



Institute for Apprenticeships
& Technical Education

EQA Framework

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Foreword

Our mission at the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) is to improve access to high-quality apprenticeships and technical education, in order to transform the skills landscape in England. Quality is fundamental to this, and central to ensuring the quality of apprenticeships is ensuring that the end-point assessment an apprentice completes at the end of their apprenticeship is a relevant and robust test of occupational competence.

We have a statutory responsibility to oversee the External Quality Assurance (EQA) of end-point assessments. This framework sets out how the Institute expects EQA to be delivered by all EQA providers to provide assurance that end-point assessments across apprenticeships are relevant and reliable, and delivered within a system that is positive, efficient and continuously improving.



Sir Gerry Berragan, Chief Executive

What are we trying to achieve?

In delivering our mission we aim to ensure that completing an apprenticeship provides not only assurance that apprentices have undertaken a rigorous training programme and independent assessment; but more importantly, that they have acquired a high level of relevant occupational competence, as defined and recognised by employers in their industry.

Pivotal to our role is ensuring that every single apprentice goes through a reliable end-point assessment that is acknowledged by employers as a relevant test of the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to operate effectively in their chosen occupation. It is critical that end-point assessment gives employers the confidence that apprentices not only have the theoretical knowledge, but the ability to practically apply their skills in a professional environment alongside behaviours that have currency in their workplace.

Our vision for how quality assurance will be carried out

Through the publication of this framework we will establish, sustain and oversee an evidence-led, continuously improving, and cost-effective EQA service that facilitates access to the market for end-point assessment organisations, whilst driving up the quality of end-point assessments, ensuring a reliable, fair and positive experience for apprentices and employers. This document sets out the five principles which underpin our approach to EQA: relevant; reliable; efficient; positive; and learning.

Fundamental to our approach is the recognition that occupational understanding and live monitoring of assessment activity are crucial to provide assurance that end-point assessment is delivering effectively.

EQA will elevate the reputation of apprenticeships in England, reassuring society, employers, and apprentices, that apprenticeships are high-quality and credible, and those who successfully complete an apprenticeship have undertaken an end-point assessment that employers consider relevant and worthwhile.

By doing this, we can achieve our ultimate mission: transforming the skills landscape through high quality apprenticeships.

Sir Gerry Berragan

Chief Executive, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

Introduction

Quality is central to the government's reform of apprenticeships. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) has a statutory duty to secure that evaluations of the quality of apprenticeship assessments, provided by persons in relation to assessment plans published under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, are carried out. External Quality Assurance (EQA) is the process by which this is delivered.

Every apprentice who completes their apprenticeship standard must undertake a holistic independent End Point Assessment (EPA) to confirm that they have achieved occupational competence. The nature of the EPA for each apprenticeship standard is set out in an assessment plan, developed by employers and approved by the Institute. This assessment is then delivered by an independent end-point assessment organisation (EPAO) selected by the employer from the [Register of end-point assessment organisations](#) (RoEPAO). External Quality Assurance ensures the consistency of assessment regardless of which organisation delivers it.

EQA is the independent evaluation that an apprentice has undergone a fair and proper EPA that assesses occupational competence at the end of their apprenticeship. It is designed to ensure that apprenticeship EPA is meeting employers' needs, including consistency and validity of delivery, process and outcomes as specified in the published apprenticeship standard and assessment plan. EQA is fundamental to the credibility of apprenticeships; it is crucial that employers are confident that anyone who has completed an apprenticeship is competent in the occupation for which they have trained. Equally, it is essential that all apprentices have a high-quality experience of EPA, and are confident that they have been assessed to the same standard, whichever EPAO conducts their assessment.

Three tiers of assurance

Ensuring the quality of EPA is crucial and in order to secure this three tiers of assurance exist within the EPA system:

- the first tier is undertaken by the EPAOs who use Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) to ensure that their assessments are valid and reliable.
- EQA providers then monitor EPAs for particular standards.
- the third tier is the work done by the Institute to oversee quality across the whole apprenticeship system including the performance of EQA providers.

This document outlines the Institute's EQA framework for ensuring that EPA is consistently high quality across all occupational routes, apprenticeship standards and EPAOs.

The eight step framework

There are eight steps within the framework, encompassing upfront quality control mechanisms, ongoing quality assurance, and continuous improvement:

1. setting out the right approach to assessing occupational competence via **clear end-point assessment plans that have been developed by employers** and approved by Route Panels as fit-for-purpose.
2. ensuring that only organisations with the relevant experience and expertise can deliver assessment via the **Register of End-Point Assessment Organisations** (RoEPAO)
3. ensuring that EPAOs are thoroughly prepared to deliver high-quality assessments through **readiness checks**
4. ensuring that EPA provides a high-quality and relevant assessment of occupational competence through a programme of **monitoring EPA delivery**. EQA, which includes observation of EPA delivery, is undertaken by organisations and individuals with the necessary assessment and occupational experience and expertise
5. **reporting on the quality of EPAs**, and using evidence from EQA reports to develop clear action plans to maintain or improve the performance of individual EPAOs including:

- a. EPAO capability and capacity
- b. EPA delivery
- 6. **using EQA to improve assessment** for:
 - a. apprenticeship standards and assessment plans
 - b. any other aspect of apprenticeship quality
- 7. **taking action** to ensure that any inadequate EPA practices are remedied promptly, thereby minimising any risk to the quality of assessment
- 8. **continuous improvement of EQA process** to capture good practice and ensure that EQA is operating effectively and consistently, and provides evidence of impact to the Institute and others

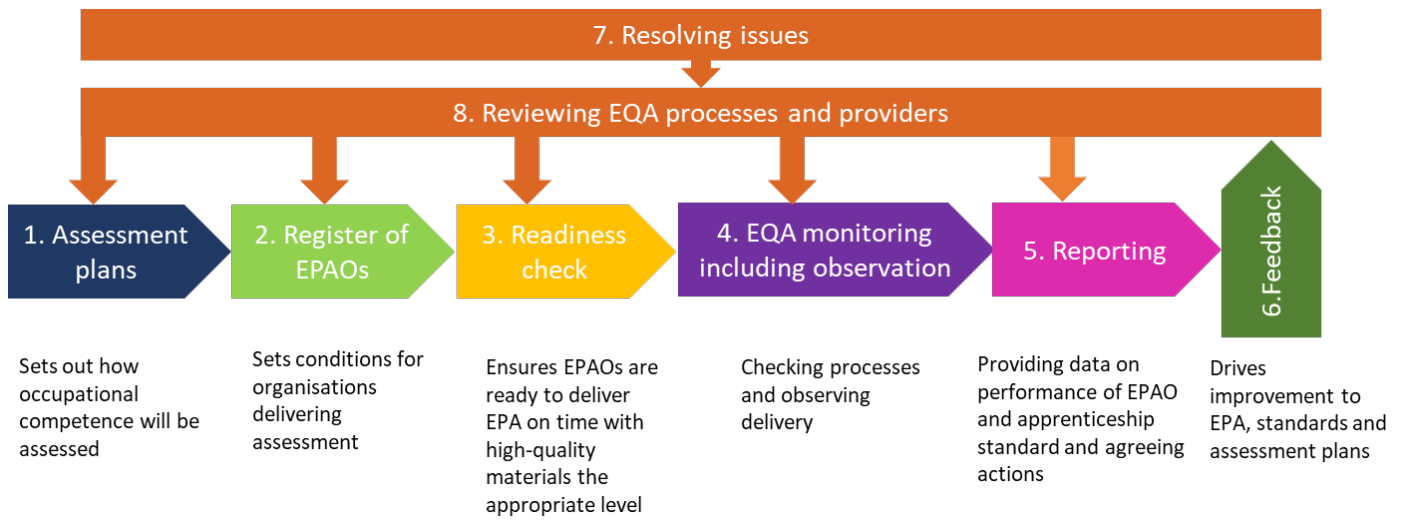


Figure 1 - EQA 8-step framework

While the Institute has statutory responsibility for EQA and, with its employer-members on the 15 Route Panels, for the approval of assessment plans, there are a number of other organisations who play a key role in the quality assurance system. For example, the RoEPAO is overseen by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (the Agency), and EPAOs are responsible for their own internal quality assurance. The roles each organisation plays at each stage in the process is set out in each section of this document.

An employer group (Trailblazer) designs the apprenticeship standard and assessment plan and nominates an EQA provider that they consider is best able to deliver assurance to employers and apprentices, about the quality, relevance and reliability of assessment for the standard. A number of organisations are recognised by the Institute as EQA providers, following a rigorous recognition process. EQA providers enable the Institute to assure that assessment is occupationally relevant in practice and delivers reliable outcomes that employers and apprentices value. They do this through a programme of readiness checks, desk-based monitoring, and observations of a sample of live assessment delivery and internal quality assurance activities. All of the findings from these, together with further evaluation and feedback from employers and apprentices, drive continuous improvement. The Institute works closely with all EQA providers to support the quality and consistency of EQA. This framework will ensure that all the organisations involved in the delivery and quality assurance of apprenticeship assessment have a clear understanding of their role and their accountabilities, as well as what they can expect from the other organisations involved.

