



# Digital Industries Apprenticeship: Assessment Plan

## IT Technical Salesperson

September 2016



## Digital Industries Apprenticeships: Assessment Plan

### General Introduction and Overview

The Digital Industries Apprenticeship Standards are being designed by the industry for apprentices employed in a wide variety of different organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Employers likely to use the new Standards include:

- Large IT businesses, each of which may take on hundreds of apprentices a year, where the Apprenticeship pathway is a mainstay of recruitment;
- Small and medium-sized specialist IT businesses, which may employ apprentices as core staff to provide the skills for growth;
- Large non-IT businesses, which may employ a handful of apprentices in IT roles, typically at head office;
- Small and medium-sized non-IT businesses, which may take on a small number of apprentices in these roles, to support their core business.

The actual job role of the apprentice will vary significantly from one employer to the next.

The approach to assessment, therefore, has been designed to be appropriate, relevant and feasible in a wide range of contexts while also ensuring consistency across these contexts.

Employers have adopted the following broad principles to inform the approach:

- Assessment will motivate apprentices to do their very best, not just do enough to satisfy a minimum standard – for example by using a ‘high stakes’ method in the synoptic project, which gives apprentices a clear performance goal to aim at.
- The assessment process will add value to both the apprentice and the employer, by complementing and building on normal performance management and development tools.
- It should enable and encourage progression and continuous professional development, by being linked to professional qualifications and recognition.
- It should position the apprenticeship, not just as a job, but as the starting point for a career – assessment at the end marks a clear recognition of achievements, on which the individual can build.
- The assessment methods chosen ensure relevance and consistency, irrespective of the specific job role of the apprentice.
- Costs and practicalities will be appropriate and proportionate to employers with small numbers of apprentices.
- Assessment will be driven by the Standards and will cover full competence in the occupation.

### Overview of Assessment

The final, end point assessment is completed in the last few months of the apprenticeship. It is based on

a portfolio – produced towards the end of the apprenticeship, containing evidence from real work projects which have been completed during the apprenticeship, usually towards the end, and which, taken together, cover the totality of the standard, and which is assessed as part of the end point assessment

a project - giving the apprentice the opportunity to undertake a business-related project over a one-week period away from the day to day workplace

an employer reference

a structured interview with an assessor - exploring what has been produced in the portfolio and the project as well as looking at how it has been produced

An independent assessor will assess each element of the end point assessment and will then decide whether to award successful apprentices with a pass, a merit or a distinction.

### **Threshold Assessment**

The decision as to when an apprentice is ready to cross the threshold from learning into the end point assessment phase will be made by the employer and the training provider, based on their monitoring of apprentices' progress.

