



EQA SERVICE FOR RAIL APPRENTICESHIPS

READINESS CHECK



WELCOME

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

WHAT IS THE READINESS CHECK?

The Readiness Check is the first of two work streams carried out as the External Quality Assurance Organisation for a range of Rail, Logistics and Digital Apprenticeship Standards. As a work stream it sets up our subsequent EQA Monitoring work, which ensures ongoing quality and consistency in assessment. The objectives of the Readiness Check are to ensure:

- End-point assessment instruments are fit for purpose and perform as required by the assessment plan.
- Employers have the information they need, and the end-point assessment service is delivered to employers effectively.
- End-point assessment delivery plans are robust, enable contingency and ensure employer engagement.
- There is sufficient assessment capability and capacity in place to deliver the service, and there are processes in place to maintain this level of capability and capacity.
- Internal quality control and assurance procedures are in place and operational.

Through five lines of enquiry, we examine the extent to which you are meeting the minimum standard prescribed by the IfATE, ask you to reflect on where improvements can be made within your organisation and to work with us to ensure your assessment strategies are consistently producing fair, reliable and comparable assessment judgements.

These lines of enquiry address five areas of end-point assessment delivery:

1. Assessment Materials
2. Support Materials
3. End Point Assessment Delivery Plans
4. Assessor Recruitment & Training
5. Policies & Procedures

You must undergo a Readiness Check for **every standard** for which you are seeking to deliver End Point Assessment Services.



CONDUCTING THE READINESS CHECK

The Readiness Check is completed by reviewing documented processes, systems and materials, and by scrutinising how these are being applied, effectively, **in the context of your in-scope apprenticeship standard(s)**.

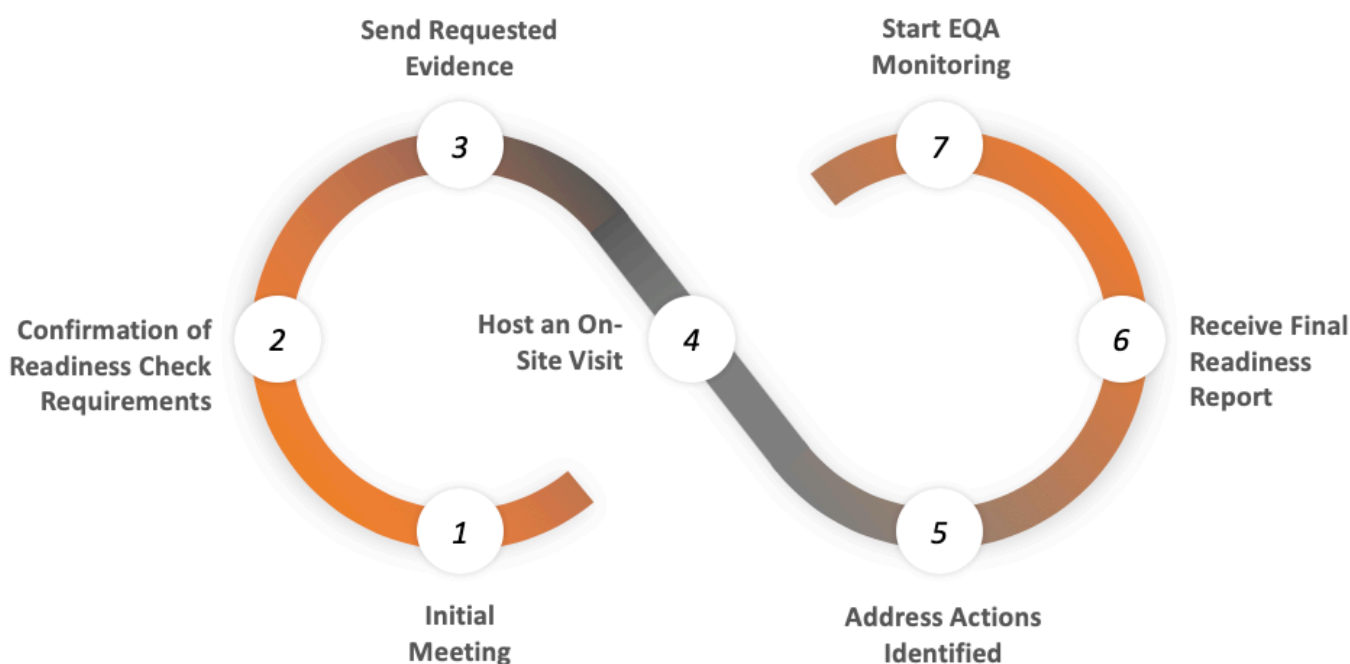
In many instances the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) will have already undertaken operational readiness work with the EPAO in order to check and discuss progress towards operational readiness. We will take any Readiness Ratings made available from the Agency and then undertake a 'Full Readiness Check' for the standard(s) in question. The full check will take into account the readiness rating awarded by the Agency and any issues or actions raised.