EQA principles

We have developed a set of principles that underpin our policies, practices, behaviours and actions. The unifying purpose of these principles is the desire to achieve the right outcome for apprentices and employers and transform the skills landscape:

Table 1 - EQA principles

EQA Principles		
Delivery of EPA is:	Relevant	The EPA is current and genuinely measures occupational competence. Achievement of the apprenticeship is a dependable predictor of success in the occupation
	Reliable	The EPA produces consistent outcomes irrespective of context, cohort, timing or the organisations involved
Quality assurance of EPA is:	Efficient	The process is high-quality, easy to use, cost-effective and facilitates the entry of new employers and EPAOs. To ensure that the right aspects of quality are measured, the right activity is undertaken by the right people, at the right time, and enabled by a digital system that generates actionable Management Information
	Positive	EPA is trusted and respected by employers, apprentices and providers to deliver the right outcomes. The experience is open, transparent and accessible
	Learning	Continuous improvement is embedded in all areas of the EQA framework to ensure an enduringly proactive and progressive approach to quality

1. End-Point Assessment plans

Ensuring that the end-point assessment plans that employer groups develop are robust and high-quality, and lead to the delivery of valid, manageable and cost-effective assessments of occupational competence.

Why is this important?

It is vital that all apprentices complete a high-quality end-point assessment (EPA) and that this is delivered consistently, irrespective of where or when they undertake it, and which EPAO delivers it. The assessment plan is the document that sets out for each particular standard which assessment methods will be used, and how they will be deployed to assess the apprentices' occupational competence at the end of their apprenticeship. Effective quality control is essential to ensure that this plan clearly and accurately sets out how the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) will be assessed, and can be interpreted consistently by different EPAOs. Equally, it is important, that employers have confidence that it will assess whether an apprentice does have the KSBs that demonstrate competence in the occupation.

What do we do to ensure it?

Assessment plans are developed by Trailblazers - groups of employers from across an occupation who come together to develop an apprenticeship. This ensures that the knowledge, skills and behaviours which will be gained through the apprenticeship and assessed via the EPA, are relevant and appropriate for the occupation. The Institute supports the development of assessment plans, and works with Trailblazers to ensure that the assessment plan delivers what they, as employers and experts in that field, understand to be an accurate, fair and relevant measure of occupational competence.

All assessment plans are subject to public consultation, they are reviewed by independent Peer Reviewers, who are industry experts, and by Education Advisors, who bring additional assessment expertise.

Their advice is fed through, in the first instance, to a route panel of representative employers who are experts in their industry. Route panel members provide their expertise and strategic views when making recommendations. Recommendations are ratified by the Institute's Approvals and Funding Committee.

In approving an assessment plan the Institute takes account of whether the plan has met six criteria. These are listed below:

Table 2 - Assessment plan criteria

Criteria	End-point assessment requirements	How will this be tested?
Deliver valid and accurate judgements of occupational competence	The methods of assessment must be fit for purpose and appropriate to the content of the occupational profile. They must include synoptic assessment delivered using a mixture of valid methods that will lead to an integrated EPA at the end of the programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the methods of assessment proposed against the occupational profile duties and KSBs to determine whether the methods taken together will assure occupational competence in the workplace Evaluate whether there is sufficient information in the plan for the EPAOs to develop and deliver valid assessment tools
Produce consistent and reliable judgements	The assessment methodology and tools used must ensure that employers can have confidence that apprentices assessed in different places, at different times, by different assessors have been judged in the same way and to have therefore reached the same standard of occupational competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check that the methodology and tools required will optimally assess the stated KSBs Check that the description of assessment methods contains enough detail for different EPAOs to develop and deliver comparable assessment in different places and times
Ensure independence	The plan must ensure that the organisation delivering the assessment and the individual assessors making assessment decisions are independent of the training provider, the employer and the apprentice. For integrated Degree Apprenticeships the organisation does not have to be independent but the individual assessor should be	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check that the plan clearly sets out how independence will be ensured for both the training provider, the EPAO and the individual assessors
Grading	<p>Apprenticeships should be graded using at least one level above pass for the EPA as a whole</p> <p>The grading should be appropriate and applicable to assessments produced by EPAOs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm that the plan includes at least one grade above pass for the synoptic method and EPA as a whole and that these are appropriately described, clearly showing what an apprentice would need to do to achieve each grade Confirm that a grading exemption has been granted where appropriate. Confirm the grading descriptors are appropriate and can be interpreted consistently
Feasibility, manageability, and value for money	This should be ensured within the constraints of funding policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use experience of other EPA plans to check whether the assessments can be practically delivered within the defined constraints and to the specified scale at reasonable cost

Criteria	End-point assessment requirements	How will this be tested?
Enables EPAOs to make reasonable adjustments	Reasonable adjustments for conducting an EPA, in compliance with equality legislation, should be in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check that the assessment methods proposed promote accessibility for all apprentices

Which organisations are involved?

Trailblazer groups of employers develop the assessment plans to ensure that they set out an occupationally appropriate assessment methodology.

The Institute scrutinises, through its Route Panels, and approves, through its Approvals and Funding Committee, assessment plans to ensure that they reflect the occupation, that the methods of assessment are appropriate and can be applied consistently, that they meet our assessment criteria and are of equally high-quality across standards and routes.

Delivering in accordance with our principles

- **relevant** – assessment plans measure occupational competence using relevant methodology, and the knowledge, skills and behaviours assessed are predictors of success in the occupation after passing the apprenticeship
- **reliable** – assessment criteria ensure that assessment plans are clear, comprehensive and unambiguous so that apprentices receive fair outcomes regardless of the EPAO
- **efficient** – the approach to assessment plan approval uses the right occupational and assessment expertise at the right points in the process to ensure the right decisions are made in a timely manner
- **positive** – approach ensures a positive experience by focussing on accessibility, openness and transparency
- **learning** – the Institute continually seeks to learn from experience and improve its processes for developing and approving assessment plans. Through its accountability for the assurance of the whole of EQA, the Institute is properly and uniquely placed to ensure that lessons from EPA and EQA are reflected in assessment plans

The process

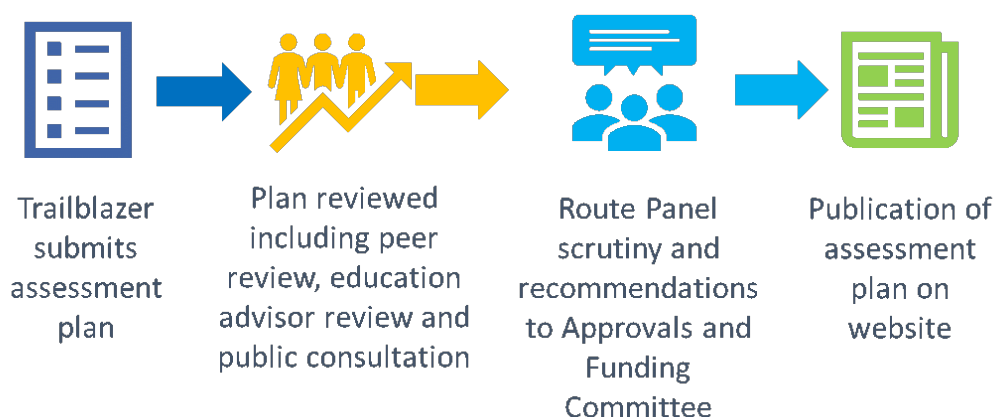


Figure 2 - End-point assessment plan approval process

2. The Register of End-Point Assessment Organisations

Ensuring that EPA is only delivered by high-quality organisations possessing the relevant assessment and occupational expertise, and access to sufficient, experienced and suitably qualified assessors.

Why is this important?

Delivering EPA through organisations that are proven to have the sector expertise, capacity and capability will help to ensure that apprentices have a rigorous and fair experience of assessment, and will increase employer confidence in EPA as a relevant and reliable test of occupational competence.

What do we do to ensure it?

The Institute advises on the conditions for entry onto a Register of End-Point Assessment Organisations (RoEPAO), so ensuring that they are consistent with the EQA Framework and EPAOs meet our quality standards. In order to ensure that only organisations of appropriate quality can deliver EPA, the Agency maintains the RoEPAO, assessing all EPAO applications against the [conditions for being on the register of EPAOs](#). EPAOs must demonstrate that they possess the specific capabilities required for each standard that they wish to assess. The RoEPAO lists the organisations which have been approved to deliver EPA for each standard and employers can only select organisations that have been approved to the RoEPAO.

Which organisations are involved?

The **Agency** oversees the administration of the RoEPAO, including approving applications.