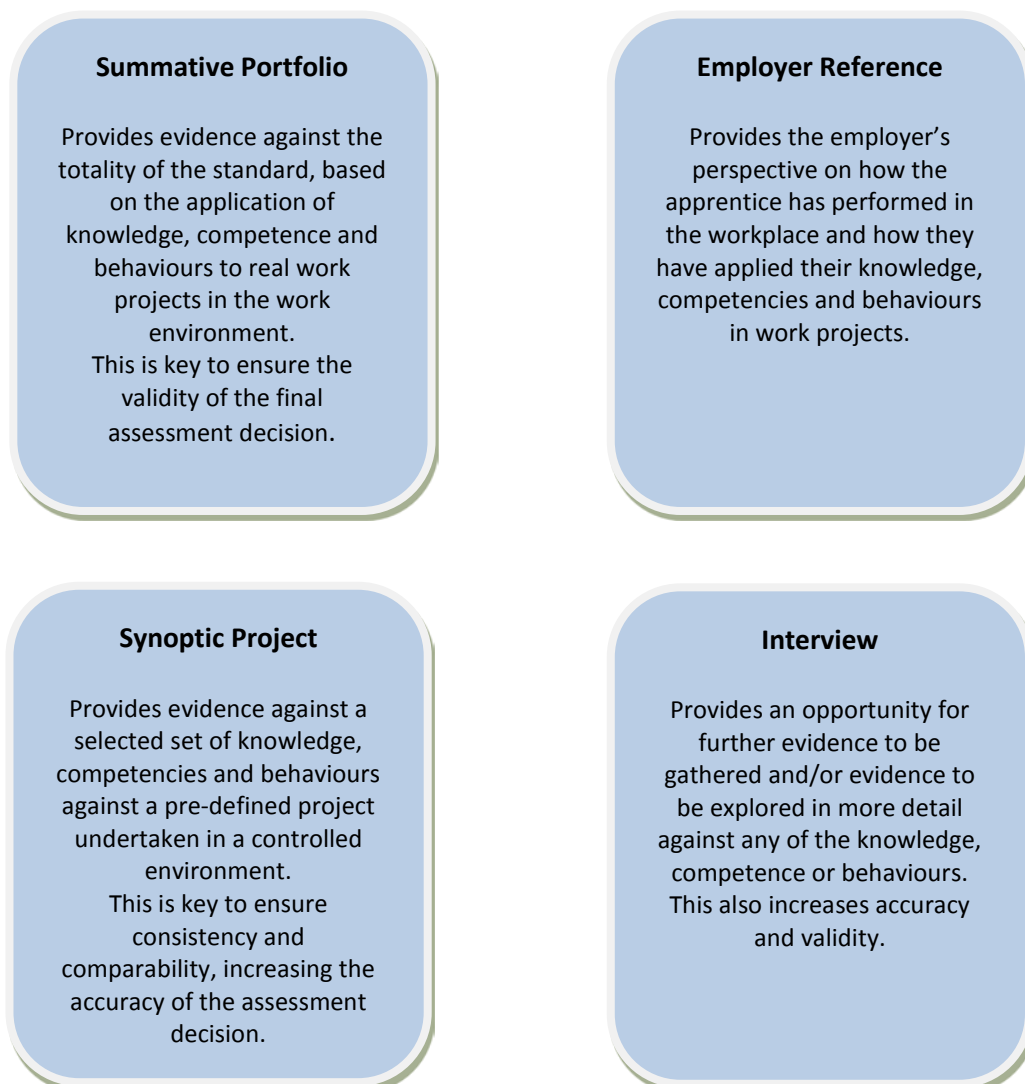
### **End Point Assessment**

The end point assessment includes an assessment of all the requirements of the standard, including, competencies, knowledge and behaviours. It takes place in the final few months of the apprenticeship, using four assessment methods:

- Summative portfolio
- Synoptic project
- Employer reference
- Interview

The use of a variety of assessment methods in the final end point assessment ensures that the assessment of each apprentice is based on their performance and reflects accurately the quality of their work and the application of skills, knowledge and behaviours specified in the standards. Taken together, these components of the final end point assessment build a cumulative picture of performance against the standard, enabling the independent assessor to make a holistic judgement about how well the apprentice meets or exceeds the standard.

The diagram below summarises what is assessed in each of the four elements of the end point assessment.



Independent assessors will grade apprentices, using all the information gained in the end point assessment, against the criteria for pass, merit and distinction.

### Summative portfolio

In the portfolio apprentices present evidence from real-work projects, illustrating the application of all the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the standard. This is produced towards the end of the apprenticeship with evidence from projects that have been completed, usually, towards the end of the apprenticeship. The portfolio is not evidence that the learning has taken place, but is evidence that the apprentice has applied that learning in a holistic and coherent way.

The evidence contained in the portfolio will comprise a small number of complete and/or discrete pieces of work which, together, cover the totality of the Standard. It will showcase their very best work, enabling them

to demonstrate how they have applied their knowledge and understanding in a real-work environment to achieve real-work objectives.

Employers and training providers will assist the apprentice to assemble their portfolio to ensure that the portfolio is complete, that it covers the totality of the Standard and has been done to a satisfactory standard. Wherever possible, this will be an e portfolio or other electronic platform.

