

Introduction

The *Assessment Strategy* that accompanies each of the Adult Care Apprenticeship Standards contains a combination of distinctive assessment methods designed to test the apprentice's knowledge, skills and behaviours in line with the requirements for synoptic testing under the Future Apprenticeships reforms. The Assessment Plans have been developed to provide End-point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs) with the dimensions for the synoptic test as required by the employer group that created the Standard.

This guidance provides further amplification and sets out the acceptable requirements for the tests, as well as the dimensions for each of the assessment methods. It is intended to assist end-point assessment organisations develop a common interpretation of the assessment plan and to signpost some areas of interest to the external quality assurance requirement of the Care Apprenticeship Board.

Registered End-point Assessment Organisations will be responsible for creating the assessment instruments. To ensure that the assessments follow the spirit of the assessment plans and deliver comparable results measuring the same level of competence, all End-point Assessment Organisations should follow the guidance contained in this document.

End-point assessment organisations should participate in the development of exemplar assessment instruments such as apprentice self-assessment templates, testimony recording tools and by sharing sample situational judgement questions. Examples of best practice will be published online for illustrative purposes in line with the assessment plan.

The assessor will draw from a range of evidence to develop the individual end-point assessment. Each apprentice will produce a self-assessment and testimony from people who use the services. This should be interpreted by assessors to include family and those with a stake in the service offered. It is expected to be an enabler for evidence of competence, not a constraint to compliance with the assessment plan.

Level (equivalence)	Standard	Situational Judgement Test	Professional Discussion
2	Adult Care Worker	50%	50%
3	Lead Adult Care Worker	50%	50%

Interpreting the Assessment Plan

The following points have been agreed by the Care Apprenticeship Board and should be used to enhance understanding and interpretation of the assessment plan. At the appropriate time the outcomes of the ongoing consultation with EPAOs will be incorporated into a formal assessment plan review to be submitted to IfA for approval. Changes to the assessment plan will be based on best assessment practice and not for reasons of convenience. Unless specifically stated, the EPAO should interpret the current published assessment plan at all times, which remains the ultimate source document for interpretation.

1. Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) will be assessed across the designated assessment instruments. It is intended that the successful outcome of the SJT is used to initiate the professional discussion (PD) and so should in all cases precede the professional dialogue.
 - The assessment plan makes reference to standardised templates and examples of best practice. The CAB wish to support all EPAOs in developing high quality instruments that allow successful apprentices to claim occupational competence. It has been decided therefore to ask all EPAOs to work with the EQA function to identify best practice and with agreement, publish questions, situations and professional dialogue themes for the use of the sector via the ACEQUAS portal.
 - The assessment plan makes reference to retakes in cases where an apprentice does not achieve the required standard to achieve a pass grade. The interpretation is consistent with the Institute of Apprenticeships guidance for EPAOs (<https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-new-apprenticeships/developing-an-end-point-assessment-plan/>)
 - This section of the plan sets out the policy that will apply to apprentices who fail all or part of their EPA to ensure that they have equal opportunity to re-take or re-sit some (or all) of the assessment.
 - The assessment plan (page 4) describes the situation where an apprentice achieves between 35 and 39 correct answers. The apprentice should be allowed to attempt the assessment a second time. This is a retake. This means the apprentice should undergo some additional training in order to attempt the assessment a second time. Additionally, an apprentice achieving a score of 40 or higher can only be awarded a Pass grade.
 - Apprentices achieving a score of 24 or less should only be permitted to retake the assessment after a professional review of performance and acted on the findings. This should be undertaken by the employer and training provider. The purpose is to identify the route cause of failure and to support the apprentice in a second attempt. A score of 40 or above is required to achieve the maximum available grade which is a Pass.
 - For the professional discussion, a fail will result in an opportunity to retake the assessment, with a maximum grade of a Pass.
 - The opportunity to resit is available only in exceptional circumstances, in line with good assessment practice. It is for EPAOs to determine what constitutes exceptional circumstances and to keep records for inspection by the EQA.

In general, the following principles should be considered:

- A re-take involves a need for *further learning* before an assessment is taken, while a re-sit does not. You should outline your requirements in the case of apprentice failure clearly in your end-point assessment plan.

- Apprentices who achieve a Pass grade **cannot** attempt the assessment subsequent times simply to achieve a higher grade.
- For apprentices who do not pass first time, you should consider whether it is appropriate to prepare a performance report in order to assist the employer determine the training requirements necessary.
- It is for the EPAO to interpret this advice and plan assessments accordingly.