The **Institute** sets the quality criteria for being on the RoEPAO.

Delivering in accordance with our principles

- **relevant** – organisations must apply against each standard they wish to deliver, demonstrating that they have specific, relevant expertise in both the occupation and assessment
- **reliable** – the same conditions are set by the Institute and applied to every organisation
- **positive** – the RoEPAO is open, its conditions are transparent, it is accessible to all who wish to apply, and EPAOs are supported by EQA providers
- **efficient** – the process facilitates entry to the market by new EPAOs through a system and process that is easy to use and by providing guidance and support to new entrants whilst keeping our standards high
- **learning** – conditions for being on the RoEPAO are reviewed to ensure learning from good practice

3. Readiness Checks

Ensuring that EPAOs are ready and able to deliver assessment at the point at which they are needed by employers.

Why is this important?

EPAOs must be ready to deliver assessment at the point at which an apprentice successfully completes their training programme and is confirmed as ready to take the end-point assessment by their employer.

What do we do to ensure it?

When an EPAO is approved on the RoEPAO they must indicate a date by which they will be ready to deliver assessments. For apprenticeships with a duration of between 12-24 months the EPAO must have all EPA support materials in place within nine months of their registration, and final assessment instruments and tools must be ready three months in advance of the first EPA taking place. For apprenticeships of over 24 months' duration EPAOs must have all support materials in place within 12 months of registration, and final assessment instruments and tools ready three months in advance of the first EPA taking place. This will be confirmed by a two stage readiness check delivered by the Agency and the EQA provider for the apprenticeship standard.

Stage 1 - The Agency confirms operational readiness

The Agency will work with the EPAO over the course of the 9-12 months from their acceptance on to the RoEPAO to ensure that they are making appropriate progress towards being ready to deliver by the date indicated in their application to the RoEPAO.

The Agency's operational readiness work will include:

- a readiness checklist that will be sent to EPAOs to ensure they are still making the appropriate progress
- a discussion with the EPAO, which will include support relating to their RoEPAO application

This work will also include an evaluation of the EPAO's capacity and capability to deliver which may include:

- how they manage their data covering current and future apprentices with their current number of assessors
- detailed plans for delivery of the assessment
- how the EPA will confirm occupational competence

The Agency will evaluate the EPAO's progress and provide a report including a readiness rating using the four-point scale set out in Table 3. A grade of 4 indicates that the EPAO has not made sufficient progress and the Agency will discuss next steps. This may include agreeing a new date for delivering EPA, suspension, or withdrawal from the RoEPAO. A grade of 1-3 indicates that the EPAO is operationally ready. It is then essential to check the EPAO's readiness to deliver specific standards including assessment of occupational content. At this point the Agency will formally hand-over responsibility for Stage 2 of the readiness check to the EQA provider, as well as handing over any evidence gathered during Stage 1 via the Institute's digital system. The EQA provider will use its occupational expertise to undertake the final part of the readiness check, confirming whether or not the EPAO is ready to conduct assessments on that standard.

While the Agency is accountable for working with the EPAO during Stage 1 of the readiness check, the EQA provider may have discussions with EPAOs during Stage 1. This is to provide guidance and constructive support to enable the development of assessment instruments and the delivery of a high-quality, reliable assessment experience. Guidance can include good practice and lessons learnt from other EQA activity.

Stage 2 - EQA provider confirms standard-specific readiness

Following handover from the Agency, the EQA provider will then undertake a full readiness check for the standard in question. The check will also take into account the readiness rating awarded by the Agency and any issues or actions raised at Stage 1.

For the readiness check, the EQA provider will review relevant evidence gathered by the Agency in Stage 1 and may request additional documents and/or undertake a visit the EPAO. The readiness review will focus on the following five lines of enquiry (see Table 4 on p14 for more details):

- assessment materials
- support materials
- EPA delivery plans
- assessor recruitment and training
- policies and procedures including internal quality assurance

The review of readiness, which will be undertaken by the EQA provider must be completed at least one month before the date of the first EPA, will set out whether or not the EPAO is ready to deliver assessment for the specific standard as judged against the five lines of enquiry. The EQA provider will provide a rating on a four-point scale to the EPAO for each area line of inquiry. The report will also identify those areas that the EPAO must improve. EPAOs rated as 'not ready to deliver' must make all changes identified by the EQA provider and will undergo a further readiness check before they can deliver any EPA. The readiness rating will contribute to the EPAO's risk rating, which will, along with other factors, determine the frequency and intensity of the ongoing monitoring they will receive (see Section 4).

Table 3 - Four-point scale of readiness – EQA provider readiness check

Four-point scale of readiness – EQA provider readiness check	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	Insufficient material Material not accessible to all users Support arrangements could give unfair advantage to certain apprentices	Generic EPA information available but more work needed to meet the specific needs of the standard	Clear and accessible material pitched at the right level Material clearly differentiates for different audiences (e.g. employer, apprentice, training provider) Range of different material (e.g. templates or timeline setting out the apprentice journey)	Exceptionally clear and innovative materials clearly tailored to the needs of the standard and test occupational competence in a genuine and innovative way

Four-point scale of readiness – EQA provider readiness check	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	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 IQA)	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

Table 4 - Lines of enquiry - EQA provider readiness check

	Lines of enquiry				
	Relevant	Reliable	Efficient	Positive	Learning
Assessment materials	<p>Are materials appropriate to the standard and level of the apprenticeship?</p> <p>Are they specific to the role and reflecting recognised and current practice within the industry?</p>	<p>Will materials allow for consistent, valid and fair Assessment of occupational competence?</p> <p>Will they allow appropriate grading judgments to be made?</p> <p>How is the security of materials managed?</p> <p>Has any assessment software been thoroughly tested?</p>	<p>Are Assessment materials being developed and used efficiently?</p>	<p>Are materials accessible to all apprentices including those for whom reasonable adjustments will be made?</p>	<p>Pilots/trials with people already employed in these roles?</p> <p>Systematic and genuine industry feedback</p>
Support materials	<p>Are materials appropriate to the Standard and level of the apprenticeship?</p> <p>Do they reflect current/standard industry practices?</p> <p>Are they regularly updated?</p> <p>Would employers recognise their relevance?</p>	<p>Do materials accurately describe and/or represent the assessment that an apprentice will undertake?</p>	<p>Are materials available digitally and at no extra charge?</p>	<p>Are they clear and accessible?</p>	<p>Who have materials been tested with?</p> <p>What feedback processes are built in?</p>
EPA delivery plans	<p>Are they appropriate to delivering the Assessment specified in the EPA plan?</p>	<p>Will they produce reliable results over venue and time and for all apprentices regardless of their specific characteristics? Are they suitable for all apprentices?</p>	<p>Are the plans realistic and appropriate for delivering the likely volume?</p>	<p>Do training providers and employers understand what is required and support the process?</p>	<p>Which groups and what criteria have they been tested with?</p> <p>Are their specific diversity checks built in as standard?</p> <p>What is the feedback process?</p>

	Lines of enquiry				
	Relevant	Reliable	Efficient	Positive	Learning
Assessor recruitment and training	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 Assessment Plan?	Does the EPAO have appropriate conflict of interest policies, and are they applied across all Standards, to ensure that assessors will be independent from apprentices, employers and Training Providers? Are these standing up to actual delivery on that specific Standard?	Has the EPAO recruited sufficient assessors for the likely volume of EPAs to be undertaken?	Are the assessors credible across the industry as people fit to pass apprentices as occupationally competent? Will employers respect their judgement? Is a process in place to promote and monitor assessor CPD?	What is the schedule and quality of assessor training for industry experts?
Policies and procedures IQA – (Internal Quality Assurance)	Are the IQA policy and procedures fit for purpose?	Does the organisation have appropriate internal quality assurance arrangements in place?	Do the EPAO's data management processes meet the needs of the Standard?	Is the EPAO engaging appropriately with employers and providers to ensure that apprentices are prepared for their EPA?	Has the EPAO responded to the EQA provider recommendations?

The EQA provider will share readiness reports with the EPAO within 10 days of the readiness check being completed, and with the Institute within 25 days using the digital system.

Which organisations are involved?

EPAOs submit an application to the RoEPAO and provide all information requested. EPAOs must also engage actively with the Agency and EQA provider and comply with all conditions for being on the RoEPAO.

The **Agency** works with EPAOs over the first year following their entry on to the RoEPAO to ensure that they are making appropriate progress towards being ready to deliver and liaises with the EQA provider to ensure a timely handover.

All **EQA providers** undertake a readiness evaluation when an EPAO has said they will be ready to deliver assessments for each standard.

The **Institute** oversees the work of all EQA providers and ensures that they are delivering consistently.