The evidence should be based on real work projects or outputs. The evidence can be supplemented with the following

- performance reports
- reflective accounts by the apprentice
- expert witness testimony
- customer feedback

The completed portfolio will be assessed against the requirements summarised in the standard and set out in detail in the Occupational Brief (available from the Tech Partnership at [www.thetechpartnership.com/apprenticeship/ittechnicalsalesperson](http://www.thetechpartnership.com/apprenticeship/ittechnicalsalesperson))

This is carried out by an independent assessor who makes their own judgement on the quality of the work. The independent assessor may also note particular aspects of the work that they wish to discuss with the apprentice during the interview, either to confirm their judgement and/or provide further information on which to base their grading decisions.

The evidence will be assessed against all components of the standards, i.e.:

- technical competencies;
- technical knowledge and understanding;
- underpinning skills, attitudes and behaviours.

The assessor will examine the evidence in the portfolio for:

- completeness – the evidence in the portfolio, taken together, must cover the totality of the standard
- quality – the evidence must at least satisfy the minimum requirements for each area of the standard, as defined in the Occupational Brief available from the Tech Partnership.

## Synoptic project

The project presents evidence from a business-related project testing the application of a selection of the knowledge, skills and behaviours defined in the standard. Each project will specify which selection of knowledge, skills and behaviours it is designed to test. The project does not need to cover every competence, but must cover a broad breadth of the competence outcomes, understanding customer requirements and determining the most suitable solutions to sell, working effectively with colleagues to do so.

The project is designed to assess apprentices in a consistent way, irrespective of their particular workplace and their particular role within their company, and must therefore be completed outside of day-to-day work pressures.

Assessment Organisations will develop a bank of business-related projects. Each of these projects will present a typical business task, appropriate for an SME, an IT business, a large corporate or a non-IT businesses. All of the projects will be comparable in terms of content and complexity, it is the context within which the skills and knowledge must be demonstrated that will vary. Training providers and employers will select the most appropriate project for each apprentice, based on their current job role.

Existing projects will be rotated and new ones introduced. The projects will also be designed in such a way as to ensure there is no benefit for an apprentice having prior knowledge of a project.

Each project will take, typically, three working days to complete. Apprentices will complete their project off-the-job, so that they are away from the day to day pressures of work and in a 'controlled' environment, which may be on the employer's premises or the training provider's premises. The requirements for the 'controlled environment' will include a quiet room, away from the normal place of work, with a dedicated work-station, with access to all the required equipment and with someone responsible for the controlled environment to ensure it is their own work and to respond to any questions in a consistent way.

The project is assessed by an independent assessor who makes their own judgement on the quality of the work, based on the defined knowledge, skills and behaviours it is testing against the standard, the grading criteria and the minimum requirements for each area set out in the Occupational Brief.<sup>1</sup> Assessors of projects must understand the different outputs likely depending on the complexity of the programming language the apprentice has used.

The independent assessor may also note particular aspects of the work that they wish to discuss with the apprentice during the interview, either to confirm their judgement and/or provide further information on which to base their grading decisions.

Assessment Organisations will test and trial the projects with small groups of apprentices, employers and training providers. This will ensure they are valid, reliable and comparable to the other projects, before they are implemented. Assessment Organisations will monitor projects over time to ensure comparability and continuing relevance.

At least half of the projects will be available to complete on-line.

Projects will balance the need to 1) be specific to ensure consistency and comparability and 2) be sufficiently flexible to enable apprentices to apply the approaches they use in their role.

Each project will enable the following to be demonstrated

- the application of knowledge and skills to meet the project outcomes
- the approach to planning and completion of the task
- the application of the relevant behaviours

Projects will enable differentiation of performance in line with the grading criteria.

Projects will require apprentices to document their assumptions and to highlight the consequences of those assumptions – enabling them to show their understanding of commercial pressures, and the application of their thinking and problem solving skills.

The end point assessment will test the knowledge the apprentice has gained throughout their apprenticeship. As this apprenticeship will give them the skills required for an IT Technical Salesperson role they should be

confident in any assessment that's around communicating with customers both internal and external as well as approaching potential customers with the aim of winning new business. They should maintain a thorough understanding of technologies and what new technologies are emerging.

## Employer Reference

The employer will provide a reference setting out their views of the quality of the apprentice's work.