Specific Requirements for each Assessment Method

The Situational Judgment Test guidance has been updated and replace with new guidance. You can find this new guidance here

1. Situational Judgement Test

The situational judgment test will present the candidate with a range of real-life scenarios about which answer must be given in a multiple-choice format. The assessment should be made available in a variety of forms to be taken under controlled conditions with a time limit applied. Questions must be drawn from the stated knowledge and skills elements of the standard and focus on the higher order competencies.

It will be for EPAOs to determine the applicable format and conduct of the assessment, including any rules for invigilation or guarantee of security of assessment.

a. Scenario assessment principles

Throughout the design of the assessment, the following principles should always take precedent:

- Scenarios and questions should only be drawn from knowledge and skills elements of the published standard
- No question should be set that draws from knowledge and skills not explicitly specified in the Apprenticeship standard
- Scenarios should focus on the higher order competencies
- Scenarios and questions in a final assessment should draw from a wide range of elements in the standard
- Scenarios and questions need to relate to a variety of care environments and service user needs.

b. Scenario development

The test will comprise a series of scenarios from which 60 questions will be presented to candidates. It is anticipated that the whole assessment will be completed in a time of 90 minutes and so each scenario should be able to be read, understood and an answer selected in approximately one minute. To be able to achieve this, the scenario should require apprentices to:

- consider one outcome per scenario – *Independent Questions*

or

- a series of linked questions requiring a candidate to build up their responses. However, each question must be independently set, so that a wrong answer on one question cannot influence the outcome in any other question (an error carried forwards) — *Linked Questions* the scenarios chosen will need to be drawn from a wider bank of prepared scenarios so that any given question set cannot be anticipated by a learning provider, employer or apprentice. It is recommended that a minimum of 360 questions are developed from which a set of 60 can be selected. It is also recommended to refresh the database by replacing questions systematically on an annual basis. Where questions are grouped, the questions should be replaced so that the overall balance and spread of scenarios remains as required.

There are several specific actions that should be taken to ensure the scenarios chosen are valid:

- The set of 60 should always broadly cover all elements of the standard. Coding questions or using groupings can ensure that the chosen set always cover the widest range of topics.
- Each scenario need not be unique. It is acceptable for some scenarios to be similar in structure and response type. It is important for EPAOs to present scenarios that have sufficient context for different employment types so that tests are meaningful to a wide range of roles within the scope of the standard.
- Some scenarios should be developed or released to learning organisations, employers and apprentices as exemplars for on-programme testing use. The scenarios can form part of the “live” set but should be used as a group in a live test (so that an exemplar set does not form a complete set of live questions).

It is strongly recommended that scenarios are tested with a control group of apprentices to ensure that the scenarios are realistic, reasonable and are likely to be representative of situations in which an apprentice is likely to find themselves.

c. Scenario design — common to all EPAO situational judgement tests

Independent Question design

Each question should begin with a statement of the scenario, concise enough to be understood inside 30 seconds. To achieve this, the scenario at all levels should ideally have no more than three sentences, without excessive use of “comma clauses”.

Scenarios must have one correct answer that is unambiguous. Questions should not indicate behaviours, or be used to create a personality profile. The situational judgement test is **not** a behaviours test and answers should not be used to match statements to likely actions.

Each question should have four answers that conform to the following best practice in questionnaire design:

One correct answer or statement that cannot be confused with any other answer

- One plausible incorrect answer
- Two incorrect answers

It is not recommended to use a dummy answer, or a clearly incorrect answer, or a nonsensical answer within the four options. It is best practice to allow a genuine choice between four possible answers, rather than to allow the immediate rejection of one improbable answer.

The exemplar question is provided for illustration purposes only and is untested and not for use in any situational judgement test.

Exemplar Question (for a Level 2 / 3)

23. You enter a resident's bedroom in a small care home. You know the resident should be in the room but you are unable to locate them either in bed or in their usual favourite armchair. There is a strong smell of cleaning fluid in the room.

Your first action should be:

- a) Find where the smell is coming from as the fumes might be dangerous
- b) Ignore the smell for the time being and try to find the resident in the room
- c) Leave the room and ask for help to locate the resident in the building
- d) Close the door to prevent the smell escaping, but wait for the resident to return

The correct answer should be in any one of the four possible positions and if a similar question is used, then the answer should be in a different location. When question sets are randomly selected, it is possible for a string of answers to be inadvertently located in the same answer slot. This is not ordinarily an issue, except where a written answer sheet is used.