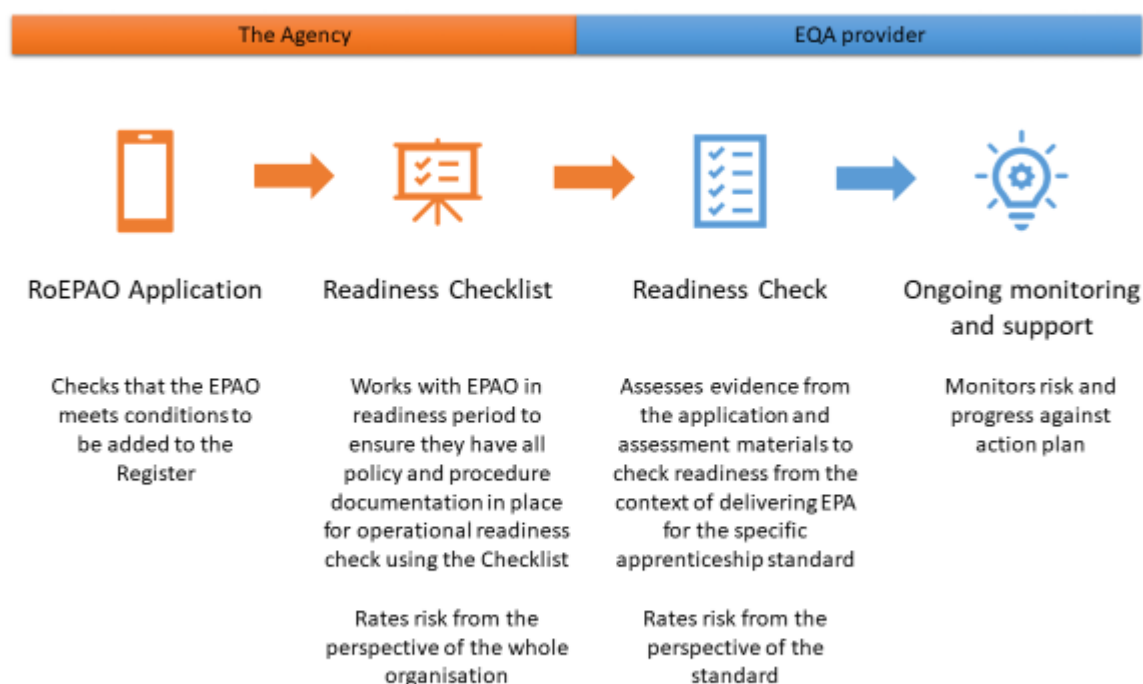


Figure 3 - The Agency and the Institute accountability for EPAO readiness

Delivering against our principles

- **relevant** – readiness checks ensure EPAOs are prepared to deliver EPA that will generate accurate assessment of occupational competence
- **reliable** – readiness checks ensure EPAOs are prepared to deliver EPA consistently, in accordance with the assessment plan
- **positive** – the readiness process is clear, transparent and supportive, and outcomes of the checks are shared openly with EPAOs and EPAOs provided with advice and support as they need it
- **efficient** – the process is as simple and easy to follow as possible with clear guidance
- **learning** – EQA providers will identify areas of improvement for each EPAO and agree an action plan. Early and consistent engagement facilitates opportunities for EPAOs to apply learning

The process

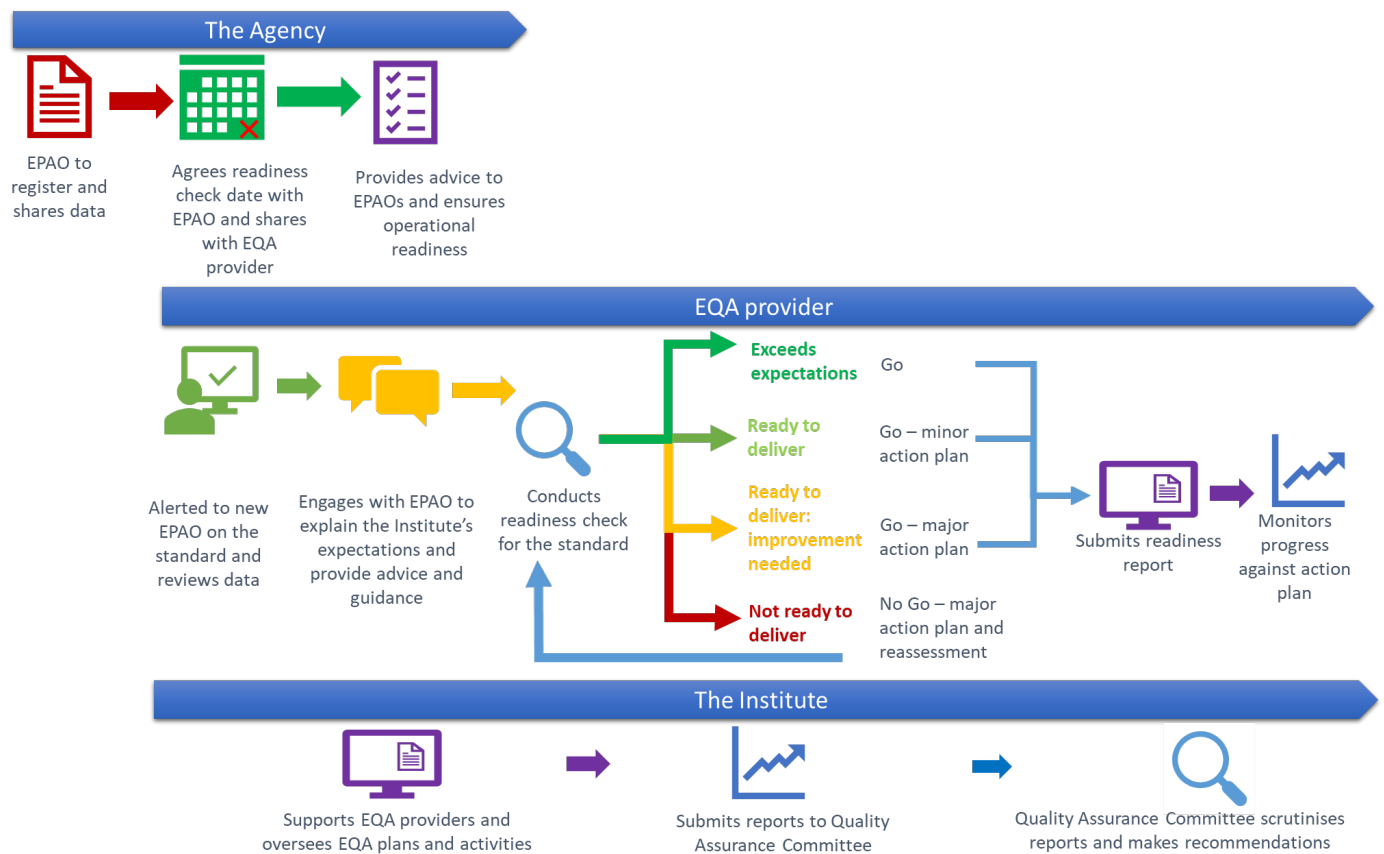


Figure 4 - EPAO Readiness process

4. Monitoring EPA including observing delivery

Ensuring that the actual delivery of end-point assessment provides a relevant, reliable and independent assessment of occupational competence

Why is this important?

Employers need to have confidence that EPA is a relevant and reliable assessment of occupational competence, and that apprentices have a fair and positive experience of the process.

What do we do to ensure it?

EQA provides an independent, expert evaluation of the quality of EPA that assures that it is delivering to employers' needs.

During the development of the assessment plan for each apprenticeship standard, the Trailblazer group nominates an EQA provider to deliver EQA. This gives employers ongoing confidence and assurance in apprenticeship assessment for each individual occupation. The nominated provider is asked to set out a proposal for its delivery of EQA, and this is scrutinised by the Institute's Quality Assurance Committee, including checks for conflicts of interest, financial and organisational robustness. If accepted, the provider is recognised as the EQA provider for that standard.

Desk-based reviews

EQA providers undertake monitoring activities to ascertain that each EPAO is providing high-quality, relevant assessment and that the assessments are in line with the assessment plan and consistent across all EPAOs delivering on that Standard. The frequency and focus of EQA activities will be based on an evaluation of risk and random sampling and will be shared with the Institute through the digital system and agreed with Institute officials. EQA providers will undertake a programme of desk-based reviews for each apprenticeship standard, looking at information from each EPAO delivering the Standard. The EQA provider will be able to access some documentation from the Agency, or other EQA providers through the Institute's digital system, but it will need to request various documentation from EPAOs, which may include:

- policy documents (application to the specific standard)
- assessment materials – including signing off any major changes
- support materials
- strategy for Internal Quality Assurance
- details of planning for the EPA service
- data on EPA including, registrations, pass rates and distribution of grades
- CVs, qualifications, performance reports and CPD records for assessors
- feedback from stakeholders, including apprentices, training providers and employers on the relevance and reliability of assessments delivered
- records of IQA activities, including standardisation and moderation
- records of any reasonable adjustments or special considerations granted and evidence behind these decisions
- conflicts of interest records

Desk reviewers will need expertise in quality assurance and delivering assessment.