The Assessment Organisation will provide guidance and a simple template seeking employers' comments against the grading minimum standards, criteria and dimensions, as set out in the Occupational Brief.

The employer will not be asked to grade or provide a rating, as they do not have the comparative experience or evidence.

## Interview

The interview is a structured discussion between the apprentice and their independent assessor, focusing on the summative portfolio and the synoptic project, with reference to the employer reference as appropriate. It covers both what the apprentice has done in terms of the standard of their work, and also how they have done it. This enables the end point assessment to include the full range of technical knowledge and competencies as well as the underpinning skills, attitudes and behaviours.

The purpose of the interview is to:

- clarify any questions the independent assessor has from their assessment of the portfolio and project;
- explore any comments raised in the employer's reference;
- confirm and validate judgements about the quality of work;
- explore aspects of the work, including how it was carried out, in more detail;
- provide further evidence for the independent assessor to make a holistic decision about the grade to be awarded.

Assessment Organisations will produce a structured brief for the independent assessor to support the discussion. This will ensure that consistent approaches are taken and that all key areas are appropriately explored.

The interview will cover

- what they submitted in the portfolio
- what they produced in the project
- the standard of their work, as evidenced in the portfolio and the project
- how they approached the work submitted in the portfolio and the project

The interview can draw on broader experience from the workplace, but the initial and the primary focus is on the work presented in the portfolio and the project.

The interview will be undertaken by an independent assessor – and it is the same assessor who has assessed the portfolio and the project (and who is approved to assess against that standard) and who will also make the grading decision.



The interview will take place following the completion and assessment of the project and the portfolio.

It is only after the interview has been completed that the grading decision can be taken.

## Grading

Grading takes place at the end of the apprenticeship, following the end point assessment. The output is a single grade: pass, merit or distinction, for the entire apprenticeship.

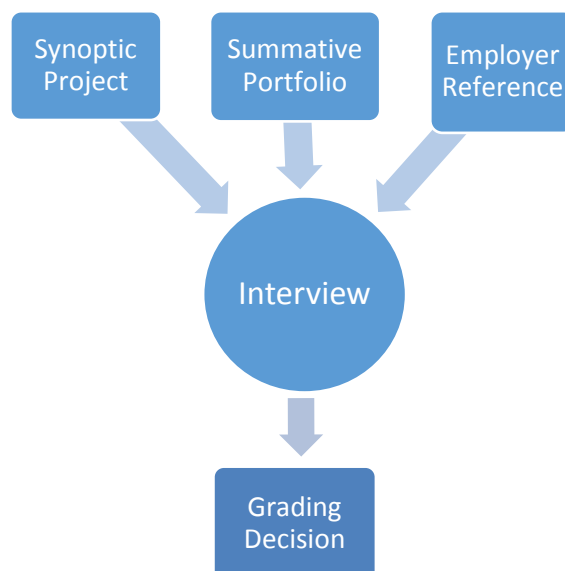
Grading is done by the independent assessor, based on a holistic view of the apprentice's work and as evidenced through each of the methods of end point assessment.

The assessor will assess each of the project and the portfolio in advance of the interview, will review the employer reference, and will note

- any initial assessment conclusions
- questions to explore at interview to test these initial conclusions

Whilst the assessor may have some sense of the likely or potential grade, this initial and partial assessment conclusion is not communicated as the grading decision cannot be made before all the evidence has been assessed, including the evidence gained at the interview.

The interview enables the outputs from the project and the portfolio to be explored in more detail – in terms of what was produced and how it was produced, and to address the questions previously identified and to validate, test and amend initial assessment conclusions.



The grading decision is made after the interview. The grading decision is made on the basis of a holistic assessment of the totality of the evidence presented - including the interview itself, bearing in mind that

- The bulk of this evidence is contained in the portfolio, and it is the portfolio that presents evidence against the totality of the standard
- The project provides a test of how well the apprentice can perform, in a controlled and comparable environment against a selection of the competences on the standard – a check and a balance on the portfolio
- The employer’s reference provides supporting evidence based on their perceptions of that apprentice within their workplace
- The interview provides additional supporting evidence or clarification of the above

There is one grade – and none of the elements are graded separately.