Linked Question design

In this type of question, a longer or more detailed scenario is presented from which more than one question may be set. This is likely to be more popular in higher level apprenticeships (Level 5 and above) where more complex scenarios should be developed for candidates in more senior management positions.

The scenario should still be designed to have short and concise sentences and the total time taken to read the scenario and answer all linked questions using that situation should take approximately one minute per question. For example, a scenario with four linked questions should be designed so that a candidate can read the scenario and answer four questions in four minutes.

Each question relating to the scenario must still have one correct answer that is unambiguous. Questions should as before not indicate behaviours, or be used to create a personality profile.

Each question should still have four answers that conform to the following best practice in questionnaire design:

- One correct answer or statement that cannot be confused with any other answer.
- One plausible incorrect answer
- Two incorrect answers

It is again not recommended to use a dummy answer, or a clearly incorrect answer, or a nonsensical answer within the four options. It is best practice to allow a genuine choice between four possible answers, rather than to allow the immediate rejection of one improbable answer.

The exemplar question is provided for illustration purposes only and is untested and not for use in any situational judgement test.

The questions presented are standardised and do not represent examples of the types of questions expected for the occupation.

The correct answer should be in any one of the four possible positions and if a similar question is used, then the answer should be in a different location. When question sets are randomly selected, it is possible for a string of answers to be inadvertently located in the same answer slot. This is not ordinarily an issue, except where a written answer sheet is used.

Exemplar Question (for a Level 2 / 3)

You are visiting an individual client in their home for the first time with Sandra, a new member of staff that you have not worked with before. You have been asked to manage and observe their work for the day and you are covering for the sickness absence of their manager. You have been asked to provide feedback on their work and contribute to their Apprenticeship portfolio as this is an opportunity for a different perspective on their work.

19. You observe Sandra moving ornaments and personal items out of the way to give her more room to lay out some equipment. You see your client watching this and you detect some concern on their face. Should you:

- a. Tell Sandra clearly so the client can hear that she should not move personal items without first asking permission
- b. Ignore the issue for the time being and speak to Sandra later
- c. Ignore the issue completely, clients should understand this may need to happen to be able to care for them properly
- d. Reassure the client that any items will be put back when you leave

20. Sandra drops a china cup on the floor which breaks. Your client calls out and tries to catch the cup and in doing so, tells you they have hurt their hand on the armchair.

- a. Apologise and offer to pay for the damage in cash
- b. Ignore the breakage and wait for Sandra to apologise
- c. Ignore the breakage and look at their hand to assess any injury or discomfort, nodding to Sandra to quickly clear the breakage
- d. Apologise for the breakage, note the damage in your records, assess any injury or emotional discomfort and arrange a follow up action afterwards

Test Format

The test is intended to be taken as an online instrument in exam conditions or as a controlled assessment, with questions and answers presented as a web page or using an application. The choice of formats is for the End-point Assessment organisation to decide, but it is recommended that the following range of formats is provided:

- An online test accessed through a web page, tablet or on a PC or desktop computer (using a keyboard, mouse or adapted device)
- A written paper. In this case, it is difficult to mix question sets unless a “print on demand” paper mechanism is devised, such as a question generator on a hosted web site

Some learners may need adapted formats based on an assessment of learning and access needs. Each EPAO should capture and assess any equality issues prior to accepting an apprentice for an end-point assessment. Acceptable alternative formats would normally include large print, audio formats and controlled reader assessment. In the latter format, the assessor must read the questions and the plausible answers for the apprentice. Where this format is used, a written statement of need should be submitted with the test result. This is because this form of assessment is prone to systematic bias.

~~The test is taken in the English language and all learners should be made aware of this prior to attempting the end-point assessment. The level of English language used throughout the test should mirror the level of English required for the award of the Apprenticeship.~~

~~Scenarios should be tested with a controlled group of apprentices to ensure that expected responses are given for a given level of competence. Testing protocols should be formally recorded and made available to the nominated external quality assurance organisation.~~

EPAO Flexibilities for situational judgement tests

Notwithstanding the principles stated in the previous section, each EPAO should exercise flexibility in question setting and design. Each EPAO approved for the delivery of standards in adult care should use the flexibilities according to the following principles:

- Knowledge elements can be linked in the same situation. It is not necessary to be limited by one element-one question
- Questions can be linked to build up a scenario and more than one question can be attributed to a given situation. However, each question should follow the best practice indicated in this guidance and an incorrect answer in one question should not cause an apprentice candidate to be drawn to a wrong answer in another question. For example, the following sample statement would be prohibited—"use your answer to question 5 to decide how...."
- EPAOs should be free to develop an individual "house style" for question design.

