

Ofqual's Approach to the Regulation of New Apprenticeship End-point Assessments



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Introduction

1. This paper describes Ofqual's approach to regulating end-point assessments (EPAs), part of reformed apprenticeships that the Government is introducing in England. It will aid the groups of employers (known as Trailblazers) responsible for developing new apprenticeship standards in making an informed decision about whether to ask Ofqual to provide their external quality assurance arrangements, and assist assessment organisations¹ in understanding the implications of Ofqual regulation.
2. This paper explains:
 - that Ofqual will only regulate EPAs where we are asked to do so by the Trailblazer responsible for developing the associated apprenticeship standard and assessment plan,
 - that we will regulate EPAs as qualifications, and what that means,
 - the process for a Trailblazer to request Ofqual to regulate its EPAs,
 - that assessment organisations wanting to offer those EPAs which Ofqual will regulate, will need to be recognised by Ofqual prior to applying to the Skills Funding Agency's (SFA) Register of Apprenticeship Assessment Organisations (RoAAO),
 - the approach we will take to regulating EPAs.

Background

3. Ofqual's statutory objectives include securing qualification standards and promoting public confidence in regulated qualifications in England.
4. For the last few years, groups of employers (known as Trailblazers) have been developing standards and assessment plans for new apprenticeships. These standards may include qualifications, but must include EPAs to test whether apprentices can demonstrate they can meet the requirements set out in the standard.

¹ Those organisations accepted onto the SFA's Register of Apprenticeship Assessment Organisations (RoAAO)

5. The Government has set out² its requirement for EPAs to have external quality assurance independent of those who lead on delivery of training and assessments. It outlines four methods for Trailblazers to provide for this assurance:
 - propose their own approach, in line with the stated quality assurance principles,
 - ask professional bodies to carry out this role,
 - ask Ofqual to oversee their external quality assurance by regulating their EPA, or
 - propose that the employer led Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) carry out external quality assurance of their EPA.
6. Once it is established we will discuss with the IfA how our responsibilities will interact, and how we can work together most effectively.

The role of end-point assessments in apprenticeships

7. An EPA is intended to be a synoptic assessment, taken at the end of an apprenticeship, to assess whether an apprentice has developed the knowledge, skills and behaviours identified by employers for a particular occupation. Successful completion of the EPA means the individual has met the requirement of the apprenticeship standard and is fully competent in their occupational role.
8. EPAs can only be developed by assessment organisations who are approved against specific apprenticeships on the RoAAO.³ They will use an assessment plan created by Trailblazers to develop EPAs for a particular apprenticeship standard. An employer can choose any assessment organisation approved against its standard on the RoAAO to conduct its EPA.

² Future of apprenticeships in England; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-of-apprenticeships-in-england-guidance-for-trailblazers>

³ This register is a list of organisations that have been assessed as being suitable to conduct independent end-point assessment of apprentices, and be in receipt of public funds. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/register-of-apprentice-assessment-organisations>

9. As there is potential for multiple assessment organisations to develop EPAs as prescribed from one assessment plan, and a need to maintain standards over time, the Government is requiring external quality assurance arrangements to be put in place. These are intended to ensure consistency of quality and approach to assessment from all the assessment organisations developing EPAs against a particular apprenticeship standard, and to guard against the risk of standards being lowered by competing organisations. Assessment organisations will need the governance, and skills to deliver valid assessments on an ongoing basis. The requirements for entry onto the RoAAO together with external quality assurance will allow employers to choose between different EPA providers with confidence.
10. Where Ofqual is asked to externally quality assure an EPA by a Trailblazer and we agree to do so, we will do this by applying the regulatory framework we use for qualifications.

Ofqual regulation

11. Where Ofqual regulation is requested we will regulate the EPA as a qualification.⁴ Our General Conditions of Recognition (the Conditions)⁵ take the whole lifecycle of a qualification into account, aiming to verify that an EPA is, and continues to be, sufficiently valid. The lifecycle covers all phases of qualification development and review, from design through delivery, awarding, evaluation, and improvement. This is a continuous process throughout the life of a qualification.



⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-to-have-your-qualifications-regulated>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/general-conditions-of-recognition>

12. Validity is the degree to which it is possible to measure what needs to be measured by implementing an assessment procedure. Our expectation is that EPAs should, in particular:
- effectively test the knowledge, skills and behaviour⁶ as prescribed within the apprenticeship standard's assessment plan,
 - enable results to be trusted as a measure of what an apprentice knows and can do,
 - have a purpose and content that meets the needs of end users, i.e. the employers who will be employing apprentices,
 - be graded in line with clear and defensible prescriptions contained in the assessment plan,
 - be kept under regular review.
13. Should an apprenticeship standard's assessment plan require achievement of a regulated qualification (for example as a gateway requirement before the EPA), then irrespective of whether Ofqual has been asked to regulate the EPA itself, we will continue to regulate these qualifications as we would any other regulated qualification.
14. We are still finalising the detail of our regulation in relation to EPAs and we may decide to consult on additional conditions or guidance later this year.