### Grading criteria

There are three sets of criteria on which the assessment and grading is made. The three criteria are

The What: what the apprentice has shown they can do,

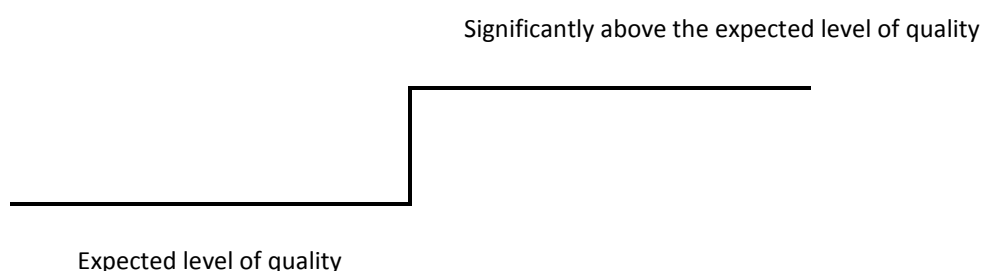
The How: the way in which the work has been done

The With Whom: The personal and interpersonal qualities the apprentice has brought to all their work relationships

Each of these three criteria has minimum (expected) requirements, which must be satisfied for a pass.

Each of these criteria has a number of dimensions which should be considered to determine if the apprentice is significantly above the minimum (expected) level of quality.

That is, for each of the three criteria there are two levels: the expected level (as defined in the minimum requirements) and a level that is significantly above this



The minimum requirements for a pass and the dimensions to be considered for a merit or a distinction are defined in the Occupational Brief, available from the Tech Partnership at [www.thetechpartnership.com/apprenticeship/ittechnicalsalesperson](http://www.thetechpartnership.com/apprenticeship/ittechnicalsalesperson)

### **The Grading Decision**

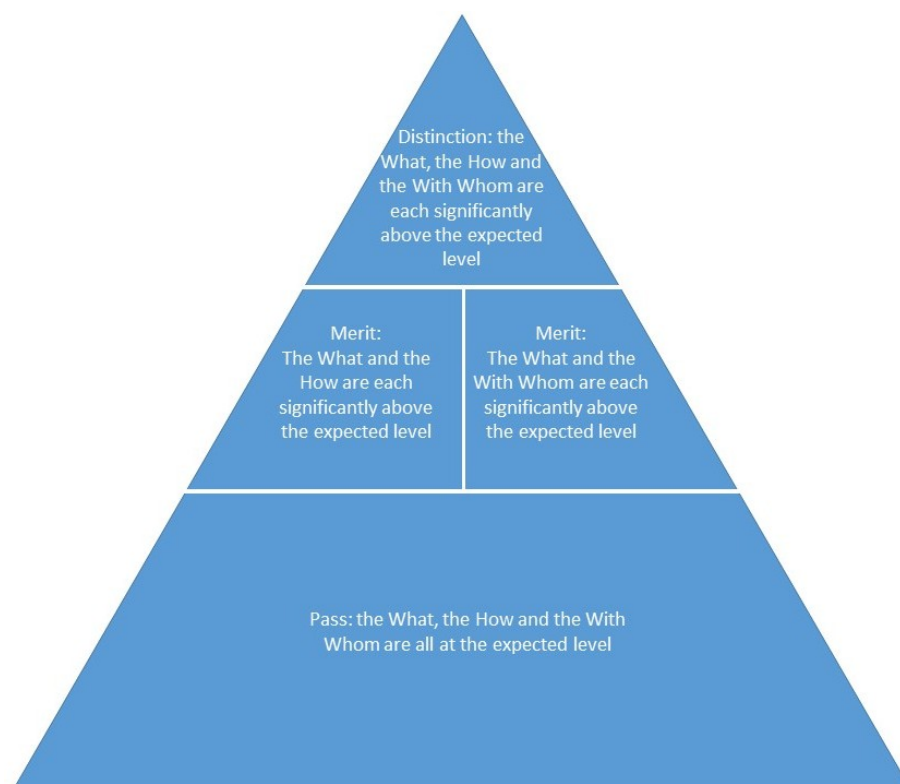
The purpose of grading is to differentiate between those apprentices whose work is at the expected level of quality against the totality of the skills, knowledge and behaviours specified in the standard and those whose work is significantly above this expected level

For a pass, each of the three sets of criteria must demonstrate at least the expected (minimum requirement) level of quality

For a merit, the What has to be significantly above the level of quality and one of either the How or the With Whom has to be significantly above the level of quality expected

For a distinction, each of the three sets of criteria must be significantly above the expected level of quality.