Visits and observation of assessment activities

EQA providers will also deploy reviewers with assessment and industry expertise to observe EPA delivery and check that the EPA is being undertaken in a manner that supports the assessment of occupational competence. It is important that individuals undertaking such visits have the necessary experience, familiarity

and knowledge to judge that EPA is truly assessing occupational competence. Evidence sought may include:

- observations of a sample of assessments, including live assessments. Observations must check that the content and context of assessments are occupationally relevant
- observation of assessor standardisation or moderation meetings
- review of training materials
- review of physical or digital versions of documents, including marked assessment materials from apprentices
- interviews with assessors and other EPAO staff
- feedback from apprentices and employers to check how well EPA is meeting their needs, including how well it relates to current business practice
- check IT systems, security and record storage
- accessibility of assessment including any language bias and reasonable adjustments
- assessments cover requirements of the assessment plan and occupational competence
- following up on previous actions and recommendations

The aspects of EPA which EQA providers will quality assure are set out in Table 5. The table also shows whether an aspect will generally be reviewed by a desk-based audit or during a visit from an EQA provider. Some things will also be considered over a longer time duration by the EQA provider and the Institute through longitudinal evaluation. These areas are also noted in Table 5 and explained in more detail in section 6 of this document. The EQA provider will choose to request evidence at their discretion based on, but not limited by: their sampling strategy; previous monitoring evidence; feedback about the EPAO from other parts of the system; or at the Institute's request.

Table 5 - Aspects of EPA to be assured - EQA monitoring

Aspect of EPA to be assured	Where will this usually be set out?			How will this usually be assessed?		Longitudinal Evaluation
	Assessment plan	Conditions of RoEPAO	Operational evidence	Desk review	Visits / observations	
Relevant						
individual assessment instruments/methods are fit for purpose	✓			✓	✓	✓
assessment is delivered in line with the published EPA plan	✓	✓			✓	
EQA team includes expertise in quality assurance, assessment and occupational competent	✓			✓	✓	
assessors' knowledge is up-to-date	✓			✓	✓	✓
Reliable						
assessment is carried out independently in practice	✓	✓		✓	✓	

Aspect of EPA to be assured	Where will this usually be set out?			How will this usually be assessed?		Longitudinal Evaluation
	Assessment plan	Conditions of RoEPAO	Operational evidence	Desk review	Visits / observations	
assessments are operating effectively and achieving the desired outcomes			✓	✓	✓	✓
grading is applied accurately and consistently	✓			✓	✓	✓
assessment is reliable and comparable across different EPAOs, employers, places, times and assessors		✓			✓	✓
Efficient						
sufficient assessors are available		✓		✓	✓	
accurate records are kept and data is held securely with appropriate protocols in place		✓		✓	✓	
retakes, resits, appeals and complaints handling are operated effectively	✓	✓		✓	✓	
timeliness of assessment windows			✓	✓		✓
booking and management of assessment			✓	✓		
marking/remote assessment	✓				✓	
resources for assessment			✓	✓	✓	
evidence gathering and record keeping			✓		✓	
confidentiality			✓		✓	
certification application process including its timeliness and checking any requirements		✓	✓		✓	
employers are choosing EPAOs		✓		✓	✓	✓
Positive						
access to assessment is fair, and decisions on reasonable adjustments are made fairly and consistently	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
issue of results and feedback		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
information provided and fees charged are clear and transparent		✓		✓		

Aspect of EPA to be assured	Where will this usually be set out?			How will this usually be assessed?		Longitudinal Evaluation
	Assessment plan	Conditions of RoEPAO	Operational evidence	Desk review	Visits / observations	
all requirements of the standard in terms of achievement of gateways and mandatory qualifications and requirements are achieved prior to sign-off and the employer makes the final decision on the readiness of the apprentice for EPA	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Learning						
each EPAO has arrangements to collect and action feedback from apprentices, employers and assessors		✓		✓		
Internal Quality Assurance processes carried out by the EPAOs is effective and rigorous	✓			✓	✓	

Not every desk review or visit will look at all aspects of EPA and the exact focus of EQA reviews and visits will be determined by an assessment of the risk posed by each EPA plan and EPAO, with an element of random sampling. The EQA provider must agree their sampling strategy with the Institute.

Which organisations are involved?

EPAOs comply with requirements of the RoEPAO. This includes providing data and engaging positively with the EQA provider during EQA activities

EQA providers deliver EQA including desk-based monitoring and observation of EQA delivery.

The **Institute** oversees the EQA Framework and all EQA providers to ensure that they are delivering the service consistently and effectively, and to look holistically at the delivery of EQA.

Delivering our principles

- **relevant** – EQA providers will work with EPAOs to identify good practice and areas of improvement for the assessment plan to ensure they are unambiguous and valid. EQA providers will use assessors with occupational expertise to evaluate EPA on the ground
- **reliable** – EQA providers will ensure EPAs are conducted consistently by all EPAOs and across all cohorts of apprentices through monitoring, support and sharing learning
- **positive** – EQA providers set clear expectations and take an open and collaborative approach to EQA monitoring. Views of those undergoing EPA will be taken
- **efficient** – the Institute provides clear process guidance and a digital platform to allow for proactive planning
- **learning** – EQA monitoring includes the identification and sharing of good practice

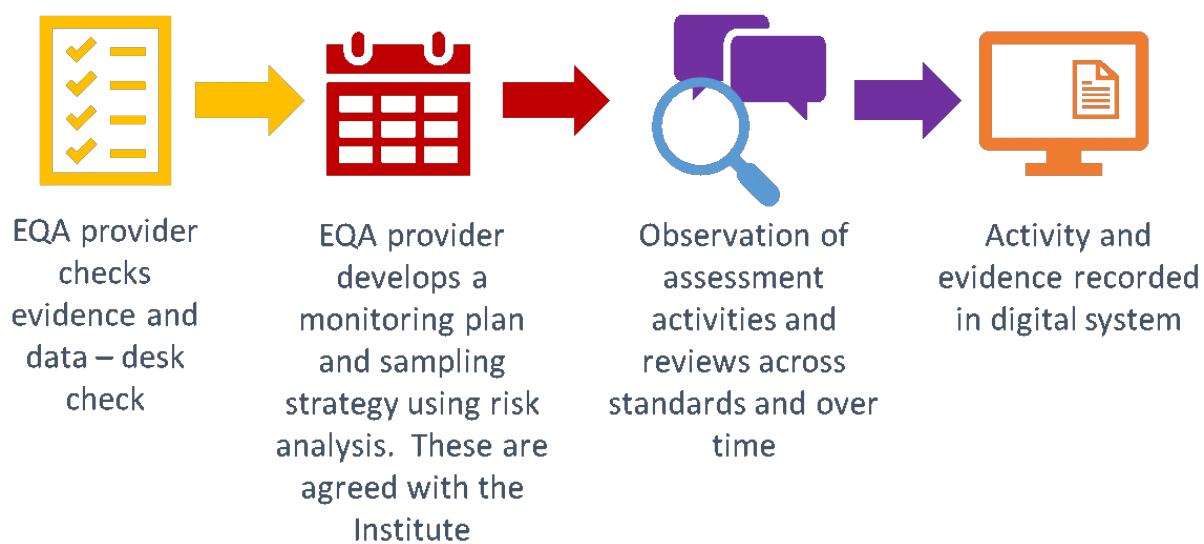


Figure 5 - EQA Monitoring process

5. Reporting

Providing clear reports to EPAOs and the Institute, including examples of good practice, recommendations and action points. Providing evidence to support improvements to the delivery of EPA.

Why is this important?

Understanding trends and continuous improvement is an important element of EQA. Reports should focus on identifying good practice as well as taking action to resolve any issues.

What do we do to ensure it?

The frequency of EQA reviews, and areas of focus will be determined using a risk-based approach, but there will be a minimum of one EQA review in relation to each EPAO per standard each year. In the first instance the risk rating will be determined by the grading on the four-point scale assigned at the readiness check. The grading and risk rating will be reviewed and updated at each subsequent EQA review. EQA providers use the digital system to record their evaluations of EPAOs and evidence, and to plan EQA activities. This will minimise duplication and ensure risk information and evidence is shared with relevant parties.

Continuous improvement is an important element of EQA, and the process goes beyond a measure of compliance. Following each round of EQA activities the EQA provider will provide feedback to the EPAO and the Institute's Quality Assurance Committee, setting out their key findings, specific actions and recommendations for improvement.

Each EQA provider will also provide an annual summary report on each EPAO on each apprenticeship standard. The EQA provider will submit reports to the EPAO within 15 days of the visit, providing them with any recommendations for improvement and highlighting areas of particular strength. The EPAO will have 15 working days to respond to any factual inaccuracies within the report, and submit an action plan to be agreed with the EQA provider. Following this the report will be formally submitted to the Institute using the digital system and shared with the Quality Assurance Committee.