Is Ofqual regulation the right choice of external quality assurance?

15. There are benefits to choosing external quality assurance through Ofqual regulation however, we recognise that it might not be the appropriate option for all.
- We already have regulatory and assessment expertise, and an understanding of the wider qualifications market.

⁶ Future of apprenticeships in England: guidance for trailblazers - from standards to starts December 2015 p34 para 93; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-of-apprenticeships-in-england-guidance-for-trailblazers>

- We already recognise many awarding organisations; our regulation will not add further regulatory burden (and therefore cost) on assessment bodies that are also recognised awarding organisations.
- Ofqual has a range of statutory powers should things go wrong, ranging from directing and fining, to withdrawal of an organisation's recognition.
- We cannot charge awarding organisations for recognition – we are funded by the taxpayer.
- Only assessment organisations that meet our rigorous recognition requirements, and continue to meet them, can provide regulated qualifications.

Requesting Ofqual regulation

16. In order for Ofqual to regulate an EPA within an assessment plan the Trailblazer group needs to write a formal letter of request to Ofqual detailing the particular standards and including the relevant assessment plans. This can be emailed to apprenticeships@ofqual.gov.uk .
17. We will consider whether the EPA is capable of being regulated based on the assessment plan(s) supplied to us. In order to provide assurance in line with our standards objective, Ofqual must consider whether the assessment plan enables awarding organisations to develop an EPA which is valid.
18. Following our consideration, we will respond, copying this correspondence to the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). If the EPA is capable of being regulated the published assessment plan can include a statement which confirms its EPA is to be regulated by Ofqual. The SFA will then only consider Ofqual recognised awarding organisations as candidates for approval against that standard on the RoAAO.

Implications of Ofqual regulation

Trailblazers

19. If the assessment plan for an apprenticeship standard confirms the EPA will be regulated by Ofqual only a recognised awarding organisation will be able to develop an EPA for that standard. Any organisation seeking to develop an EPA for that standard would therefore have to be recognised: it will need to

demonstrate it meets our Criteria for Recognition⁷ and confirm it can comply with our Conditions.⁸

20. To assist in completing an application for recognition, we have developed supporting information documents⁹ explaining what we expect in an application. The process of recognition can take 2 to 3 months.
21. Once recognised Ofqual will regulate all qualifications that are within an awarding organisation's agreed scope of recognition. The Conditions require all qualifications to be valid and fit for purpose. There is guidance¹⁰ available about how to comply with the Conditions and other associated requirements.
22. If there was a conflict between a Trailblazer's requirements and Ofqual's, we would require compliance with our Conditions.

Awarding organisations

23. Where we are asked and have agreed to regulate an apprenticeship EPA, we will do this along with the regulation of any other regulated qualifications within the standard.
24. If an awarding organisation wishes to offer EPAs within its agreed scope of recognition it may do so without recourse to Ofqual. These will fall within Ofqual's regulatory purview.
25. EPAs for an apprenticeship standard where Ofqual is not providing external quality assurance, and which are outside an awarding organisation's agreed scope of recognition (for example in a sector subject area or at a level that the awarding organisation is not recognised to deliver), are outside Ofqual's regulatory purview.
26. If an EPA is for an apprenticeship standard where Ofqual is not providing external quality assurance, although these fall within Ofqual's regulatory purview, an awarding organisation could, if it so chooses, request that the specific EPA be excluded from its scope of recognition.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-to-have-your-qualifications-regulated>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/general-conditions-of-recognition>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-for-recognition-supporting-information>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-the-general-conditions-of-recognition>