The assessor takes a holistic judgement of whether or not their assessments demonstrate that the apprentice is “significantly above the expected level of quality” in each of these three areas and can then determine which grade should be awarded



## Professional body recognition

Apprenticeships are a key entry point to the significant career opportunities that the digital industry sector can provide. The Register of IT Technicians, managed by BCS, provides independent recognition that completing an apprenticeship is the beginning of a career in the IT profession.

People completing this apprenticeship will be eligible to apply for a place on the independent Register of IT Technicians, providing recognition of their competence in applying technical skills in a business environment

whilst signing up to a professional code of conduct and behaviours. A place on the Register acknowledges that those achieving these standards have joined the professional community, and opens the door to the continued support, career development and guidance that professional bodies provide.

Professional body involvement and recognition in the development of the standards and the approach to assessment is a further, independent, check on quality assurance both for the apprenticeships delivered against the standards and an individual's assessment against them.

## **Quality Assurance**

We are developing a model for External Quality Assurance and the Assessment Plan will be updated once those arrangements are confirmed.

## **Ensuring independence**

Independence and impartiality are achieved as the end point assessment is undertaken by an independent assessor from an Assessment Organisation. The independent assessor will make a holistic assessment of each apprentice's work, including the grade to be awarded, on the basis of evidence supplied in the portfolio, project, the employer reference and through the interview.

## **Delivering consistent, reliable judgements**

The assessment methods described above are designed to produce assessment outcomes that are consistent and reliable, allowing fair and proper comparison between apprentices employed in different types and sizes of organisation.

The apprenticeship standard defines what is required in terms of skills, knowledge and behaviours. Our approach puts the standard at the heart of the assessment process, ensuring that judgments on occupational competence are consistent and that there is standardisation and comparability between employers.

This specification for the tools, materials and techniques to be used in assessment, are the starting point to ensure that consistent approaches to assessment are taken by assessment organisations. The detailed criteria as set out in the Occupational Brief help to ensure consistent application of these assessment methods.

Any organisation interested in delivering the assessment service must be on the SFA register and will, therefore, be able to demonstrate a range of capabilities including

- in depth and up to date sector knowledge and understanding
- credibility within the sector
- the capability and relevant, up to date sector experience of the people who will carry out assessments
- the ability to develop tools and materials to deliver these assessments
- a track record in delivering assessments
- robust internal verification processes
- employer responsiveness and effective customer service processes
- induction, and training and development plans for everyone involved in assessment
- effective leadership and management arrangements
- quality assurance and quality control procedures
- impartial moderation of assessments

It will be the responsibility of the Assessment Organisations to ensure that those undertaking end point assessments have the necessary skills and industry knowledge to make reliable judgements.

They will be required to recruit and train people, whether as employees or sub-contractors, with the right mix of skills and experience to undertake the independent end-point assessment against this standard.

Registered assessors must be competent in the occupation they are assessing, in terms of

- Up to date, relevant, in-depth and broad experience of working in this occupation
- Relevant industry expertise equivalent to or higher than the level of the apprenticeship standard being assessed and/or relevant professional recognition at a level equivalent to or higher than the registration level of the apprenticeship standard being assessed
- The possession of practical and up to date knowledge of the application of current working practices, infrastructure, tools and technologies appropriate to this occupation and of relevance to the sector/size of business in which they will be carrying out assessments

In addition, independent assessors must have completed an induction to demonstrate working knowledge of the apprenticeship standard and the assessment process. They must be fully trained and approved for use of each of the assessment tools and be trained in the consistent application of the grading criteria. They must attend standardisation meetings to ensure and maintain consistency of assessment decisions.