The Institute can share the outcomes of reviews with relevant bodies and plans to publish reports or elements of them at some point in the future. No other body is to publish elements of the report without prior written agreement from the Institute.

Each EPAO will be given a grade on a scale of 1-4, indicating the overall quality of their assessment for each standard, these grades will be used to inform the risk assessment used to determine the frequency and focus of subsequent EQA activity. Indicative characteristics for each grading along each line of enquiry are set out below.

Table 6 - EQA monitoring rating scale

	4. Inadequate	3. Requires improvement	2. Good	1. Outstanding
Relevant	<p>Assessments do not validly assess the occupational competence as set out in the assessment plan</p> <p>Assessments are not delivered in line with the assessment plan</p> <p>Assessors lack the occupational or assessment expertise</p> <p>Policies and procedures are generic and not applied to the particular needs of the standard</p>	<p>Assessment materials validly assess occupational competence, with some elements requiring improvement</p> <p>Assessments are delivered in line with the assessment plan, but some elements require improvement</p> <p>Assessors possess adequate occupational and assessment expertise, but it may be limited or not kept up-to-date</p>	<p>Assessment materials validly assess occupational competence</p> <p>Assessors possess up-to-date knowledge of occupational and Assessment practice. EPAO has robust system in place to manage CPD and training</p> <p>All activity (including application of non-Assessment specific policies) tailored to the needs of the standard in question</p>	<p>Assessment materials validly assess occupational competence and have been rigorously tested by occupational experts and reviewed as appropriate</p> <p>CPD and training exceeds usual expectations, including a proactive approach to learning and improvement</p>
Reliable	<p>Assessment is not undertaken independently of employer or training provider</p> <p>Standardisation and moderation processes do not ensure quality and consistency</p> <p>Significant differences in the consistency of delivery or grading across different groups of apprentices</p>	<p>Assessment is independent of employer and training provider</p> <p>Standardisation and moderation are run effectively, but some elements require improvement</p> <p>Assessment is delivered comparably across different parts of the country or employers</p>	<p>Effective standardisation and moderation processes in place</p> <p>Steps are in place to ensure that all Assessment is delivered comparably and in line with EQA provider guidelines</p>	<p>Excellent Assessment practice observed throughout delivery that ensures Assessment is comparable across the Standard and over time</p> <p>A proactive approach is taken to ensure comparability with other EPAOs for the same Standard, where appropriate, or with similar standards</p>

	4. Inadequate	3. Requires improvement	2. Good	1. Outstanding
Efficient	<p>EPAO fails to make adequate assessors available for the assessment required</p> <p>Administrative processes are ineffective or inefficient in a way which compromises apprentice or employer experience</p>	<p>Functional systems and processes are in place but could be improved</p>	<p>Efficient systems in place for allocating assessors and robust business continuity arrangements</p> <p>Procedures understood at all appropriate levels within the organisation with accountability and responsibility at the right level</p>	<p>A proactive approach includes forecasting and continuous improvement</p>
Positive	<p>There are risks to the security of Assessment materials</p> <p>Apprentices requiring reasonable adjustments are not appropriately provided for</p> <p>Support materials and other information (including on fees) are not available, or are inaccurate or inappropriate</p> <p>Feedback from employers and apprentices indicates a generally poor level of service</p>	<p>EPAO effectively checks that gateway requirements are met but this is not always consistent</p> <p>Reasonable adjustments and special considerations are mostly administered fairly and effectively, and appropriately recorded</p> <p>Support materials are adequate but may not be standard specific or updated frequently</p> <p>Feedback indicates a reasonable level of satisfaction from employers and apprentices with the way the EPA was conducted</p>	<p>EPAO consistently and effectively checks that gateway requirements are met</p> <p>Reasonable adjustments and special considerations are always administered fairly, effectively, and are appropriately recorded</p> <p>All processes to support assessment delivery are effective</p> <p>Support materials are comprehensive and helpful</p> <p>Feedback indicates a mostly high level of satisfaction from employers and apprentices with the way the EPA was conducted</p>	<p>Every effort made to ensure that apprentices and employers receive a positive experience of EPA</p> <p>Feedback indicates a consistently high level of satisfaction from employers and apprentices with the way the EPA was conducted</p> <p>A wide range of support is offered to employers and apprentices</p>

	4. Inadequate	3. Requires improvement	2. Good	1. Outstanding
Learning	<p>No or limited efforts made to obtain feedback from apprentices, employers or training providers</p> <p>Continue to apply procedures and processes which have been demonstrated to be ineffective</p>	<p>Some effort made to obtain and act on feedback from employers, apprentices and training providers but may be ad hoc or unfocused</p>	<p>Robust systems in place to obtain and act on feedback from employers, apprentices and training providers</p> <p>Improvements made to assessment practice from review of internal quality assurance processes</p>	<p>Continuous improvement embedded into culture of the organisation at all levels</p> <p>Feedback sought from employers and apprentices is routinely used to improve assessment delivery</p>

Which organisations are involved?

EPAOs check report for factual accuracy and develop action plan.

EQA providers produce a report for each apprenticeship standard and each EPAO assessing that standard.

The **Institute** oversees the EQA Framework and all EQA providers to ensure that they are delivering the service consistently and effectively, and to look holistically at the delivery of EQA and findings across all EQA providers and all standards. The Institute's Quality Assurance Committee provides governance and oversight, makes recommendations and ensures that the Institute is meeting its statutory duties.

Delivering our principles

- **relevant** – EQA providers report good practice and areas of improvement for the EPAO to support continuous improvement to the quality of assessments
- **reliable** – EQA providers will take note of advice and any actions to ensure the quality of all EPAs; inadequate performance will be identified and Institute informed so interventions can be agreed and managed effectively
- **positive** – feedback includes examples of good practice and encourages a collaborative approach to improvement
- **efficient** – the Institute provides clear process guidance and a digital platform to allow for real time reporting and proactive planning
- **learning** – feedback and improvement is embedded into the monitoring process, ensuring all learning is acknowledged and acted upon

The process

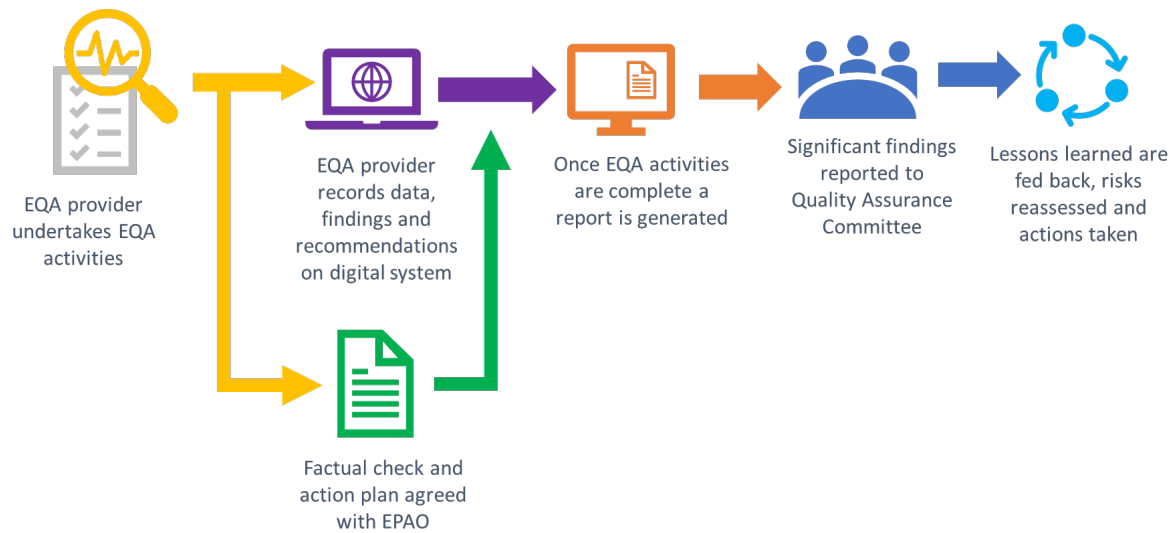


Figure 6 - EQA reporting process

6. Using EQA to improve assessment

Ensuring that all organisations within the apprenticeship assessment system learn from the findings of EQA and are able to make improvements as a result.

Why is this important?

The Institute's aim is to ensure the quality of apprenticeships and to do that it requires a system that aids continuous improvement. Feedback from the findings of EQA, including from the experiences of apprentices and employers, and from the EPAOs themselves, will enable all parts of the assessment system to learn from current practice and improve their delivery. This will allow ongoing improvements to EPA in real-time, and the Institute will also undertake longitudinal evaluation of EPA over a longer time scale to ensure that it is continuing to provide relevant and reliable assessment.