At the point that the EPAO states that they are ready, and such has been verified as required by the Agency, we will undertake a readiness assessment for the standard(s) in question. This will involve a combination of desktop review and an onsite visit. Please note; the NSAR Readiness Check should be completed at least 8 - 12 weeks before the date of your first End Point Assessment activity.

The Readiness Check is structured in a manner which will focus solely on your organisational readiness to deliver the in-scope standard(s) for which you have been approved to deliver. We will not look to establish the suitability of generic, organisation-wide, systems, but rather focus on the suitability of systems directly underpinning the standards for which we are the nominated EQA provider.

HOW IS THE READINESS CHECK CARRIED OUT?

The following outlines the touchpoints that you will have with us as part of the Readiness Check:





1. Initial Meeting

As soon as we have been notified that you are seeking to offer End Point Assessment against a standard for which we are the nominated External Quality Assurance organisation and are in a position to progress with your Readiness Check, a member of the NSAR team will be in touch to arrange an introductory telephone meeting, during which we will:

- Establish a relationship and clarify the roles and activities
- Get your first impressions of the assessment plan and any market insights that you have gained
- Discuss a timetable for the checks, taking into account where evidence is likely to arise, expected assessment dates and when materials are likely to be ready
- Where needed, provide you with guidance on the design, development and implementation of methods of assessment
- Agree a date to have your Readiness Check On-Site Visit.

2. Receive Confirmation of Readiness Check Requirements

Following our Initial Meeting we will confirm the details of your visit, provide an agenda and visit plan and request that a selection of evidence be sent to us for remote review prior to your on-site visit.

3. Send Requested Evidence

You can send your evidence digitally or in hard copy, as preferred.

Evidence requested may include:

- Supporting digital guidance for the standard.
- Assessment Instruments for each standard and supporting documents (including test specifications).
- Mechanism for quality control of the assessment materials, support material, assessors and assessment delivery and decisions for the standard
- Proposed IQA schedule for this standard
- Feedback and evaluation mechanisms for the standard
- List of assessors for the standard
- Delivery plans, contingency plans & expected volumes for the standard

Please note, you will need to send through the requested evidence **at least 10 working days before the intended visit**.

No judgements or report surrounding this evidence will be made available to you prior to your on-site readiness visit.



4. Host an On-Site Visit

Your nominated EQA Manager will visit your premises with the aim of verifying that the readiness criteria have been met.

During this site visit we will:

- Follow the lines of enquiry to establish whether the Readiness criteria are met or not.
- Determine your overall “Go/No Go” Readiness status.
- Identify any actions or recommendations.
- Produce a preliminary Readiness Report, using the report development tool within the EQA Digital System.
- Send you a copy of this Preliminary Report.

5. Address Actions Identified (Where applicable)

We will work with you develop an action plan that responds to the outcomes of the readiness check and ensure that you are ready across all areas.

If the you have been identified as having critical actions and are deemed as unlikely to be able to deliver EPA, NSAR will contact the IfATE Quality Manager immediately to discuss next steps.

Your nominated EQA Manager will look to verify completion of any outstanding actions in line with agreed time frames.

6. Receive Final Readiness Check Report

Your nominated EQA Manager will send you a copy of your Final Readiness Report and send a copy of the report to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

Once your Readiness Check has been concluded, and you have been approved as being ‘Ready’, you can start delivering End Point Assessment services for the standard.

