the assessment process we can make inferences about less challenging parts of the process allowing us to keep external quality assurance to an effective minimum.

Our EQA Framework has three elements, as shown below



NSAR EQA Framework

Each of these is explained in more detail in our EQA Service Specifications.

Outputs

The formal outputs of our work will be reports, by standard and by EPAO, to the IfA setting out the findings from our EQA activity. These reports will be shared with the relevant EPAOs.

In addition, we will produce more general reports of our findings to inform the Trailblazer groups and other stakeholders with an interest in rail apprenticeships to inform the continuous improvement of the rail apprenticeship standards and assessment plans.

Data

The Institute for Apprenticeships shares information with us as the external quality assurance body. EPAOs have also agreed to any additional reasonable requests for the provision of information made of them by us or information about the end-point assessments that have been undertaken or planned for the future.

We will

- use data confidentially and sensitively, protecting commercial confidentiality
- use data to inform all aspects of EQA activity by monitoring trends to inform EQA activity and to share with those refreshing standards
- request only the information needed to conduct core EQA responsibilities

OUR '3C' EQA FRAMEWORK

NSAR: RAIL

Our '3C' framework for the external quality assurance of end-point assessment targets the following three external quality assurance concerns

1. *Systems Compliance* with the Assessment Plan
2. *IQA Consistency* in managing and delivering end-point assessments
3. *EPAO Comparability* of assessment outcomes across assessors and across EPAOs

The activities carried out as a result of these three areas will involve

- one-to-one work with individual EPAOs, and
- partnership working with all EPAOs working together with us to ensure there is a shared understanding of what constitutes a pass, merit or distinction and that their assessment outcomes are comparable

Systems Compliance

Our compliance work focuses on ensuring there is an accurate interpretation of the Assessment Plans and ensuring a shared understanding of the assessment requirements across all EPAOs. Our primary concern will be the extent to which the intentions as set out in the Assessment Plan are properly understood and appropriately implemented by each EPAO

The main way we establish compliance within EPAOs is by reviewing documentation, the implementation of systems and processes and discussions with key staff.

We look at the key activities related to compliance with the Assessment Plan, particularly

Capacity and Capability	The methods used to ensure initial and on-going competence of end-point assessors both in terms of occupational competence and ability to assess.
EPA delivery and operational systems	The assessment delivery processes and procedures, including reasonable adjustments and fair assessment; resists; complaints and appeals; assessment instrument design, implementation and refresh. Quality management and improvement processes.

IQA Consistency

End-Point Assessment Organisations are required to carry out their own internal quality assurance checks to ensure that the end-point assessment decision is robust, consistent and comparable across assessors and across locations.

Our work on consistency looks at the extent to which each EPAO has appropriate internal quality assurance procedures in place to ensure robust, reliable and comparable assessment within their end-point assessment teams. We look to ensure that these procedures are not just in place but are being actively implemented and are effective in ensuring that risks to the validity of assessments and assessment decisions are minimised.

We will ensure the robustness and consistency of all end-point assessments through scrutiny of the internal quality assurance policies and processes.

We will review

High-risk threats to validity

Our work is designed to ensure the areas of most risk to validity in assessment are targeted when monitoring internal quality assurance performance.

Consistency

The processes used to ensure a consistent performance in assessment by individual assessors and by assessment teams. This will include the training of assessors and their standardisation, and moderation process used. It will also include the monitoring of assessor performance across all assessment instruments.

EPAO Comparability

Our comparability work looks at assessment outcomes across End-Point Assessment Organisations and takes place whenever there is more than one End-Point Assessment Organisation carrying out end-point assessments for the same Apprenticeship Standard.

We work with EPAOs to ensure there is comparability by

Scrutinising the quality of apprentice outcomes at all grades

Workshops with end-point assessment organisations with cross-moderation used to establish and maintain a consistent approach to assessment and grading.

Reviewing performance data from each EPAO

Analysing performance and assessment data to inform future external quality assurance activity and to establish performance patterns and trends.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

EPAO	End-point Assessment Organisation
Comparability	generating assessment outcomes that are comparable in standard between end-point assessments within an organisation, with other organisations, and over time. Where an assessment has equivalent forms then it is important to ensure comparability of outcomes.
EQA	External Quality Assurance
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency – responsible for funding apprenticeships and for collecting data on apprenticeship starts.
IFA	Institute for Apprenticeships
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance: the end-point assessment organisation’s approach to quality control and quality assurance which ensures assessments and assessment decisions are appropriate.
Reliability	The extent to which measurements of assessment gives results that are very consistent.
Standardisation	Implementing and developing technical standards/assessment marks based on the consensus of different parties
Validity	The degree to which an assessment measures what it is meant to measure.

CONTACT US

www.nsar.co.uk/eqa

eqa@nsar.co.uk