What do we do to ensure it?

The Institute reviews assessment plans regularly, thematically, and in response to policy changes. In addition, ongoing monitoring and feedback encourages continuous improvement across all aspects of end-point assessment and ensures that every assessment is rigorous and fair.

Making improvements to assessment plans

Assessment plans are subject to a thorough, employer-led development and approvals process as outlined in Section 1. However, there will be occasions when they need to be clarified or revised as identified by different stakeholders, including training providers, EPAOs or EQA providers. Issues usually fall into three categories of:

- **deliverability** – typically identified when EPAOs experience of planning or delivering assessment indicate that an EPA plan cannot be delivered as written, or that implementing it would lead to an unreliable or inaccurate assessment of occupational competence
- **clarity** – where assessment plan language is ambiguous or unclear, and could be open to misinterpretation
- **errors** – factual errors, or conflicting requirements in the assessment plan

The following table explains how different types of issue should be resolved, including roles and responsibilities. The appropriate course of action will depend on the nature and scale of the problem.

Scale of issue	Example	Who can make the decision	Communications / audit requirements
Minor adjustments: For individual learners or flexibilities as set out within the assessment plan	Reasonable adjustment/ special considerations Flexibilities that will not compromise reliability / independence (e.g. around logistics)	EPAOs	Requirement that the EPAO keep a record of their decision and reason for making it and that this and any appropriate evidence behind the decision is available to EQA at audit
Intermediate issues: Clarifications and interpretation	Interpretation of assessment plan. This could include addressing either a single minor change or multiple alterations within an assessment method to enable effective delivery. For example setting a common duration for an assessment where this is not covered within the plan	EQA provider	EQA provider must engage with and disseminate any change to all EPAOs on the standard and confirm that they have been implemented EQA provider must record actions and notify the Institute so that the assessment plan can be updated if required
Major issues: Fundamental changes within an assessment method to enable effective delivery	Change of assessment method; change of grade descriptors	Ad hoc revisions follow the identification of any issues. Whole route reviews are also conducted periodically	A new version of the assessment plan will be developed by the Trailblazer and then published by the Institute as soon as possible The EQA provider will be informed and will be responsible for communicating with all relevant stakeholders and assuring that directed changes have been implemented

Improvements in assessment

EQA reviews will identify both good practice and issues in the delivery of the EPA. This will generate a rich source of intelligence to guide improvements. Individual EQA providers will make recommendations for improvements to EPAOs during the course of regular monitoring, drawing on their occupational and assessment expertise, and good practice observed across their EQA activity.

EQA providers will respond to ad hoc queries and requests for guidance from EPAOs. In addition EQA providers operating on standards with more than one EPAO will periodically bring these EPAOs together at forums to discuss and share good practice in assessment.

The Institute will also coordinate a regular forum of all EQA providers to encourage a collaborative approach, and share intelligence and good practice. This will allow the Institute and all EQA providers to track trends across EPA provision and identify where issues which could impact the successful delivery of EPA may be occurring and target subsequent EQA activity.

It is also crucial that EQA continues to draw on feedback from employers and apprentices in order to provide assurance that each EPA is continuing to deliver a relevant, reliable and cost-effective test of occupational competence. EPAOs should seek feedback from employers whose apprentices have been through their EPA, and the apprentices themselves to give assurance that the assessment met their expectations and is relevant to the occupation in question. EQA providers may wish to review this

feedback as part of their work.

Over time the Institute will additionally undertake longitudinal evaluation of end-point assessment drawing from a range of employers and former apprentices to capture their view of the relevance and reliability of the assessment. This will serve two purposes: firstly getting employer feedback on the continued relevance of assessment as occupations develop and evolve, feeding into the Institute's statutory review process; secondly, taking a view from users about the impact of the apprenticeship on the performance of the apprentice and the business. As part of this work the Institute will use its panel of apprentices as a conduit for the voices of all apprentices enabling us to take a longitudinal view of the continued relevance of EPA to those undertaking it.

Which organisations are involved?

EPAOs will make minor adjustments to assessment plans and report them to their EQA provider.

EQA providers will work with EPAOs to resolve issues and ensure that EPAOs deliver any recommendation made by EQA monitoring. EQA providers will work with EPAOs, other EQA providers and the Institute to support consistency and continuous improvement.

The **Institute** will ensure that assessment plans are amended and/or other issues identified by EQA, are resolved; it is also accountable for ensuring that any changes are communicated to EQA providers. The Institute will undertake longitudinal evaluation of the continuing relevance and benefit of EPA.

Delivering against our principles

- **relevant** – EQA Providers and EPAOs are encouraged to challenge and improve the assessment plans to ensure they are valid
- **reliable** – regular forums are held by the EQA Providers for EPAOs to share lessons learnt and to provide feedback. This ensures the approach is consistent and robust
- **positive** – feedback is welcomed on all aspects of EPA; all actors are committed listening to feedback and taking appropriate action
- **efficient** – feedback processes are clear, unambiguous and followed by all, so the right activity is done by the right people at the right time. That action is taken is proactively monitored
- **learning** – continuous improvement is built into every part of the EQA Framework and open and honest feedback is encouraged. Feedback will be sought from employers and apprentices, that the EPA is relevant to their occupation

The process

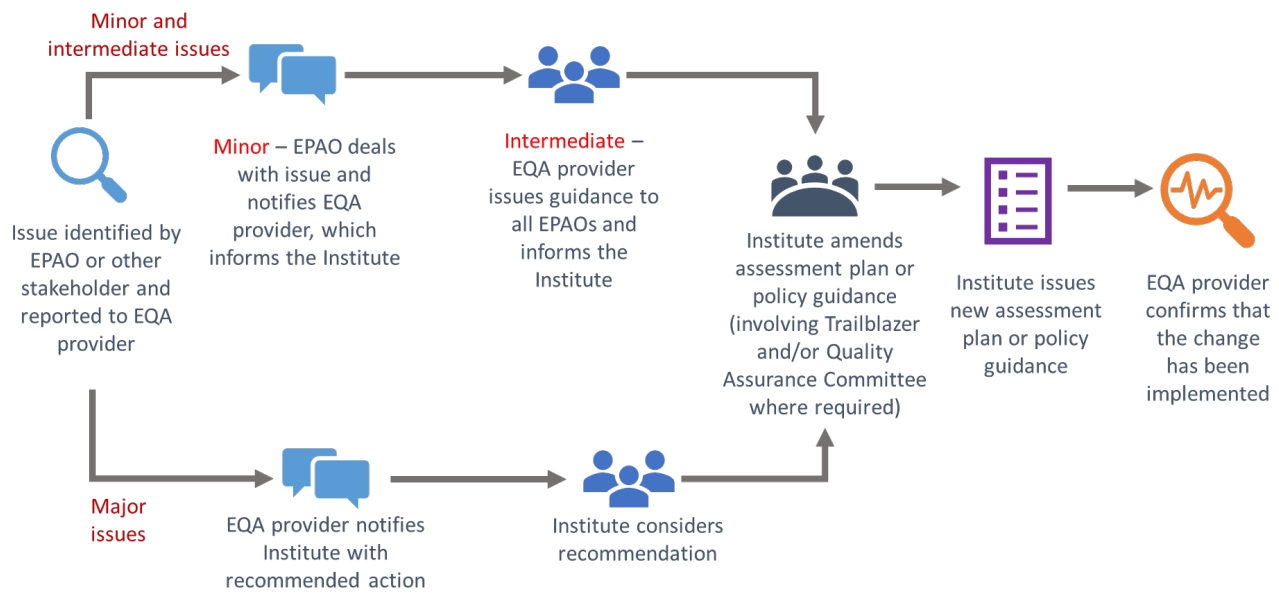


Figure 7 - Assessment plan feedback and improvement process

7. Taking action

Ensuring EPAs that are inadequate are remedied as quickly as possible so that any risk to the quality of assessment is minimised.

Why is this important?

The EQA process will drive continuous improvement across the EPA system. Nevertheless, there will be occasions when issues with EPA arise, either because of the assessment plans themselves or through the interpretation and delivery of assessment by EPAOs. In these circumstances, it is imperative that EQA providers and the Institute act quickly, fairly and robustly to protect the interests of apprentices and employers.

What is done to assure EPA?