7. Start EQA Monitoring

Once operational, we will monitor your continued compliance with the IfATE EQA Framework requirements and look to ensure that your actual delivery of end-point assessment provides a relevant, reliable and independent assessment of occupational competence. Please see the [EQA Monitoring Guidance](#) for further information regarding what this involves.



WHAT DOES READINESS LOOK LIKE?

MONITORING AREA	4 NOT READY TO DELIVER	3 READY TO DELIVER: IMPROVEMENT NEEDED	2 READY TO DELIVER	1 EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS
ASSESSMENT MATERIALS	Materials do not meet the needs of the Assessment Plan in terms of content or level	Most materials are in place and pitched at the right level, covering the right content for the standard with clear plans to develop remaining content	All materials in place and pitched at the right level and covering the right content for the standard	Clear plans in place to review, including plans to utilise evidence from Assessment and feedback from employers and apprentices
SUPPORT MATERIALS	<p>Insufficient material</p> <p>Material not accessible to all users</p> <p>Support arrangements could give unfair advantage to certain apprentices</p>	Generic EPA information available but more work needed to meet the specific needs of the standard	<p>Clear and accessible material pitched at the right level</p> <p>Material clearly differentiates for different audiences (e.g. employer, apprentice, training provider)</p> <p>Range of different material (e.g. templates or timeline setting out the apprentice journey)</p>	Exceptionally clear and innovative materials clearly tailored to the needs of the standard and test occupational competence in a genuine and innovative way



MONITORING AREA	4 NOT READY TO DELIVER	3 READY TO DELIVER: IMPROVEMENT NEEDED	2 READY TO DELIVER	1 EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS
EPA DELIVERY PLANS	No plans in place for effective delivery	Plans in place for delivery but engagement with employers has not yet taken place Plans may be generic with insufficient occupational detail	Robust plans in place to deliver occupation-specific EPA Effective and regular communication with employers Contingency plans in place	EPAO has stress-tested plans and has robust contingency arrangements in place Very strong links with employers
ASSESSOR RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING	Insufficient assessors recruited and no clear plans to recruit to full capacity No evidence of appropriate occupational expertise	Some assessors in place and clear plans to recruit to full capacity Assessors have satisfactory occupational and assessment expertise Training and standardisation booked in	Sufficient assessors in place to meet immediate demand and geographic coverage Assessors have good occupational and assessment expertise Training and standardisation undertaken	Assessors have excellent occupational and Assessment expertise Future proofing built into assessor recruitment plans Contingency plans in place
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES (INCLUDING INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE)	Policies not in place Intend to use approach which has been proven to be ineffective in other EPA work	Workable policies in place but may be generic and need further adaptation to meet the needs of the standard	Workable policies in place which clearly meet the specific needs of the Standard Reasonable review dates in place Clear ownership at right levels within the organisation including management	Policies and procedures make use of good practice in other areas, including EPA on other Standards where appropriate



OUTCOMES OF READINESS CHECKS

Readiness Checks establish the extent to which an EPAO is able to deliver EPA successfully for a particular standard. The EQA will provide a rating on a four-point scale, aligned to the IfATE EQA Framework, and the ratings and report will be used to determine the frequency and intensity of any ongoing monitoring based on the risk profile calculated.

The outcome of the check also provides indication as to the level of risk that an EPAO poses and will dictate the focus and depth of ongoing monitoring.

There are four outcomes sitting within the Readiness Check:

OUTCOME	DESCRIPTION
1. EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS	EPAO Fully meets the 'Readiness' requirements prescribed within the Quality Statements, without further action.
2. READY TO DELIVER	EPAO is ready to deliver EPA for this Apprenticeship Standard, subject to minor issues addressed within the action plan and monitored on an ongoing basis.
3. READY TO DELIVER: IMPROVEMENT NEEDED	<p>EPAO is ready to deliver EPA for this Apprenticeship Standard, subject to major issues addressed within the action plan and monitored closely on an ongoing basis. This is a 'ready' decision where most key systems, processes and personnel are in place to meet identified or anticipated demand but there are still:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Known, non-critical areas of the EPA service that are not yet 'on-line' Areas of EPA that need strengthening or developing but these are clearly planned for and resourced but not yet actioned <p>The outcome of this type of judgement is a development plan with timeframe to move to ready status. The EPAO is still able to proceed and offer EPAO services but much agree and commit to meeting the development gaps within the agreed timelines.</p>
4. NOT READY TO DELIVER	EPAO is not ready to deliver EPA. Major actions are required to achieve readiness. No Evidence is available, there are a significant number of actions identified and/or there is cause for serious concern regarding EPAO practices in this area.