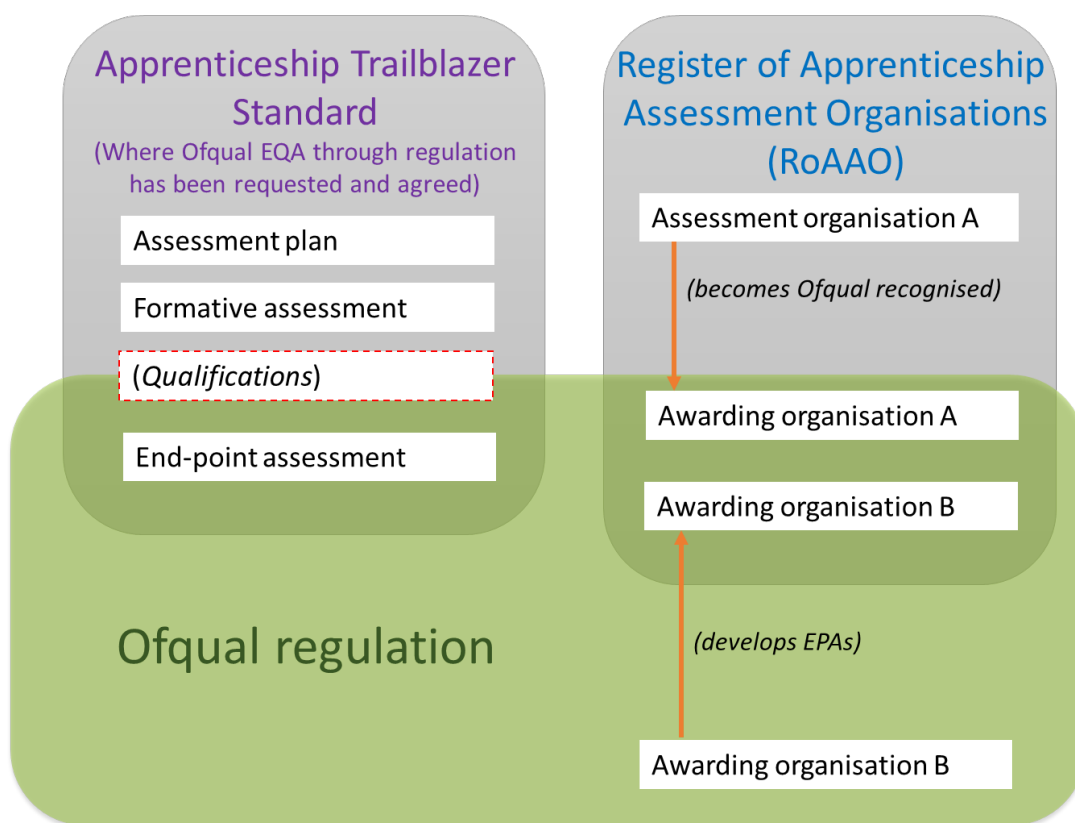
27. Where more than one awarding organisation is developing EPAs based on one assessment plan we would encourage awarding organisations to work jointly on approaches to assessment to assist in the comparability of EPAs.

Ofqual's regulatory purview

28. In summary, Ofqual's regulatory purview within the new apprenticeship reforms includes: (see fig 1.)

- regulated qualifications within apprenticeships (we recognise that not all 'gateway' qualifications are regulated, however some qualifications used by Trailblazers as a gateway to EPAs are regulated),
- EPAs within standards where we are asked and have agreed to regulate,
- awarding organisations on the RoAAO

fig 1.¹¹



¹¹ Green area denotes Ofqual's regulatory purview

Appendix 1 - Glossary

Apprenticeship standard: The knowledge, skills and behaviours agreed by employers that apprentices must meet. 'Standard' may also mean the level of demand of an assessment or qualification.

Approved Assessment Organisations: Organisations listed on the SFA's Register of Apprenticeship Assessment Organisations (RoAAO) that have been approved to offer end-point assessment.

Assessment plan: Developed by a Trailblazer this provides details of end-point assessment: what it comprises; the assessment methods to be used; and how grading will be applied.

Comparability: Generating assessment outcomes that are comparable in standards between assessments within a qualification, between similar qualifications, with other awarding organisations, and over time. Where an assessment has equivalent forms then it is important to ensure comparability of outcomes. There are two reasons for this –

- (a) To reach fair comparisons about the attainment of Learners: It is impossible to produce different forms with exactly the same content and statistical specifications (such as the level of difficulty or demand on the Learner). Therefore, a requirement to ensure comparability of outcomes makes sure the level of difficulty or demand of the test forms is taken into account when setting standards so that Learners taking the different forms can be compared fairly, and
- (b) To ensure that the outcomes can be used as a measure of standards: Outcomes from different forms of the same test must be comparable if they are to be used to measure standards over time. Both expert judgements and statistical procedures such as test equating can be used to ensure comparability of outcomes from different forms of the same test. It is, however, important to ensure that assessments are not so similar that they become predictable, as this would be a threat to Validity.

Criteria for Recognition (the Criteria): these are the measures we use to decide whether or not to recognise an awarding organisation when an organisation applies to be able to develop or award regulated qualifications.

General Conditions of Recognition (the Conditions): All conditions to which an awarding organisation's recognition is subject (including other conditions imposed under section 132(3)(d) of the Act¹²).

End-point Assessment (EPA): Independent assessment at the end of the apprenticeship.

Gateway requirements: requirements that the apprentice must meet before going on to take an end-point assessment.

Scope of Recognition: When applying for recognition, awarding organisations must indicate what they want that recognition to cover. Recognition can be described broadly or narrowly, so an awarding organisation could have recognition to offer 'vocational qualifications in every sector and at every level' or it might have recognition for a single specific qualification.

Validity: Validity is the degree to which it is possible to measure what needs to be measured by implementing an assessment procedure

The evaluation of Validity involves the development of a clear argument to support the proposed interpretation of the outcomes and as a consequence the intended uses of the assessment. The Validity argument should be built on statements of the proposed interpretation and supporting evidence collected from all stages of the assessment process.

¹² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/22/contents>

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Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation

Spring Place
Coventry Business Park
Herald Avenue
Coventry CV5 6UB

Telephone 0300 303 3344

Textphone 0300 303 3345

Helpline 0300 303 3346