Through the process of desk-based reviews, data analysis and visits outlined above, EQA providers will monitor the quality of apprenticeship assessment. This regular process may identify issues that compromise the delivery of EPA. In addition, evidence of EPAOs failing to comply with the relevant assessment plan, the conditions of the RoEPAO, or EQA action plans may come from the following sources:

- EQA provider support and mentoring activities
- self-reporting of issues by EPAOs in accordance with the Conditions of the RoEPAO
- analysis of data
- complaints from apprentices, training providers or employers
- complaints from employees of EPAOs
- any other intelligence

Examples of issues which could compromise the effective delivery of assessment include:

- an EPAO unable to deliver assessment at the time, and in the manner agreed with an employer in accordance with the published assessment plan.
- EPAO not employing appropriately qualified or trained personnel, including those who are required to have occupational experience and awareness
- an error in assessment materials which could compromise the relevance or reliability of the assessment
- a breach in confidentiality or security of assessment materials
- an EPAO conducting assessment in such a way that any apprentice may not be assessed accurately, fairly or consistently with other apprentices on the same standard and in accordance with the same assessment plan
- any other risk to the independence of the assessment

When an EQA provider is made aware through any of the channels above that an issue has occurred, or may occur, that has or could compromise assessment they will log the issue on the EQA digital system to alert the Institute and agree a course of action. Where the matter is urgent or advice is needed, an EQA provider should contact the Institute by phone or email.

The EQA provider will work with the EPAO to develop an action plan to resolve the issue. Where the Institute considers that the quality of any apprenticeship assessment or EPAO is, or may, become unsatisfactory, it has the statutory power under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 to carry out a review and will make arrangements in order to improve the quality. The Institute has a range of options for dealing with inadequate EPAO practices. The action taken will depend on the nature of the incident, the severity and the risk posed. The Quality Assurance Committee will be informed of all issues

undergoing investigation and may be involved in the discussion around appropriate course of action. The Institute will work with other bodies such as the EQA provider and the Agency to agree appropriate course of action. Actions taken may include:

- increased scrutiny by EQA providers across some or all standards
- preventing the EPAO from undertaking any further EPA on the standard(s) concerned until the issues have been resolved
- suspending the EPAO from the RoEPAO for some or all standards
- removing the EPAO from the RoEPAO for some or all standards

Some standards and assessment plans are subject to other regulatory regimes, or linked to the achievement of a professional standard or licence to practice. In such cases the EQA provider, which may or may not be a regulatory body/professional body, will need to ensure that EQA activities meet the Institute's requirements. If the EPAO is subject to a parallel regime operated by the EQA provider, and has transgressed the requirements of that regime, the Institute and EQA provider will work together to determine an appropriate and proportionate course of action. The EQA provider must inform the Institute immediately where other requirements conflict with the principles of EQA so the Institute can review the issue; this will usually involve working closely with the regulator or professional body to agree an appropriate solution.

Which organisations are involved?

EPAOs are responsible for informing their EQA provider, the Institute and Agency if they have breached their conditions of the RoEPAO.

EQA providers will monitor the quality of apprenticeship assessment delivery, rectify issues and inform or escalate to the Institute.

The **Institute** will act quickly, fairly and robustly to review issues, liaise with appropriate bodies and recommend a course of action. The Institute's Quality Assurance Committee will be informed of all issues undergoing investigation and will be involved in the discussion around the appropriate course of action.

The Agency works with the Institute to agree the appropriate course of action. If there is a possibility of removal or suspension of an EPAO from the RoEPAO, the case is handed to the Agency for ownership and processing.

Delivering against our principles

- **relevant** – action taken in response to issues will be swift, proportionate and based on evidence
- **reliable** – the same process is followed by all and outcomes and actions are comparable.
- **positive** – issues will be resolved quickly and effectively in order to maintain the quality of apprenticeships for employers and apprentices
- **efficient** – a clear escalation process ensures that activities and decisions take place at the right level at the right time, and only the most serious issues are passed up the line
- **learning** – where issues are found, we learn from them and respond by making improvements throughout the system

The process

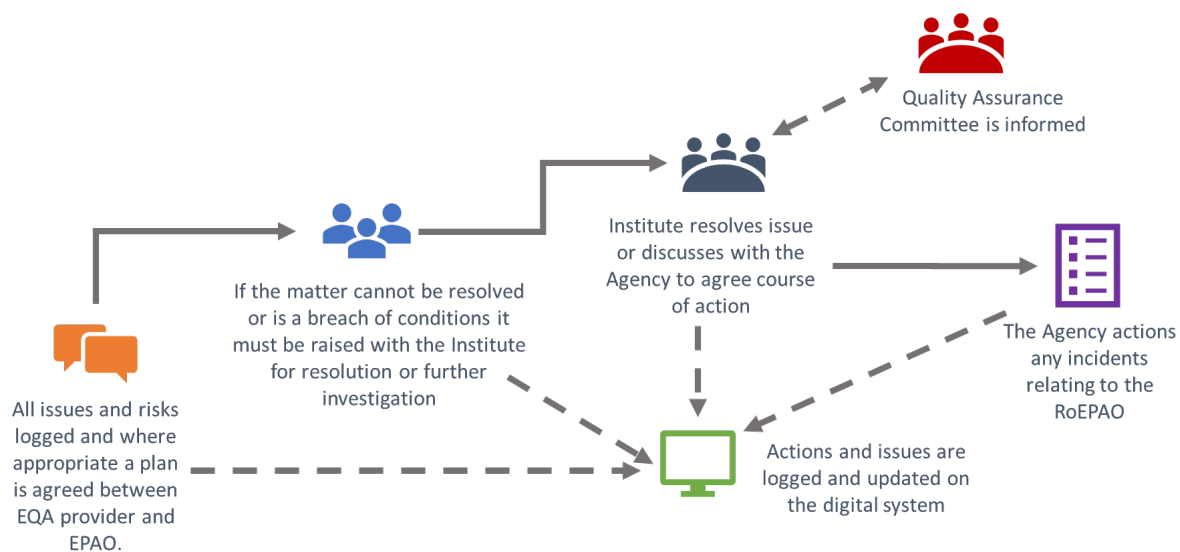


Figure 8 - Taking action

8. Continuous Improvement of EQA process

Ensuring that we continue to monitor the delivery of EQA and are able to make improvements as a result.

Why is this important?

As the number of assessments continues to grow, it is imperative that we continue to improve EQA. It is also essential to collect feedback from EQA providers and EPAOs who have experienced EQA in order to understand:

- what additional guidance or support is needed for those designing apprenticeships, delivering assessment or providing EQA
- whether EQA is improving the quality and delivery of EPA and providing assurance for employers and apprentices
- whether responsibilities, timelines and priorities remain appropriate
- that any costs/charges associated with EQA are appropriate and operating effectively
- how EQA drives behaviours
- how each EQA provider is delivering the service

What do we do to ensure it?

The Institute will review at least annually, EQA processes as set out in the EQA Framework and manual, to ensure they remain relevant. Officials from the Institute will work with EQA providers to support planning and activities, and ensure that EQA operates effectively. The EQA digital system will allow effective sharing of data and manage the delivery of EQA. In any revision of EQA, the views of all stakeholders will be considered.

Assurance of EQA providers

The Institute is responsible for assuring the performance of EQA providers. Once a Trailblazer has nominated an organisation to deliver EQA, a rigorous process confirms that potential EQA providers are suitable organisations. This process includes due diligence checks on the provider's financial position, status and potential conflicts of interest as well as a thorough review of their plans to deliver EQA. Evidence is reviewed by the Quality Assurance Committee before any organisation is recognised as an EQA provider.

Once an EQA provider has been recognised, the Institute continues to provide advice and guidance as well as monitoring its performance to ensure that EQA is rigorous and consistent. This will be done by agreeing KPIs, regular catch-ups and programme reviews, analysis of the data entered onto the digital system, and analysis of the annual report EQA providers are required to submit to the Institute. The Institute will seek to work with all EQA providers to ensure that the level of assurance they provide is in accordance with the principles of EQA. If an EQA provider is unable to achieve the required standard, the Institute will remove the provider from the list of recognised EQA providers and work with the Trailblazer to identify an alternate EQA provider.

Periodically, the Institute may invite independent bodies, such as Government Internal Audit, to review the functioning of EQA.

Which organisations are involved?

EQA providers and EPAOs will provide the Institute with feedback on the operation of the EQA Framework, including identifying potential improvements.

The **Institute** will support EQA providers to deliver EQA in order to drive up the quality of apprenticeship assessment. The Institute will also consult other stakeholders to ascertain their views of the effectiveness of EQA and organise periodic, independent, reviews of the EQA system.

Delivering against our principles

- **relevant** – EQA providers and other stakeholders are encouraged to recommend improvements to the delivery of EQA including the EQA Framework
- **reliable** – effective relationships between the Institute and EQA providers will ensure that issues are resolved and learning is captured, allowing assurance to employers and apprentices. Independent audits of EQA will be conducted periodically
- **positive** – the Institute is committed to listening to all feedback and taking appropriate action. Good practice will be shared with all EQA providers
- **efficient** – the Framework has been introduced to make the delivery of EQA more efficient and effective. The Institute will review its operation to ensure that it continues to do so
- **learning** – continuous improvement is built into every part of the Framework and open and honest feedback is encouraged

Version 1, June 2019

This document will be updated at least annually to ensure its currency.

Any questions or comments about the framework should be addressed to IFA.assessment@education.gov.uk



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