The complexity and "nesting" of questions is a flexibility that should be used with care by each EPAO. The principles of question length and the time allocated to read, understand and respond should underpin question and scenario design. How the elements are interpreted is for each EPAO scenario designer to determine.

d. Scoring and grading

The scoring for the situational judgement test is easily calculated but will require a series of controlled tests to refine the methodology.

The scoring system agreed is as follows:

- Acceptable achievement (Pass) requires any 40 correct answers from 60 questions
- Good achievement (Merit) requires a score of any 50-54 correct answers
- Outstanding achievement (Distinction) is awarded for scores of 55-60 correct answers.

The scoring system is designed to reward high achievement and is preferable to using a linear achievement scale (such as 40%/60%/80% or similar methodologies). To achieve the desired scoring ratios with confidence in the true competence of the apprentice, EPAOs are required to undertake testing of their assessment instruments and to retain a copy of the testing procedures and results for the purposes of external quality assurance scrutiny.

e. Protocol for validation

Each EPAO approved to deliver the end-point assessments will be subject to external quality assurance. One of the key areas of interest will be the validity and reliability of the SJT.

Principles for the test are:

- Each question could be answered correctly by any candidate capable for the award of a pass.
- Some questions are more likely to be answered correctly by any candidate capable of achievement above a pass.

- Any set of candidates, judged by other means, as being a pass candidate will achieve broadly 40-50 correct answers in any combination of questions in any live test question set.

To achieve this, it is recommended to construct a sample of questions and test them with a set of apprentice candidates judged as being likely to achieve the requirements of the standard (perhaps using performance on the diploma programmes or equivalent as a guide).

Questions should be set and amended so that a consistent range of outcomes are achieved. Similarly, higher order questions should be tested so that candidates capable of higher levels of achievement can achieve a Merit and Distinction at acceptable rates.

Professional Discussion

The assessment of a professional discussion provides a holistic approach to assessing knowledge and understanding and is useful in determining not only what and how a candidate is performing, but also their analytical and decision-making abilities. As an assessment method, it can be one of the best ways of testing the validity and reliability of a candidate's evidence. It is important to bear in mind that professional discussion is not simply a question and answer session. There are three key stages in organising professional discussion and these are prior planning, facilitating/assessing and the recording of outcomes.

A professional discussion is a highly structured interview (from the assessor's point of view), with specific themes and outputs to be achieved. From the viewpoint of the candidate, the method should feel open, fluid and dynamic so that they can offer insights, knowledge and input that is unprompted – but captured by the assessor as an outcome of the discussion.

A representative of the employer may be involved in the professional discussion. This is not a requirement, nor is it prejudicial if they do not attend. The assessor has sole responsibility to grade the assessment. However, if an employer is involved, then they may participate in the discussion but not have a role in determining the final grade.

a. Planning the discussion

The assessor needs to be clear about the purpose of using the professional discussion as part of the end-point assessment - and the required outcomes in the early stages of the planning process. Candidates should be informed of the format the discussion will take. Assessors should agree a list of areas/points (as per an agenda) they wish their candidate to cover. For standardised discussions, a set of graded stimulus questions should be prepared to allow consistency across tests to be supported. It is recommended that candidates receive a written copy of these points in advance of the discussion.

The assessment plan identifies that all knowledge is in scope for the discussion, but it is not necessary to assess every aspect of knowledge in every discussion. It is intended to assess those areas of knowledge that the assessor deems necessary to enable a successful apprentice to claim competence in the apprenticeship.

b. Facilitating and assessing the discussion

Professional discussion is a method of assessment and as such should not be confused with having an unfocused social chat. However, assessors do want their candidates to feel comfortable about the process and therefore the assessor's interpersonal skills are key in achieving positive results. The assessor's role is to manage the process to allow their candidate to prove their knowledge and understanding in a supported environment but without the assessor consciously directing and leading the conversation.

The assessor must ensure the discussion remains focused and effective, by periodically summarising points covered, using the stimulus questioning to probe for more information or to clarify certain points of the discussion. At the beginning of the discussion the assessor should reiterate the reason for the discussion and agreeing with the candidate how the main points of the discussion will be assessed and recorded. However, as the discussion progresses, there should be a gradual 'handing over' to allow the candidate to enter a full discussion where they have the opportunity of doing most of the talking, the assessor using stimulus questions to keep the discussion flowing.