Anyone who undertakes end point assessment must be held on a register by the assessment organisation. The register must confirm that each individual undertaking end point assessment has satisfied these criteria and that evidence has been checked, through

- Personal interviews
- Qualifications
- CPD certificates
- Employment history
- Testimonials
- Assessment organisation induction and training events

Assessment organisations will be responsible for developing the assessment tools and materials and supporting materials, including documented criteria for the use of each assessment tool. These tools should be trialled and tested before implementation. Assessors should be provided with supporting information to help ensure that all assessments are made consistently and against the specification.

The Assessment Organisations should have robust internal quality assurance and verification processes to ensure that the quality, consistency and validity of assessments is maintained. Assessment Organisations should have regular standardisation meetings between themselves.

All organisations delivering assessment will be expected to collaborate with each other to ensure consistency of assessment outcomes across different assessment organisations and to collaborate in relation to moderation arrangements.

### **Delivering accurate, valid judgements**

The assessment process is designed to test the totality of the standard. As described elsewhere in this Plan, the combination of four assessment methods in the end point assessment ensures that the assessment of each apprentice is based on their performance and reflects accurately the quality of their work and the application of skills, knowledge and behaviours specified in the standard. Taken together, the four components of the end point assessment build a cumulative picture of performance against the standard.

- The portfolio is a key factor in ensuring the validity of the final assessment decision.
- The project provides a relatively high degree of consistency and comparability, increasing the accuracy of the assessment decision.

- The employer reference provides additional evidence of how the apprentice has demonstrated the application of skills and knowledge in the workplace.
- The interview with an independent assessor increases accuracy and validity by providing the assessor with an opportunity to assess depth and breadth in the application of underlying knowledge, skills and behaviours.

The role of the independent assessor and the capability of the Assessment Organisation is critical – as these ensure that assessments are undertaken by suitably qualified and trained assessors, using approved tools and materials, with documented criteria, as well as robust internal verification and quality control processes.

### **Feasibility and Manageability**

These apprenticeships will be taken up by employers, from all sectors, across the country. This approach to assessment, with its emphasis on on-line and virtual assessment, means that there is no requirement for physical centres or for assessors to be located geographically.

There are a wide range of providers of vendor certificates and a number of specialist assessment organisations with the sector expertise to develop and deliver the required assessments.

It is estimated that there will be approx. 1000 starts on this apprenticeship once it is fully available.

### **Affordability and sustainability**

The costs and practicality of assessment have been key considerations in the development of this approach, not least because of the number of smaller businesses who employ apprentices in these roles. Cost effectiveness has been increased in a number of ways, including

- the removal of the current duplication in the on programme assessment of knowledge, by enabling the assessment of knowledge through vendor and professional qualifications
- the pragmatic combination of assessment methods ensures breadth, validity and reliability to satisfy the assessment requirements whilst minimising additional, non-value adding assessment costs
- the removal of the current requirements for the collection of unnecessary evidence throughout the duration of the apprenticeship, by focusing on end point assessment
- the simplification of roles and responsibilities in the assessment process
- the involvement of the employer in defining the work projects reduces the need for multiple visits by assessors
- the development of on-line approaches, including on-line materials, resources and assessment processes, to enable scalability and cost-effectiveness

Consultation with awarding organisations and training providers has confirmed that the costs of this approach will be no more than the current arrangements, and could be significantly less. Their view is that less time will have to be spent on assessment, but that the time spent on assessment will be more value adding to the apprentice and the employer. They also recognise that they may need to have more experienced staff involved in the process.

Our aim is that assessment costs will be 10-20% of the total cost of the apprenticeship. The direct costs of assessment are estimated as follows

- assessment of portfolio of evidence - 3.5 hours
- interview - 2 hours
- assessment of final project - based on the model of a practical complex project completed over three days, with one assessor covering a group of up to five apprentices, giving a cost of 1 day of assessment per apprentice

This gives a direct cost of assessment of between 2.5 and three days of assessor costs per apprentice