The Readiness Check generates a feedback report which highlight any areas where action may be necessary. This report will detail where any action may be needed to improve performance against one or more quality statement. This is a confidential communication. The report also informs our reporting requirements to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

Any areas of malpractice or breach of assessment plan requirements are raised immediately with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, who may refer back to the Skills Funding Agency for review.



READINESS CHECK LINES OF ENQUIRY

READINESS AREA	LINES OF ENQUIRY
ASSESSMENT MATERIALS	<p>Relevant</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are assessment materials appropriate to the standard and level of the apprenticeship? 2. Are they specific to the role and reflecting recognised and current practice within the industry? <p>Reliable</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Will materials allow for consistent, valid and fair assessment of occupational competence? 4. Will they allow appropriate grading judgements to be made? 5. How is the security of materials managed? <p>Efficient</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Are assessment materials being developed and used efficiently? <p>Positive</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Are materials accessible to all apprentices including those for whom reasonable adjustments will be made? <p>Learning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Have you systematically collected any genuine industry feedback e.g. through trials/pilots?
SUPPORT MATERIALS	<p>Relevant</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are materials appropriate to the standard and level of the apprenticeship? 2. Do they reflect current/standard industry practices? 3. Are they regularly updated? 4. Would employers recognise their relevance? <p>Efficient</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Are materials available digitally and at no extra charge? <p>Positive</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Are they clear and accessible? <p>Learning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Who have materials been tested with? 8. What feedback loops are built in?
EPA DELIVERY PLANS	<p>Relevant</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are they appropriate to delivering the assessment specified in the EPA plan? <p>Reliable</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Will they produce reliable results over place and time and for all apprentices regardless of their specific characteristics? 3. Are they suitable for all apprentices? <p>Efficient</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Are the plans realistic and appropriate for delivering the likely volume? <p>Positive</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Have they thought about accessibility in their planning? <p>Learning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Which groups has that been tested with? 7. Are their specific diversity checks built in as standard? 8. What are the feedback loops?



READINESS AREA	LINES OF ENQUIRY
ASSESSOR RECRUITMENT & TRAINING	<p>Relevant</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do the assessors recruited have the appropriate and up to date occupational and assessment skills, and meet any specific requirements as set out in the EPA plan? <p>Reliable</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Does the EPAO have appropriate conflict of interest policies, applied across all standards, in place to ensure that assessors will be independent from apprentices, employers and Training Providers? 3. Are these standing up to actual delivery on that specific Standard? <p>Efficient</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Has the EPAO recruited sufficient assessors for the likely volume of EPA to be undertaken? <p>Positive</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Are the assessors credible across the industry as people fit to pass apprentices as occupationally competent? 6. Will employers respect their judgement? 7. Is a process in place to promote and monitor assessor CPD? <p>Learning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. What is the schedule and quality of assessor training for industry experts?
POLICIES & PROCEDURES (INCLUDING IQA)	<p>Reliable</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the organisation have appropriate internal quality assurance arrangements in place? <p>Efficient</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Do the EPAO's data management processes meet the needs of the standard? <p>Positive</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Is the EPAO engaging appropriately with employers and providers to ensure that apprentices are prepared for their EPA? <p>Learning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. In there an internal learning loop?



HOW IS THE READINESS CHECK CHARGED?

The Readiness Check is chargeable at a fixed rate, as detail within the [NSAR Charging Rationale](#), however those with an upcoming pipeline of End Point Assessment activity will benefit from discounted End Point Assessment fees within the **first three months** following confirmation of your readiness.

We anticipate most EPAOs undergoing the readiness check to have some visibility of a pipeline of end-point assessment delivery and these discounts are designed to enable you to recover some, or all, of the readiness fees.

We will therefore look to work with you to time your readiness check(s) in a way that will coincide with when you anticipate end-point assessment activity commencing.

If you have any questions, or would like any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us using the contact details below:

NSAR EQA Service
e. eqa@nsar.co.uk