Apprentices will be permitted any resources necessary to assist in their contribution to the discussion. This may take the form of portfolio items for illustration and examples of documents and records to support responses.

c. Stimulus questions

A professional discussion should be conducted using a set of standardised questions across a range of knowledge, skills and behaviours topics that will be posed to all candidates for that standard (at a suitable point in the discussion). The setting can be varied and dependent on the employment settings, but it is important that this type of assessment is distinctive from an interview, in which the questions are more highly structured. This allows an element of objective comparison across all candidates irrespective of assessor, employer or training provider. Follow up questions can be assigned a weighting and a value based on the experience and judgement of the assessor. Whilst these assessments are more subjective, it is acceptable to allow assessors to make qualitative judgements on the outcomes observed.

A professional discussion would normally allow sufficient time for 15 semi-structured stimulus questions and three or four themes to be explored in more detail.

d. Recording evidence from the discussion

It is important in a professional discussion for both parties to understand that this is a recordable and evidence-led discussion.

A record of the discussion should be produced to show how the points (relating to the standards/evidence requirements), have been covered and graded. There are various options for recording professional discussion; audio or video taping or paper based logging. If using an audio/video tape, it is important to agree this with your candidate first to ensure they are comfortable with this method of recording. Whatever recording method selected, the assessor needs to ensure that the evidence resulting from the discussion is clearly referenced to the appropriate standards/evidence requirements. This is important to enable effective grading and post-grading standardisation as part of the internal quality assurance process.

e. Gathering evidence from a professional discussion:

Develop a set of standardised stimulus questions that can have a range of acceptable answers – ensure that they are sufficiently open to allow an apprentice to demonstrate their understanding of the question and give them room to offer extended answers for higher levels of credit.

Set each question from the standardised set in the context of the apprenticeship setting (employment type, duties undertaken). Prepare a set of acceptable responses and match the response given to the closest match on the list. Extended responses can be anticipated for a higher weighting. Thus, each question may have a set of responses that are “Pass” and some contain responses that could be judged as “Merit” or “Distinction”.

Where an apprentice offers an alternative route for further exploration, then this should be allowed on occasion. The quality of their responses can be qualitatively evaluated and used where a final grading decision is borderline.

Some questions will relate to other sources of evidence, such as the self-assessment or user testimony,. It is important to prepare a grading matrix to accommodate such external evidence and judge its worth and level of credit. Look for clues in the testimony to assist in

grading. Adjectives can be used to determine weighting. E.g. An employer who describes an apprentice as “outstanding” could be given more credit over a statement that says an apprentice is “about average”.

Some open questioning should be used to assist in grading. Questions such as, “tell me about your role...” may be too open to be used for grading, but more focused wording such as, “describe to me why you chose to...” can be more illustrative of performance.

An example Professional Discussion

An apprentice at Level 3 has completed all elements of the apprenticeship, achieved a Merit in the SJT and her witness considers her to be an excellent member of staff. Your professional judgement report form has 15 questions with three acceptable answers in each. Four questions have answers that allow a higher level of achievement.

You also have space to record up to four apprentice led discussion themes and a section to record the employer views.

During the interview, the apprentice offers an acceptable response in all 15 questions, with two of them at a higher level of achievement, meeting the acceptable standard for Merit. The apprentice offers two topics for investigation and you are impressed by their knowledge and understanding of the topic. The witness statement describes the apprentice as “excellent”.

It is possible to quantify from the 15 comparator questions that the apprentice shows performance above that of a Pass (two of the four responses in the extended category are at a Merit standard). She offers two excellent extension examples led by her own work and the witness is more than broadly positive. In this situation, it is acceptable to offer the apprentice a Merit overall.

This form of assessment is semi-structured and semi-quantitative. It will be for the EPAO individually to develop further the guidance for assessors to record this type of evidence. The grading of a professional discussion across a range of candidates will be possible using the standard set of questions. It is possible that not all questions will be posed in circumstances where an assessor chooses to allow an apprentice to expand on the variable topics, or where an apprentice covers the question topic area elsewhere in a discussion. Again, some professional expertise is acknowledged here in the judgements and the written record should be annotated accordingly.

It is suggested that EPAOs undertake a professional development activity with assessors to support the standardisation of the stimulus questions.